

## UTA Artist Space Celebrates First Anniversary With 'Haas Angeles'

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Courtesy of Joe Kramm

Art-and-design twins the Haas Bros. take over the Boyle Heights venue with their most expansive show to date, including 'Sex Room' and artworks named for celebrities like Arnold Schwarzenegger, Beyonce, and Lisa Kudrow.

The pioneering UTA Artist Space in Boyle Heights is celebrating its anniversary with a survey of works by Nikolai and Simon Haas, otherwise known as the Haas Brothers, Sept. 9 through Oct. 14. The 33-year-old art-and-design twins have been on the scene for just six years, but that's enough for a full-scale survey (their first L.A. show), including furniture, installations and objets d'art.

"It has been an incredible year. We have hosted six major exhibitions that were innovative, multi-sensory and dynamic, with artists who would not have otherwise shown their work in L.A.," UTA Fine Arts' Joshua Roth tells *The Hollywood Reporter* in an email. "When thinking about our one-year anniversary, there was no question that this was the perfect show. Simon and Niki's incredible ability to move seamlessly between genres and materials make them the ideal creatives to mark this milestone with."

Brothers to actor Lukas Haas and sons to screenwriter Emily Tracy, the duo grew up with celebrity friends like Tobey Maguire, who helped kick-start their career by commissioning furniture for his office at Sony Pictures (they've also collaborated with Louis Vuitton on furnishings). Their new show includes fur-covered items and furniture with titles like *Fleece-a Kudrow*, a bench covered in black Icelandic sheepskin, *Beyonce*, a hand-thrown porcelain accretion, and *Arnold Schwarzenegger*, a white Icelandic sheepskin-covered item.

*Advocate for the Sexual Outsider* (also known as 'Sex Room') is an installation that stunned Design Miami/Basel when it premiered in 2014. It features penis-shaped lamps and other suggestive furnishings, as well as a doorway draped with leather resembling a giant vagina. "The way we present the work, it's super non-pornographic," Nikolai says about the show's centerpiece, an installation that marked a turning point for the duo. "We're not doing it for shock value. It's to bring positive vibes to sexuality."

"Most people are coming out laughing cause they have to exit through the vagina," adds Simon. "We were focused on sex mostly because the shameful aspect of it is really imposed on people; where sex is such a natural part of reality for every human, and sexual desire is so natural and also healthy that applying shame to it is, I think, very bad."

The playful pair routinely emphasizes form over concept. Influences include their artist father, Berthold Haas, patron Donatella Versace, the conceptual metaphors of Yoko Ono, actor Vincent Gallo, whom Simon calls a “deep thinker” and “a conceptual extremist,” and Lady Gaga for whom they designed masks.

“If you think about the House of Gaga and just how powerful a force that was in popular culture,” says Nikolai. “It gives definition to the idea that a thought or idea could be so much more powerful than an individual.”

The notions motivating ‘Sex Room’ and the show’s other monolith, *King Dong*, a mega beast with a massive bronze penis, are guilt and shame. “Guilt can be warranted and it’s sort of a marker for a person to adjust their own behavior,” says Simon. “Shame seems like a weapon to me. I don’t like when emotions are weaponized.”

The growing art scene in Boyle Heights has generated controversy, with the community’s Alliance Against Art-Washing and Displacement lobbying criticism at outlets including UTA Artist Space. Some saw the subject matter of its inaugural show by Larry Clark, which featured photos of teenagers shooting heroin, as insensitive to a community that struggles with addiction and gang violence. The Alliance also has criticized galleries for catering primarily to affluent outsiders.

“There is nothing exclusive about UTA Artist Space,” says Roth, son of ex-studio chief Steven Roth. “We encourage the community to be part of, attend our openings, and learn more about what we are doing.”

Nikolai lives with his wife, stylist Djuna Bel, in rapidly gentrifying Lincoln Heights on L.A.’s eastside. “Gentrification happens to every city in the world and people move to other cities and make them cool,” he says. “It’s a product of humanity.”

Simon is quick to acknowledge that race is a factor. “It is privileged classes, white people, who are able to move in and open these kind of places. I think that if galleries and other businesses were being opened by people in the neighborhood, gentrification would be less of an issue.”

“Acceptance, Compassion and Commonality” is the brothers’ mantra for solving most conflicts, whether it’s gentrification or the country’s current schism between red and blue states. “I could understand the person that voted for Trump, but I don’t understand the person who doesn’t go, ‘What the hell is going on right now?!’” says Nikolai. “We’ve all been duped into this game in big business that none of us ever gets to play a part of in any real way. The only cure for that broken system is love and compassion, that people that come into power do well with it and don’t just use it to serve themselves. That’s why [we need] compassion now. We need to understand the people we think are our enemies before they can understand us.”



Jordan Riefe

[THRnews@thr.com](mailto:THRnews@thr.com) @thr