

LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

Granberry, Michael. "Would you like to order the 'perfect,' genetically engineered baby? A Dallas billboard says you can."

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Would you like to order the 'perfect,' genetically engineered baby? A Dallas billboard says you can

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The "perfect baby" billboard on Dallas North Tollway is drawing plenty of stares and comments. So, is it an April Fool's joke? No, it is not.

No, it is not an April Fool's joke.

But plenty of people were wondering that on Friday, if that happened to be the moment they noticed for the first time the bizarre billboard visible on Dallas North Tollway near Oak Lawn Avenue.

It reads: "Perfect-Babies.com ... Genetically Perfect Children ... Inconceivable?" It concludes by saying, "Coming to Dallas April 15," which happens to be the opening day of the Dallas Art Fair, and *voila!* There's your tie-in.

The concept is the brainchild of artist [Rachel Lee Hovnanian](#), whose work will be shown at the fair, which runs through April 17. It's art meant to provoke, not unlike a

comedy skit by Sacha Baron Cohen, whose antics completely fooled (and outraged) a gathering of Plano residents during the making of his 2009 film, *Bruno*.

As Hovnanian herself writes on her Web site:

“My job as an artist is to elicit conversations. These conversations began around the societal obsession with beauty and narcissism.”

Should you go to Perfect-Babies.com, you might make the mistake, as undoubtedly plenty of people do, that this is for real, as in literally true, totally possible.

The text reads as follows:

“Our perfect babies work hard and play even harder. A Perfect Baby is the ultimate reward. We guarantee parental experience will be without compare. Each Perfect Baby is meticulously bio-engineered. Advanced bio-science harmonizes with the personal needs of individual parents. Our service offers the best start to achieve the pinnacle of modern day parenting.”

Hovnanian elaborates on her installation by saying: “The notion that a ‘perfect baby’ is available for sale in Dallas is sure to raise some important questions of which I suspect your readers will want answers.”

What “thousands of Dallasites will not know,” she says, “is that the billboard is actually an advertisement for *The Perfect Baby Showroom*, an installation on view” at the art fair. Hovnanian’s work will be available for viewing in the Leila Heller Gallery, booth G17, when the fair opens in mid-April.

Hovnanian describes herself as a “multidisciplinary New York-based artist, with roots in Houston.” In her view, *The Perfect Baby Showroom* is a “laboratory meets shopping mall where parents determine the lives and physical characteristics of their babies.”

Further detail here about Hovnanian’s exhibit:

“Arrayed in straight rows and displayed in neat stainless steel racks, Hovnanian’s hyper-realistic perfect babies are miracles of nature, yet they are also inventory; infants to be loved, yet products to be prized. Their heads rest on pillows filled with colorful genetically modified, sugary cereals puffed full of air. The *Perfect Baby Showroom* considers where our natural and synthetic worlds collide. Though subtle, Hovnanian explores capitalism, narcissism and intimacy, while raising questions about digital technology today and its future trajectory, challenging viewers to reevaluate his or her own relationship with the medium.”

Art writer Alanna Martinez once wrote that “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 ... Hovnanian's works make a tilted comedy of unsettling reality we're already living in."

Critic Lilly Ball once wrote that "Hovnanian is a seeker, exploring in her work themes of obsession, narcissism, intimacy (or lack thereof), addiction (to, say, sweetened cereal — sweetened everything), our dependence on technology and the accessibility it provides, and our relationships with our phones. She's not here to provide answers, but rather takes a Socratic approach, asking questions that helps the audience find answers for themselves."

Rachel Small, who writes for *Interview* magazine, says: "Hovnanian has devised these shows in hopes that her audience might be inspired to take a pause and reflect on their increasingly normalized behavior towards technology."

Art writer Dorothy Spears' critical comment may say it best, however: "There is a capitalist subtext to Hovnanian's work, a critique of unabashed consumerism."

Here's more about the artist's work in this YouTube video:



<http://artsblog.dallasnews.com/2016/04/would-you-like-to-order-the-perfect-genetically-engineered-baby-a-dallas-billboard-says-you-can.html/>