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05/14/2012 12:01 AM

Chelsea Artist Feeds Off Of Modern Hunger For The Fake

By: Stephanie Simon

Lots of museums have restaurants, but not too many art galleries have storefront cafes, and certainly no one is serving up what's now on the menu at the Leila Heller gallery in Chelsea. NY1's Arts reporter Stephanie Simon filed the following report.

With her slight Texas twang, artist Rachel Lee Hovnanian invites viewers to try some southern specialties at Cafe 2012, located inside the Leila Heller gallery in Chelsea. But customers should order carefully, as nothing on the menu or in the rest of her new art exhibit is really what it seems.

Hovnanian developed all the "food bytes" with a chemist. All of her creations at the gallery, from the food to the artwork to the installations, ask in this modern world of texting, tweeting and fast food, what's real and what's not?

One installation about a "date night" shows two mobile devices with faces on the screen seated at the ends of a long table.

"You're having a date but you're not really having a date and having more personal joy from your personal devices," says Hovnanian.

The exhibit is called "Mud Pie," because for Hovnanian a mud pie was the first thing she ever made that was both real and fake.

"You can't eat it because it's made from mud but it smells like apple pie," says Hovnanian about one of her desserts.

Meantime, the "@CafeWaitress" at the exhibit counter, who can be followed on Twitter, convinced me to wet my whistle with coffee sweetened with chemicals.

On one of the walls are motherboards fashioned with the narcissus flower, which are perhaps a warning to us all.

"I find that we're all sucked into our personal devices and [the mythological Greek youth] Narcissus fell in love with himself looking in the water and he wound up dying," says Hovnanian. "And I find that every time I hear my phone beep and I know I got a text, I'm like, 'Oh, I have to answer it because it's about me.'"

If you can look up long enough to enjoy it, "Mud Pie" is definitely worth the time and a taste.

MUD PIE

Through June 2

Leila Heller Gallery

568 West 25th Street

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