

Rachel Lee Hovnanian: Too Good To Be True



By Casey Kettleson in Culture Features on June 25, 2010

Examining the politics of beauty, artist Rachel Lee Hovnanian's latest installation, *Too Good To Be True*, closes June 30, 2010 at the Collette Blanchard Gallery.



Shown Above: Rachel Hovnanian, *No Prenup*, 2010, photograph in archival ink on rag paper, 26 x 32 inches, of which Hovnanian says, "The shopping precludes these people from having an intimate relationship."

I first met artist **Rachel Lee Hovnanian** several years ago when I interviewed her about her project *Preservation of the Narcissus*, where she beautifully examined society's obsession with the preservation of youth through various mediums. In her current installation at the **Collette Blanchard Gallery** (now through June 30, 2010), ***Too Good To Be True***, Hovnanian has dedicated much of her effort to what she has dubbed "trophyism" or "the idea that we have to be this perfect person."

This latest exhibition is classic Hovnanian: it engages the politics of beauty with minimal forms that expose intricate relationships that humans have to one another and to inanimate objects. Her minimalist palette is nearly completely devoid of color; gray shadows reveal the soft dimensionality of her sculpted installations. The seemingly pure, neutral palette used in her work contrasts, and thus **emphasizes the disturbing, and complex nature of perceived beauty and its delimiting consequences**. To quote the artist, her palette "imparts ... the precursor to reflection." As such, it becomes impossible to avoid the tensions of dependence, decorum and control that pervade her work.

In Hovnanian's print, *The Collector* (*shown below*), a seated male, his back to the viewer, gazes at the items in his collection – one of which is a poised, life-sized female trophy. Objectified to the extreme – literally a female sculpted as object – the figure is dressed as a beauty queen. Her colorless eyes and timid grin face the audience, lacking any particular direction of their own.

See below for more from *Too Good To Be True*, although we highly suggest visiting the exhibition for yourself before it closes...



"This one is about what happens when you become a trophy wife, how you just become an object," explains Hovnanian. Rachel Hovnanian, *The Collector*, 2010.



Rachel Hovnanian, *Leave Me Alone*, 2010, photograph in archival ink on rag paper, 26 x 32 inches.



Rachel Hovnanian, *Blood Stain Remover*, 2010, photograph in archival ink on rag paper, 26 x 32 inches.



Rachel Hovnanian, *Rumors*, 2010, photograph in archival ink on rag paper, 26 x 32 inches.



Left: Rachel Hovnanian, *Size 0*, 2010, photograph in archival ink on rag paper, 32 x 26 inches; Right: Rachel Hovnanian, *Get Him to Forgive You*, 2010, photograph in archival ink on rag paper, 36 x 26 inches.



Rachel Hovnanian, *Beauty and the Doughnuts*, 2010, photograph in archival ink on rag paper, 48 x 61 inches.

Collette Blanchard Gallery
<http://www.rachelhovnanian.com/>

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