

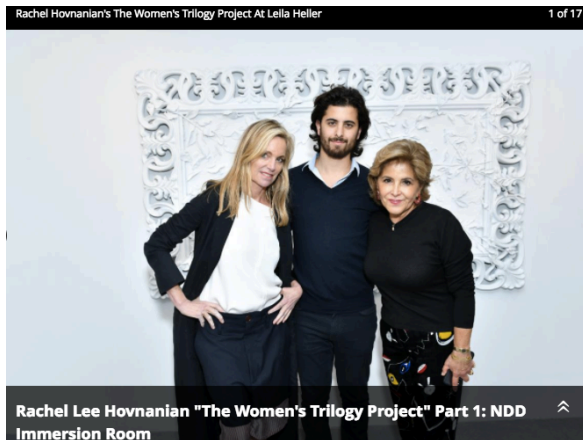
Zilkha, Bettina. 'Rachel Lee Hovnanian Opens NDD Immersion Room At The Leila Heller Gallery.' *Forbes*. (March 1, 2018).



Rachel Hovnanian Opens NDD Immersion Room At The Leila Heller Gallery

By Bettina Zilkha

March 1, 2018



Gallery

Rachel Hovnanian's The Women's Trilogy Project At Leila Heller

Artist Rachel Lee Hovnanian debuted PART 1 of her latest oeuvre, *The Women's Trilogy Project*, at the Leila Heller Gallery on Friday night. Titled *NDD Immersion Room*, the piece is meant to describe a form of human alienation from nature that results in both a greater susceptibility to negative moods and a reduced attention span. (NDD refers to Nature Deficit Disorder). Guests were asked to surrender their cell phones; they were then given lanterns and invited into the dark space, a recreation of a forest, complete with crickets, a teepee, and a cot to lie down and meditate by the (fake) fire.

Hovnanian created this exhibition under her male pseudonym, Ray Lee, assigned by her peers during adolescence to reflect her interest in masculine outdoor past

LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

times like camping and fishing. By producing work under her male pseudonym, Hovnanian diffuses the impact of gender on work being created by women artists.

"As women, possessions, gender roles and stereotypes drive us to actions and limitations that are artificial rather than real," said the artist.

Unplugging and connecting are themes that run through the exhibition. *Waiting Room* prepares viewers for the immersion room; it is a white, calming space that includes an igloo-like formation complete with a phone charger. In the first room, a neon piece, *FMLNWF*, proclaims "FUCK MY LIFE NO WIFI".

"We live in a world where we are bombarded with so much information, and yet we find ourselves constantly searching for meaning," said Hovnanian.

"Technology has changed the way our children and adults interact with each other. It has changed the way we learn and has even affected our memories."

"We see life through the lens of our phones," Hovnanian continued. "Emoticons sometimes substitute for what was once called emotional support or praise. Communicating through technology may just be the greatest mask of all - and funny how alcohol tends to cut off your emotions in the end. Alcohol and technology have something in common - if we use too much of either, it produces an anesthetizing effect. The two together isolate us in ways we cannot imagine."

For the occasion, wine was poured into specimen cups, and roasted crickets were served in pill holders, as Hovnanian's husband, Ara, and children, Alexander and Serena, hosted guests and collectors including Ros and Fran L'Esperance, Ulla Parker, Alex Roepers, Carl & Gigi Grimstad, Jamie Creel, Ann & Annabelle Dexter-Jones, Lisa Fine, and George Farias.

Hovnanian has shown with Heller since 2006. Her work has been bought by both major collectors and museums. It is a perfect partnership, as Heller understands both the aesthetic and intellectual sides of the work, and gives it the best exposure possible.

"Rachel is an extremely creative and innovative thinker and artist, and I am mesmerized by her thought process and by her work," said Heller. "I decided to do something that no one has ever done before: give Rachel the gallery for six months for three consecutive shows, in order to give her a platform to present three distinct bodies of work and concepts that are so relevant to our time - especially to women."