



"HAIRY BELAFONTE," (2014). ICE-
LANDIC SHEEPSKIN, CAST BRONZE.
57 X 24 X 28.5 INCHES. COURTESY R
& COMPANY GALLERY, NEW YORK.
PHOTO: JOE KRAMM.

HAAS BROTHERS LOOK AT ALL THOSE DICKS ON THIS FURNITURE

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In Walt Disney’s 1991 pièce de résistance, *Beauty and the Beast*, Belle’s father Maurice—after being waylaid on the road back to his home and daughter—happens upon a mysterious castle and decides to seek refuge. Upon entering the apparently abandoned building, Maurice encounters Lumiere (a seductive candlestick), and Cogsworth (a slightly compulsive pendulum clock), and after being scared witless by the speaking furnishings, Maurice scampers to the hearth where he encounters still more sorcery, but of a kinder variety, including Footstool, a loyal ottoman with sculpted paws for legs.

The anthropomorphic appointments of 30-year-old fraternal twins Simon and Nikolai Haas are not necessarily inspired by the vintage animated flick. However, their creations share several distinct qualities with the adorable stool, most notably paws. Born to an opera singer and a stonemason, the Haas’ grew up in a perhaps more imaginative environment than most. This could be why they love living in Los Angeles, a city built on fantasy.

After high school, Simon and Niki went their separate directions, Simon studying painting at the Rhode Island School of Design, and Niki taking the music route, eventually going on the road with acts like Sean Lennon, Jim O’Rourke, and Vincent Gallo. In 2010, the brothers reconvened and opened their Los Angeles-based design studio, creating furniture for the likes of Donatella Versace and Tobey Maguire. Mario Testino is known to favor their furnishings for his shoots.

Currently, they are branching out into collage and painting (the likes of which can be found on the cover of this publication) with a recent exhibition at R & Company, Cool World, the title a reference to the 1992 film by Ralph Bakshi.

Overlooking the main warehouse floor of the Haas’ downtown Los Angeles studio, music rebounds off walls, off people, off finished pieces of furniture, and works in progress. The place is immense but it’s hard to tell if this should be attributed to the literal size of the space, or to the work energy steadily releasing. Experimentation is alive and well with materials familiar and unfamiliar to me. Nicki Minaj, Britney, Steely Dan—there are only dope beats to step to. We sit down and get straight into it.

How did you begin your flexible approach to lives as makers and not strictly “artists” or “furniture designers”? Was it moving to L.A. by way of Texas?

Niki: There’s no traditionalism in Los Angeles. You can all be creatives together and do whatever you want. Anywhere else in the world, people are uncomfortable without you having a solid definition of what you do and that is quite boring.

Simon: When we moved here we realized we could create our own reality because this city is so spread out. You really choose where you want to drive and who you want to be made visible to and this flexibility extends into our practice.

That is visible in your studio. You are clearly fleshing out materials and playing. So it’s interesting you touched on your exterior environment because I’m curious how it impacts your more interior studio practice.

Simon: I mean, L.A. is playful and doesn’t take itself too seriously. Having the reputation for being a plastic fake landscape actually affords us a lot of freedom.



“CALIFORNIA RAISIN,” (2014). VERMICULATED LEATHER, CAST BRONZE. 5 X 30 X 40 INCHES. COURTESY R & COMPANY GALLERY, NEW YORK. PHOTO: JOE KRAMM.



“SIR HISS & FANNY DEVITO,” (2014). BRASS HEX TILE, BLOWN GLASS SHADE. DIMENSIONS VARY. COURTESY R & COMPANY GALLERY, NEW YORK. PHOTO: JOE KRAMM.



“HAIRY J. BLIGE,” (2014). ICELANDIC SHEEPSKIN, CAST BRONZE. 93 X 38 X 50 INCHES. COURTESY R & COMPANY GALLERY, NEW YORK. PHOTO: JOE KRAMM.



“PARTY GOD,” (2015). HAND CARVED PELE DE TIGRE MARBLE. 13 X 6 X 16 INCHES. COURTESY R & COMPANY GALLERY, NEW YORK. PHOTO: MASON POOLE.



“KAA,” (2014). BRASS HEX TILE. 92 X 38 X 30 INCHES. COURTESY R & COMPANY GALLERY, NEW YORK. PHOTO: JOE KRAMM.

Niki: This kind of plastic fake reality, which L.A. wears on its sleeve, is ultimately self-expression. It’s an authentic self-expression. In L.A., you have Angelyne who is a living artwork. And the fact that L.A. respects young people which allows you to achieve a lot at a very young age, unlike an environment such as New York where you have to intern with so-and-so for no money until you have reached enough experience to be a professional yourself and then by that time you have missed the boat.

In your piece, “Advocates for the Sexual Outsider,” you describe desire as a pursuit of honesty. This makes me think about sentimentality or more simply, feelings. The functionality of furniture and feelings seem at odds with each other. Can you speak to this?

Simon: Yes. That is really a lot of what we are interested in and is partially why we make furniture. We are not necessarily interested in furniture as a functioning object. It’s something you live with and get to experience all of the time in your house we like the idea that it can remind you of desire, or sexuality in an open way. We are interested in desire and like the idea that furniture can serve more of a human purpose and that it provides more than one service.

Niki: But if it functions that is great too. It’s a positive cycle. Feeling is function. It’s funny, because Simon and I were talking about design as a coming of age. It’s like painting: what you are really selling is value and historical context. Something like function, you can sit on it, but it’s not really enough. The art form needs to mature and become something that provides more than some kind of service. At some point a painting was just to make a room look pretty and then it became philosophical. Or in music, Elvis shaking his hips was pandemonium. But at this point, the philosophical value of furniture has been beaten out of it. What is the point of engaging social realities if all you have to offer is making something look good? Design is really becoming a socially responsible art form. It should be.

Would you say you are making objects, which are about opening up space almost as an act of resistance?

Simon: Yes. Absolutely. Design is a very rigid rule oriented practice. We hate rules but we still like design. And it is actually damaging to stick to rules. All you have to do is not get too comfortable in your own context and to not think to preciously about it. Our practice is entirely curious.

Niki: Yes, and again, you have a responsibility to incubate the social context around you. We want to throw things that build the idea of what the bigger story can be. We try to support a lot of people who we find talented who are not getting the support they deserve. When you are working toward this end and then you feel a bit of resistance from the design world fir what you are doing because you do not meet a red tape ideal or some historical context, it gets frustrating. So we choose to participate in a moment of brain expansion rather than quell it, which sometimes the market can do.

Working with furniture, your pieces have an obvious relationship to bodies and the human scale. Do you have any future plans to make larger scaled works?

Niki: Well we made a 100-thousand pound cat for Coachella [laughs]. It was made of stone.