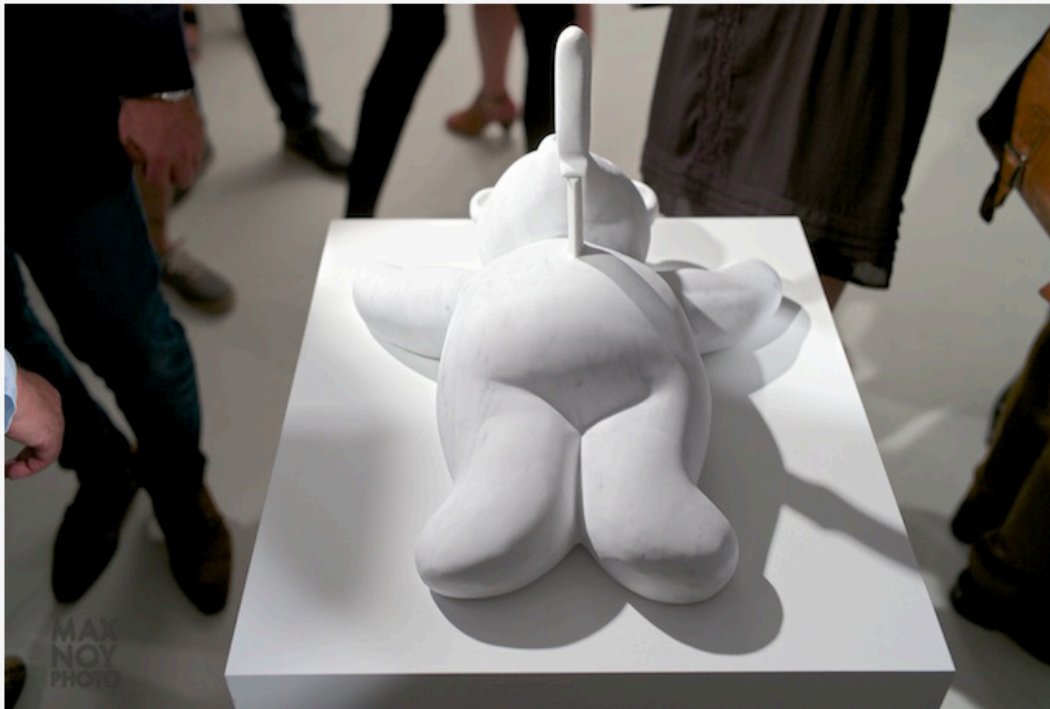


LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

Lahuyan, A. Oscar. "Rachel Lee Hovnanian: In Plastic We Trust", *ARTFUSE* (September, 10, 2014).

ARTE FUSE

Rachel Lee Hovnanian: In Plastic We Trust



Sculpture by Rachel Lee Hovnanian

Mr. McGuire: I just want to say one word to you. Just one word.

Benjamin: Yes, sir.

Mr. McGuire: Are you listening?

Benjamin: Yes, I am.

Mr. McGuire: Plastics.

That movie dialog excerpt was from *The Graduate* (1967) and it was the mantra of that time that pointed to a lucrative future in plastics. It was a movie made more than four decades ago and now our daily existence relies greatly on plastics. Last September 4th, AF dove into the roiling and boiling art season scene for the fall 2014, in which we chose the Leila Heller Gallery show for **Rachel Lee Hovnanian** entitled *Plastic Perfect*.



The art crowd at Leila Heller Gallery

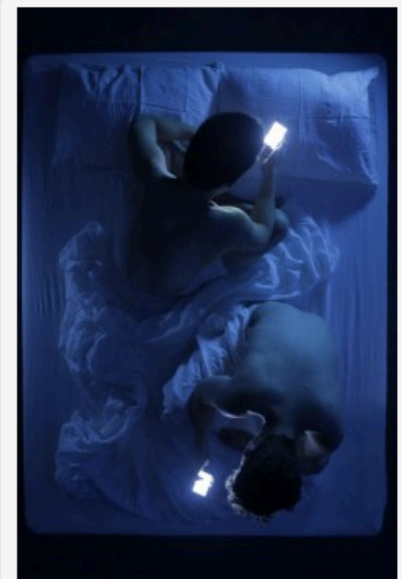
There was a sense of intrigue as the teaser image for the show had babies in Plexi-glass boxes. What is she trying to say? It mitigated the action of really coming to the opening reception to get the overall effect of the other works and installation. If art is turning the mirror to the time we live in, there is no mistaking that we do live in the world where PLASTIC rules.



Artist Rachel Lee Hovnanian

The photographs of couples in bed with various combinations, positions and mood was basically a commentary of how we are more intimate with our electronic devices rather than the person we're in bed with. The aerial view combined with the rich midnight and cobalt blue denoted a stillness and serenity to the overall picture. The screen light is the fiery component that illuminates the dark plane, which recalls a very Baroque composition where the couples in the twisted white sheets seem to be swimming in a cloud. *Foreplay, James and Emil (2014)* set a very beatific mood as they pay homage to their devices while their bodies curled up on opposite ends could be the crouched up guilt for the wages of their idolatry to technology. Ah, the agony and the ecstasy!

As an added twist to the whole night, besides the usual free wine there were servers with trays filled with a variety of cereals. Canapés and tidbits are so last season. Breakfast cereal is the fuel for the art set and we're eating it up. Our devotion is pretty much like the way it was when it's introduced into the American diet in the 1960's as the food of the future. Fast, cheap and so convenient – that it didn't matter it was manufactured and loaded with so much sugar. *They're Gr-r-reat! (2014)* had a repetitious array of cereal boxes "frosted" with luscious drips enclosed in a large Plexi-glass box where it is a delicious artifact to salivate over. It can be Hovnanian's two-dimensional version of Andy Warhol's Campbell Soup Can prints. The familiar product was treated as an art think piece and goes beyond Pop sensibility. Hovnanian wanted to bring forth our dependence and euphoria conditioned state based on the marketing of such items. Genetically modified and artificial products are made seductive based on how it is presented. We're all suckers for this. Who hasn't had warm fuzzy memories watching colored marshmallows in their Lucky Charms floating after pouring on the milk? Everyone has taken part and polluted their body because of effective or shall we say ingenious marketing.



Foreplay James and Emil (2014) by Rachel Lee Hovnanian

We believe and trust because it was sold to feed our rush (no doubt sugary) and it relates back to the same way we are hostage to our technological devices. We are hooked and in this case, we are doomed with a bowl and a spoon. Yet we can't stop because it tastes and feels so good.



The perfect baby with cereal included

And finally the piece de resistance, plastic baby in a clear box. So imagine if we are so ingrained into the manufactured and technological then having our perfect offspring shouldn't be far off. As a matter of fact, there have been strides in bio-genetics where you can determine the physicality, intelligence level and abilities of your baby. Just choose the ideal donor then combination and it will be engineered for you. This seems so subversive and against the natural law. But the human tendency is to strive for perfection. *Perfect Baby Showroom* at the front of the gallery is where you can experience the future now. With lab smocks on hooks, you put one on, then peruse the room lined up with babies inside the clear boxes and their heads nestled in blown up clear pillows filled with – CEREAL.

Baby's first food, of course. You see the sign which featured what kind of baby is available and if you want to test drive, take the baby out of the box and see if you feel it is the right one for you. It is an experience-based installation that is foretelling and disturbing the longer you stay. Are we such creatures of perfection that we'll manufacture human beings like cereal from a factory in hopes it will give us the same rush just as a sugar filled consumer product would? It is sobering but very true with the way we live and our dependence on plastic perfection. We pay with plastic, get plastic surgery to stay young forever and bend to the times our values like plastic.



You can cuddle anything you want in the dark



They're Gr-r-reat (2014) by Rachel Lee Hovnanian

Considering everything in the show, Hovnanian cleverly brings into focus a modern day phenomenon and reality that we are numb to. Our lives are plastic. It has ceased to become natural. How the fuck did this happen? The finely crafted pieces are paramount to the idiom of plastic living. She made everything perfectly palatable and charming. It is seductive and alluring just like the marketing juggernaut that continues to sell us slop. We know this but we are resigned to accept it and that is the most disturbing thought of all. Thank God for Hovnanian's skillful representation of this otherwise touchy subject. Technology – can't get rid of it and can't live without it. But in our human brilliance, let us continue to question and have that self-awareness. If I could rewrite the dialog for *The Graduate*, Benjamin would say to Mr. McGuire: *I have two words for that one, Sir. SHUT UP!* – That is the sobering way to drown out the cacophony of the plastic life and slay it with the Sound of Silence.

To view our interview with the artist, please click below:



<http://artefuse.com/2014/09/10/rachel-lee-hovnanian-plastic-perfect-at-leila-heller-gallery-123517/>