

# LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

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**Rachel Lee Hovnanian**  
***Mud Pie***  
**May 3- June 2, 2012**

*Opening Reception in Chelsea on Wednesday, May 3, 6 - 8pm*



*Texas Mud Pie, Hands and Feet (Self-Portrait), 2012. C-print*

New York – A solo exhibition of provocative new work by Rachel Lee Hovnanian will be on view at Leila Heller Gallery in Chelsea from May 3- June 2, 2012. *Mud Pie* will include large-scale installations, sculpture, mixed media paintings, and photography that explore the blurring of reality and the narcissistic side of digital life. A fully illustrated catalogue will accompany the exhibition with an essay by critic and filmmaker Amei Wallach.

This powerful narrative begins with a photograph, *Texas Mud Pie, Hands and Feet (Self-Portrait), 2012*, and finishes informed by the unfiltered world of digital technology with the sculptural work *Gates of Narcissus Metal Panels, Motherboards, 2012*.

The viewer is invited into the artist's dream/awake state as she identifies commonplace sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and views of her early childhood in Texas. Hovnanian asks us to imagine a young girl making mud pies in the backyard swallowed up in the world of make believe. Hovnanian recalls the smell of pie in her mother's kitchen, which triggers a powerful memory – but is it apple or mud? And her memory of a profusion of fresh flowers – real or is this more cultural taxidermy?

In the interactive installation/ performance piece, *Cafe, 2012*, Hovnanian presents a small neighborhood cafe in Texas. Or is it? There is what seems to be an authentic cafe aroma, but the fare is decidedly untraditional. The milky white liquid posing as coffee smells and tastes real, but it is actually a chemical

substance created in a lab- a deep rich flavor with a longer shelf life. BBQ, lemonade, and pie grace the menu, however “Food Bytes” or synthetically modified food are served in the cafe. Look out the window: there is a view of a barn – a 12-minute, video projection on a loop entitled, *Outside Nacogdoches*. @CafeWaitress (the waitress) oozes southern charm and sugars up every sentence; another ersatz reality, she's an actress from New York City with a Twitter account. When @CafeWaitress is asked about the menu she politely refers you to Siri on her iPhone and reminds you to follow her on Twitter.

In the installation, *Dinner For Two*, 2012, Hovnanian tackles the illusion of elegant dining and the romantic intimacy of a couple. Her long elegant dining table is set with silver flatware and grand flowers that need dusting (and it seems, so does the relationship). At either end of the table, the apparent husband and wife are absent figures replaced with LCD panels affixed to chairs like prosthetics where their heads should be. Each screen presents a three-minute video loop. Hyper-abundant *Floral Arrangements*, 2012, are memorialized through photographs.

Notes Hovnanian, "We've forgotten what is real. Fast food chains replaced cafes; children think a package of pink powder mixed with water is real lemonade made with freshly squeezed pink lemons. We think we have 1,000 real friends on Facebook. We are sucked into our screens and can't find the time to separate from technology. Only when the power is down, or if we are visiting a remote place with no wireless, can we take a break."

Hovnanian examines how we look for ourselves in objects that fascinate us. *The Gates of Narcissus Metal Panels*, 2012, are divided in two series. The first series, *The Gates of Narcissus Metal Panels, Reflections of the Narcissus*, are five 7 1/2 foot multi-layered metal paintings gleaming with lavish metallic leaf on linen. In the second series, *The Gates of Narcissus Metal Panels, Motherboards*, thousands of hand sculpted metal narcissus flowers are attached to industrial sheets of steel, the idealized surrogate image.

Hovnanian insists it took a digital revolution to overwhelm the mythic purity of both a child's mud pie and a kitchen-baked, factory-fresh American apple pie and that we need to recall our own mud pie to preserve our earliest origins. We are warned of the tragic fate of Narcissus. This is the modern day Narcissus dilemma – we gaze into screen images until the outer world disappears.

Rachel Lee Hovnanian was born in Parkersburg, West Virginia, and grew up in Mexico, Texas, and New York. Her work has been seen in solo and group exhibitions across the U.S. and in London, Barcelona, Madrid, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Hong Kong. She lives and works in New York City.

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