



NEW YORK

Rachel Lee Hovnanian

Leila Heller // September 4–October 18

Rachel Lee Hovnanian
Installation view of *Perfect Baby Showroom*, 2014. Wallpaper, extension cords, baby dolls, metal, acrylic, wood, neon light, foam, cotton fabric, LED lights, cereal.

“PLASTIC PERFECT” Hovnanian’s second exhibition at the gallery, entices passersby with the installation *Perfect Baby Showroom*, 2014, visible from the street through the gallery’s corner windows. Immersive, room-size pieces about the effects

of technology on human relationships, like “Foreplay,” a series of photographs depicting pre-coital couples individually absorbed in their smartphones, further suck people in, just like the innovations that the work cautiously addresses.

The show is meticulously orchestrated with near-surgical precision. Hovnanian has a gift for understanding the nuances of built environments and proves she is a wizard at balancing tones of playful humor with dark skepticism, all while negotiating the complexities of some serious sculptural logistics, such as mounting a full-size mattress-

cum-projector-screen upright on the wall. She lines the walls with retro boxes of Wheaties and Frosted Flakes covered in sugary glitter; their slick athletic heroes and cartoon mascots immediately conjure pleasant nostalgia and cravings for processed breakfast treats. But did Wheaties ever make you a track star?

She often employs heavy research, as well as the

endless bounty that can come only from Internet treasure hunting, to make her magic happen. The lifelike infants of *Perfect Baby Showroom* are actually “reborn babies” she purchased online—think “real dolls” but in baby form. They are weighted to simulate the heft of a bottom-heavy infant, and their soft, fine hair is treated animal hair—as close as it gets to the real thing. The effect is uncomfortably akin to holding a real baby, and appropriately, performers wearing lab coats encouraging visitors to cradle the dolls create a sensation of unease.

Hovnanian’s glimpse into future dystopia, which shows one possible scenario, if we continue to embrace all that technology and its conveniences have to offer, is smartly collaged from products of the same technologies she critiques. Including objects pulled together from Internet subcultures, and perhaps soon-to-be-mainstream scientific practices, Hovnanian’s works make a tilted comedy of the unsettling reality we’re already living in.

—Alanna Martinez

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Jörg Immendorff

Michael Werner Gallery // September 11–November 1

ONE OF THE BEST-KNOWN contemporary German artists, Immendorff started out studying theater at the Düsseldorf Academy of Art in 1963 before shifting his attention so that he could study with the politically active artist Joseph Beuys. Immendorff followed his mentor’s path, creating actions and protest art while declaring in a 1966 canvas that artists should quit painting. Ten years later, two events rekindled his interest in the medium: the discovery of Renato Guttuso’s history paintings, which he saw at the Venice Biennale, and meeting East German artist A.R. Penck and collaborating with him on a manifesto about issues related to the divided German states.

Three Immendorff canvases from 1978 are painted in a similar scale as Guttuso’s *Caffè Greco*, a fantasy that captured famous figures from different eras in a legendary Roman gathering place for artists and intellectuals. These works reveal political problems on both sides of the Berlin Wall, with *Delikado* portraying Penck throwing red paint on a watchtower and protesters breaking the window of an elite shop in the East, while Immendorff smears the German federal eagle with red paint as a female sculptor chips away at a cornerstone on the wall’s Western side.

Café Deutschland VI–Caféprobe (Café Deutschland VI–Café Rehearsal), a 1980 painting that’s the largest canvas in the show, captures Immendorff and Penck collapsed on the floor of

a nightclub and isolated in a mirror suspended above. Based on Düsseldorf’s Ratinger Hof, a popular discotheque of the time, the café becomes a stage for Immendorff’s comparison of life in the East and the West, with Penck, wearing a cap of ice, atop a tower displaying East Germany’s coat of arms merged with a tank, and Immendorff, surrounded by signs of nuclear threat, held in the eagle’s clutches.

Several smaller paintings present details of and studies for larger works—sporting white borders and words that make them look like propaganda posters. Three later canvases from 1984–85 reveal a shift toward a more vibrant palette that still flaunts the fast, brilliant brushwork that made Immendorff one of the standouts of the Neo-Expressionist movement. —Paul Laster



Jörg Immendorff
Erst wenn die Brocken fliegen werden wir uns beruhigen (Only when the rocks are flying we will be appeased), 1978. Acrylic on canvas, 59 x 59 in.