

LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

Davis, Scarlett. 'Exhibition Review: Pure.' *MUSÉE*. (June 14, 2018).



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Last week, Rachel Lee Hovnanian's third and final installation of *The Women's Trilogy, Pure*, was showcased at the Leila Heller Gallery on Thursday, June 7th, 2018. Trilogies are not foreign to literature and film, yet are rarely seen in art, making Rachel's work a welcomed art world anomaly. This final installation for those who observed parts I and II beforehand is the culmination of ruminating thoughts towards trilogies. But more importantly, why this title, *The Women's Trilogy*?

The success of the show was palpable. The walls of this trendy studio in the heart of the Chelsea art scene were booming with the familiar hum drums of the art-goers with their wine and Instagram worthy moments; however, hung in the air was also the sadness of the week's news involving the suicide of designer, Kate Spade. *Tragedy* would also appear Friday, the morning after the opening of *Pure*. The news of a similar suicide with the popular chef, writer, and TV personality, Anthony Bourdain.

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With Hovnanian's Tracey Minn-esque neon fixtures of popular #hashtags and all around good vibes like "FLIRL" (Feel Love in Real Life), as well as her direct nod to the role consumption and consumerism plays in the American psyche with her Italian-like marble *Ivory* soap sculptures, one enters upon a kind of meta-theatre where we all are too eerily reminded of the superficial and the hollow feelings that surround materiality; a point similarly expanded upon in parts I and II.



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"It floats!" was the popular advertisement for *Ivory* soap, a product which has roughly 135 years of history, manufactured by the company Proctor & Gamble. What Warhol saw in his iconic *Brillo* iconography, Hovnanian makes use of with this turn of the century American product, a beacon of the Industrial movement. In 1918, the US had joined efforts and entry into World War I, the National Geographic published an advertisement for Ivory saying, "Ivory use is as unchangeable a part of American life as the practice of cleanliness. Ivory soap is the very joy of living to Our boys when they are relieved from the front lines for rest, recreation, clean clothes and a bath." The artist has rendered, similar to her use of the Girl Scouts, an interesting facet of our American ideology by virtue of each reference in their own historical significance and place in our culture.

Ivory soap bar if not out of commission, are on the decline due to the prevalence of body soap. Also, the soap's buoyance was a perpetuated myth, but like women, good at keeping up appearances. With that said, how is one to glom to the over-arching meaning of these three individual works and what is the imperative for women to understand? Sometimes trying to extract meaning from someone else's creation is like trying to understand the contents of someone's kitchen drawer. There are packets of take-out soy sauce, next to band aids, with the possibility of the remnants of someone's inner most self. The result is deeply personal, but open for everyone to intuit themselves.

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If we are to examine the works in stages, they would all stem from a need to revert back to a time before the world was ruined by technology and things like social media. Part I shows a desire to revert back to nature and part II reverts to a time of innocence, childhood. Part III it would seem is a kind of baptism, wiping the slate clean or pure. However, as women I have to question if this is in our best interest, our scars and trauma enable us to withstand. What would a clean slate void of knowledge and experience offer? Rather than baptism by water in this #metoo era why not a baptism by fire?



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Part of the enjoyment of art exhibitions such as these comes with the solidarity of walking aimlessly through a gallery in a sea of people, in a sea of thoughts and impressions. Something about Hovnanian's work made me want to bridge the societal gap, so I found someone who was alone from the herd, outside of the gallery and its well clad people and just as this person was about to light a cigarette from an unopened pack, I asked: what did you think? To my surprise, this person was grateful and more than eager to engage me on the subject of art. In thinking about Hovnanian's complicated and interested demonstration of surfaces and women, I am reminded of something Kate Spade was once quoted for saying, "I buy so much fake jewelry, it's funny. It's not real. I don't wear real diamonds or anything." Women can love and women can forgive, and they can also mask their pain like no one else can. Proctor & Gamble, the makers of *Ivory*, was used the notion of a "soap cloud" to sell their product, based on this false notion of its buoyancy. Women sell their own kind of "soap cloud" as wives, mothers, sisters, girlfriends, and friends. Women can love and forgive, but they can also mask their pain like no one else. Sometimes all people need is simple reminder to let a piece of the allusion fade away, every now and then.

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