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A ROGUE
EXCLUSIVE

THE HAAS MENAGERIE

In the new Beast collection of LA-based furniture designers Simon and Nikolai Haas, animals abound in provocative, primal, and playful ways

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IMAGINE A VOLUPTUOUS daybed that echoes Hollywood, in all its glamor and kitsch, wrapped in white Icelandic sheepskin fur, with two carved wooden horns at the head, and feet made of cast bronze in the shape of camel toes and you have Anna Nicole Smith. Grace, inspired by Grace Jones, is a three-legged stool on long cast bronze legs topped with black sheepskin fur, while her white, four-legged counterpart is named after Dolph Lundgren, who sports, underneath the thick fur, golden testicles. And have you met Debbie Harry Dromedary? She is an undulating daybed draped in American buffalo fur, replete with humps at either end. One other piece, a massive armchair in black sheepskin crowned with spiked horns and finished off with cast bronze goat's hoof feet, is still to be christened.

"Bette Davis Noire!" I suggest.

The brothers, clad in their uniform black t-shirt and jeans, nod. "Maybe," they muse, "maybe that could work."

The Haas Brothers (thehaasbrothers.com) showed their Beast Collection at the inaugural Guild International Design Fair in Cape Town last February, part of the acclaimed New York design gallery R and Company's exhibition. "Our process has always been really fluid," says Nikolai. "The way we started out is, we did props and clothing and objects—really, literally, anything. We're excited to have a challenge with any kind of project."

This can-do and anything-goes attitude perhaps comes from a fairly unusual childhood. Born in California and raised in Texas, the twins—whose brother is the actor Lukas Haas—have for a father a painter and stonemason,

while their mother is a writer and opera singer. Eccentric and unconventional don't even begin to describe their upbringing.

"Pretty much our entire childhood was, well, different," Simon adds. "We would make things ourselves, build stuff. Our mom was a crazy collector who'd paint our house every two months and move things around. She'd never stop fixing stuff up, so it was, like, our existence as kids was to do construction and make things."

Nikolai continues, "When we were 13 years old, our mom said, 'I want an office! Okay you two, go build me an office.' And we'd go in the back and build it for her."

At 19, the twins—born nine minutes apart—went their separate ways. Simon went to study painting and architecture at the Rhode Island School of Design, while Nikolai moved to New York to become a musician, touring with the likes of Sean Lennon and Vincent Gallo. In 2007, they teamed up again and headed to Los Angeles, which remains their base, eventually replacing music with design and construction projects that eventually led to the birth of The Haas Brothers three years later.

Their inquisitive, experimental and adventurous approach to their work has resulted in a multifaceted, multi-layered career that is constantly evolving, and constantly provoking, with an enthusiasm that can come across as naïve and childlike, but with a perspicacity that is acutely aware of the conventions it is challenging and often sending up.



ANATOMICALLY CORRECT

Above: Long Hanging Dong Accretion vase with porcelain slip in Angelyne glaze with gold luster.

Top left: The Vagina Hedgehog Accretion vase with porcelain slip in Angelyne glaze. **Previous page:** The Ed Bel-fur, from the Beast series, in brown Icelandic Sheepskin with coyote feet and dong in cast bronze.



At Design Basel, for instance, they presented *The Sex Room*, which featured, among others, a giant penis sculpture with a glowing light at the, er, tip, an interactive vagina, and cartoonish paintings of animals on leather in various postures of coitus or exhibitionism—think Hanna-Barbera meets the *Kama Sutra*. But far from pornographic, the *Sex Room* can in fact be unsettling rather than titillating, allowing viewers to confront notions of sexuality and freedom.

I meet up with them in New York in May; they are in town to speak at the Collective2 Design Fair, as well as to see—finally—the handmade limited edition wallpaper design they did for Flavor Paper in Brooklyn.

“It was an extremely intense process,” Nikolai explains of the design, “since it consisted of 60 screens, each one around seven feet tall. John Sherman [of Flavor Paper] told us it was probably the most complicated hand-printed wallpaper of all time. Because when we take on a project, we get really excited and kind of get carried away and take it to an extreme!”

From what I can glean from their iPad photos, there’s something vaguely reminiscent of Henri Rousseau, the animals projecting a distinct innocence in a lush, Garden of Eden kind of background that is both menacing and comforting. Because upon closer look, the animals are in various states of stupor, cavorting in all sorts of positions, having partaken of the juice of the marula tree, said to have a

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narcotic effect.

“The inspiration was a 1976 movie called *Animals are Beautiful People*,” Simon says. “So there are like a bunch of animals getting wasted, hitting on each other . . .”

“And it’s all cartoons, in terms of rendering,” says Nikolai, “so the idea was that there were no boundaries. You have cheetahs next to elephants, predators alongside prey, because they’re all just drunk and having fun. It’s sexual, it’s jokey.”

“But it’s also extremely layered, visually complex, visually buzzy,” adds Simon. “It’s printed on gold, which glows in the dark. It’s layers of meaning upon layers of technique.” ■



THE BROTHERS BLOOM

Above: The Haas Brothers, Simon (left) and Nikolai (right), photographed by Daniel Trese in 2014. **Left:** The Edward Fur-long Bench from the Haas Brothers’ Beast Series in Beach Boy Icelandic sheep fur, with carved ebony horns, cast bronze cheetah feet, and a cast bronze tongue.