

# The Haas Brothers Get Their First Big Gallery Survey in Los Angeles

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Hannah Martin



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When Tobey Maguire was redoing his Sony Pictures office in 2010, the actor asked a young designer in town—26-year-old Nikolai Haas—to design a few cabinets. Haas agreed to take on the project under one condition: He could collaborate with his twin brother.

"I didn't know how to draw but I could build things pretty well," remembers Nikolai, who goes by Niki. His twin brother, Simon, continues: "I couldn't really build things but I could do a CAD drawing." (He studied painting at RISD.)

In no time the fraternal twins found a studio where they could get to work on the project. The catch? There was a three-year lease. "We sort of locked ourselves in," says Simon. "So we decided we'd just keep doing it."

Photo: Jeff McLane / Courtesy of UTA Artist Space

It's the sort of scenario that would only unfold in Los Angeles, the land of sprawling studio spaces and celebrity clients. It didn't hurt that their older brother, Lukas, was part of Leonardo DiCaprio's notorious '90s-era "Pussy Posse." Soon projects were rolling in from A-listers across the globe: resin shoes for Nicola Formichetti, monster masks for Lady Gaga, a wavy stainless-steel ceiling for Peter Marino's Guerlain flagship on the Champs-Élysées. "He would tap us to fabricate designs when he couldn't figure out how to make something," says Simon of the famously meticulous designer. These days the work has long surpassed cabinets and costumes. Think giant, bead-covered mushrooms and sea urchin-esque ceramics that float in that middle ground between art and design.

But despite the tendency to show their work in New York (where they are represented by R & Company) or on the international art and design fair circuit, there is a certain quality of the pieces that feel undeniably L.A. So perhaps it seems appropriate that the largest exhibition of the brothers' work to date would open at United Talent Agency's year-old gallery arm in their beloved hometown: La-La Land. The show—named Haas Angeles and opening September 9—is the first to display a survey of their work over the past seven years. And it's sure to be anything but boring.

Photo: Jeff McLane / Courtesy of UTA Artist Space

The show stretches from a re-creation of the famous Sex Room conceived for Design Miami in 2014—a space filled with animals sketched into compromising positions and a bunch of gilded sex toys (their nod to the functional requisite of a design fair)—to their King Dong series (giant stuffed animals with an irreverent spin) to a set of 20 colorful ceramic pieces, shown all together for the first time. The brothers will also paint a Dr. Seuss-esque 50-foot mural on one of the walls.

When asked to contemplate the undying question: Is this art or design? Simon is quick to admit: "The question is tired but it's still relevant." These days, he says, "we throw in function because it adds something to the idea. Or we take away function for the same reason."

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