

# Rachel Lee Hovnanian Serves up 'Mud Pie' at Leila Heller Gallery

By **Sasha Herman** 2:50pm

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The last time we caught up with the work of New York-based artist Rachel Lee Hovnanian, it was in Los Angeles in October at the inaugural Art Platform fair, where Ms. Hovnanian sent [two swimsuit-wearing models](#) wandering through the stalls. They strolled the fair in sandals, carrying signs that listed their dress sizes, eerily calm in the otherwise crowded, frenzied environment.

Now Ms. Hovnanian has her first solo show at the Leila Heller Gallery on West 25th Street in Chelsea, her first New York one-person exhibition since 2010's "Too Good to be True" show at the Lower East Side gallery Collette Blanchard.

When we visited earlier this month, the jubilant Ms. Heller herself was on hand to give this reporter a tour of the show. Titled "Mud Pie," it is composed of a visually arresting collection of pieces that revolve around technology, narcissism and authenticity.

Large format, two-dimensional sculptures composed of metallic narcissus flowers adorn the walls. The centerpiece of the show is a long, white dining room table set for two—the flowers are fake;

the candles are real—with the faces of a husband and wife displayed on LCD screens perched atop the back of dining room chairs at either end: they don't talk, they text.

Off to the right is an installation called *Café 2012*, a spare room with a countertop and a window looking out onto a green and yellow field in Nacogdoches, Texas, which is actually a 12-minute video on loop. The waitress manning the humble café on the day of our visit was a New York actress named Lara Hillier, and she played her part to a T, serving up drinks and pie with a Southern drawl. (You can follow her activity on Twitter at [@CafeWaitress](#).)

Ms. Hillier was out of mud pie when we visited, but we did get to sample apple pie—a gelatinous cube the size of a domino, the texture of rubber and the taste of, well, not quite apple but something close—and have a glass of orange juice, or at least an orange-flavored powder mixed with water that made Kool-Aid seem like a delicacy. According to the news release, this edible aspect of the project was inspired by the artist's time making mud pies in her backyard during her early childhood in Texas.

Ms. Hovnanian's avoids the treacly fate of other concept-driven exhibitions by being made up of superbly well crafted objects. Long after the current hubbub over technology's effects on humanity has passed, her wall works, *Gates of Narcissus: Reflection of the Narcissus*, will still be, ironically, gorgeous.