

SURFACE



The Haas Brothers exhibition 'Beast in Show' at SCAD Museum of Art.

The Haas Brothers Bring Their Otherworldly Creatures to SCAD

By: Nate Storey
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Dr. Seuss. Salvador Dali. Roald Dahl. Antoni Gaudí. When it comes to influences, Los Angeles–based Nikolai and Simon Haas, known affectionately as the Haas Brothers, look far beyond the field of design. Their discipline is imagination. “Our artwork uses fantasy to transport you into a new way of thought,” Nikolai said recently on the podcast *On Creativity with Paula Wallace*, where he and his twin previewed their new exhibition, called “Beast in Show” (through July 3), at the SCAD Museum of Art in Savannah. “A fantasy is easy to create with biomorphic shapes because it feels familiar like you could have a relationship with one of those figures in the room with you.”

Nikolai, of course, is talking about the whimsical creatures the Haas Brothers have become known for. Whether it be the collection of horned ceramic vessels for L’Objet or their furry animalistic furniture, the co-principals explore themes like nature, fantasy, and sexuality in their otherworldly works that defy classification. It’s no surprise that some of pop culture’s most creative minds—Lady Gaga, Rihanna, Donatella Versace—have lined up to collaborate with the duo.

In “Beast in Show,” the self-described sculptural humorists present their latest troupe of characters. Sporting names like Snail Earnhardt Jr. and Shaggy Gyllenhaal, the new additions to the tribe run the gamut of scale, from palm-held to life-sized. Like most of their creatures, Nikolai and Simon say the inspiration comes from

people they know. “I’ll sit there and think about the interactions I’ve had over the past couple of days with buddies [and whether] they were goofy in a specific way,” says Nikolai. “It’s a portrait of that goofiness, not them as a person.” Made of cast bronze, carved wood, and natural fur from various animals, the genderless beasts are typically equipped with horns and legs but not faces, prompting the viewer to construe personalities and traits based on gesture and form.

Since their childhood days when they would make “strange” toys and try to sell them to a local store, Nikolai and Simon’s foundational principles of fun and play have guided their forays into costume design, art direction, video work, fabrication, sculpture, furniture, and, yes, fine art. The irreverent and humorous nature of the two brothers is on display at SCAD, particularly the creature named Johnny in the Wind whose name and conspicuously large phallus are based on one of their friends. “I did it just to make Johnny laugh. I get that it’s dumb and, you know, a stupid fart joke or dick joke, but it still creates a path for empathy and feelings towards each other,” Nikolai said in an Instagram Live conversation with gallerist Marianne Boesky to preview the show.

Adds Simon: “It’s a good example of how Nikki’s personality goes into them. He’s an incredible cartoonist and sculptor, and his major talents lie in gesture and how to make objects feel alive and funny. I’m on the end of obsessive material research and contextualizing our ideas. I also play the role of editor,” he laughs. “I’m a studios nerd and he’s an out-there sculptor.”



Snail Earnhardt Jr. (2020), made of walnut, fur and glass. The bronze-and-fur buddies Tallmala Harris and Biggy Stardust (2020).