

LEILA HELLER.

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CONTEMPORARY ART IN TUSCANY: A NEW YORK ARTIST TAKES ITALY BY STORM

This summer the historic Palazzo Mediceo is hosting a contemporary exhibition of New York multi-media provocateur Rachel Lee Hovnanian - and it's spectacular.



"Travelling Ape Truck"

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Cosimo de Medici, the Grand Duke of Tuscany built his palace in Seravezza, near Forte Dei Marmi, Pietrasanta, and the Carrara marble quarry, as both a military outpost and vacation home. Michelangelo resided there from 1518 to 1521. Now a different kind of artist is in the house.



The Palazzo Mediceo in Seravezza, near Forte Dei Marmi, Pietrasanta, Italy is home for the summer to an extraordinary art exhibit.

GETTY/RICCARDO GHILARDI

This summer the Unesco world heritage site (called Palazzo Mediceo) is hosting a contemporary exhibition of New York multi-media provocateur Rachel Lee Hovnanian, the first woman and first American to show there. She calls her disturbing and carnivalesque retrospective "Open Secrets," and it is a wry commentary on society's tortured relationship with addiction, digital technology, and the pressure it forces on us to lead carefully curated lives.

At a recent Felliniesque opening, wide-eyed international guests (requested to dress in white) walked on a stately lawn past a towering marble "Beauty Queen Totem," and into the palatial funhouse. Or was it a house of horrors? In one room, the artist installed a long banquet table where the seated couple dining were videos on Ipads. Pings and beeps replaced the conversation.

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Rachel Lee Hovnanian's "Beauty Queen Totem" of Carrara marble outside Palazzo Mediceo in Seravezza, Italy.
IACOPO GIANNINI

In an adjacent room filled with repurposed wine bottles and paintings of mock Dick and Jane style reading book pages about alcoholism, guests drank "Bimbo" rose wine. In another room, an emoji animation commented on how to look like an artist, and in another, a romantic video of sexy young couples in bed seemed far more intimate with their phones than each other.

"She's a woman with a sly vision," said Marina Perchevsky, whose cultural foundation backed the event. "It's about contemporary life, but people have always had these feelings of anxiety."

In Hovnanian's most unsettling and futuristic installation, "The Perfect Baby," guests washed their hands with Purell, put on lab coats and picked up life-like plastic infants from vitrines. On the golden stone wall above them, the Grand Duke who built the palace stared down.

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Viewers could choose lifelike infants to adopt in "the Perfect Baby" installation.
GETTY/RICCARDO GHILARDI

"His spirit is here, looking at all the babies," Eugenio Gianni, the president of Tuscany told Annalisa Bugliani, the exhibition curator. "And I think he is enjoying himself."

Visitors to Tuscany needing a break from the Renaissance can include "Open Secrets" on a contemporary art spin around the region. Here are some other wonderful contemporary options in the area:

<https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/1518247/international-guests-opening.jpg?w=737&f=204603d831e01f819eddb113672e0d56>

The Luigi Pecci Centre for Contemporary Art in Prato – between Florence and Pisa, over 1000 works in a space-age building with a show this summer celebrating nightclub design.

Centre for Contemporary Culture at Palazzo Strozzi – This adventurous space in Florence emphasizes a mashup of state of the art trends in science and contemporary culture.

Galleria Continua housed in a former cinema in San Gimignano, southwest of Florence, this avant-garde space for international artists has expanded to outposts in Beijing and Havana.

Keith Haring in Pisa – This 1989 mural commissioned by the city on the side of The Church of Saint Anthony is called "Tuttomondo." It has a subtle palette inspired by surrounding buildings.

MuSA – Tucked one of Tuscany's most beautiful and bohemian towns, this state of the art center projects multiscreen interactive videos about the making of sculpture from marble.

Tarot Sculpture Garden – The French artist known as Niki created this child-friendly garden of unearthly delights inspired by Gaudi's Parc Guell in Barcelona.

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"Travelling Ape Truck" with Wi-Fi reception parked at the palazzo before visiting villages around the region.

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The artist and ringleader Rachel Lee Hovnanian.

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International guests at the opening in the installation "Swipe Left, Swipe Right."

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A bust of Cosimo De' Medici looks down on the first exhibition by a woman and an American in his trophy room.

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One half of the couple in "Dinner for Two."

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Rachel Lee Hovnanian's "Beauty Queen Totem" made of Carrara marble outside Palazzo Mediceo in Seravezza, Italy.

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