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## THE HAAS BROTHERS LIGHT ONE UP FOR CULTURED

LANDSCAPE | SEP 2015 | BY SABRINA WIRTH



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For our latest *Cultured* Commission, Niki and Simon Haas created a limited-edition set of *Hematite* candles. Based on the form for their Hematite vases, the Haas Brothers first developed these candles as gifts for friends and collectors, and now, for the first time, they've released them for sale, exclusively on [Artsy](#), with all proceeds benefiting the [National YoungArts Foundation](#). Here, we speak to Niki and Simon about the collaboration, art as movement and the importance of letting candles burn.



Niki and Simon Haas, portrait by Mason Poole.

**Can you tell me a little bit about how you came up with these forms?** These candles are based off a set of bronze vases that we made. They're called the Hematite series. They're actually the first pieces we ever showed at a gallery...

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**Niki Haas:** Yeah, one of the first pieces we ever made, which is kinda cool. We initially used them

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**Simon Haas:** The first pieces we ever made...

**Niki Haas:** Yeah, one of the first pieces we ever made, which is kinda cool. We initially used them as gifts to our first clients. So, our gallery, [R & Company](#), we gave them a gift of one of these vases. Also, Donatella Versace owns one of the first of these vases.

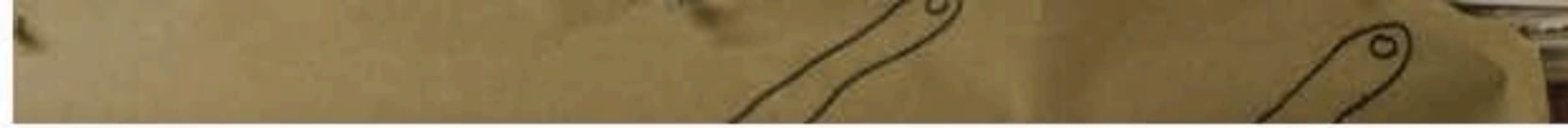
So the way we made these forms is by taking panty hose and filling it with plaster, and then binding them with rope. We were talking with Donatella about making a collection for her and we were on a bondage/leather fetish kind of kick at the time, and I think that now in hindsight that's kind of what led us to make the forms in that way. We were thinking about binding, and fetish objects, and...

**SH:** I think it's a really good, very early example, of where we would wind up going. Which is to say that it's kind of an intestinal look. I mean, some people call it the "poop vase" actually and we adopted that as a loving term...





Sketches of various projects at the Haas Brothers studio in Los Angeles.



Sketches of various projects at the Haas Brothers studio in Los Angeles.

**NH:** But it's also called a Hematite, which is very scientific... **SH:** So it was a good first test of bulgy, kind of fleshiness that we wound up using a whole lot and is really Niki's hallmark, the fleshiness of the piece. It was a really good first indicator of the first moments of touching on a bunch of subjects that we now utilize everyday in our artistic language. It's a cool piece.

**SH:** We like the idea of taking our first real object, and the one that gave us our opportunity, and releasing it in a more accessible way, also with the intention of creating opportunities for others that have similar ambitions to us.

**Do you think you'll create more candles or experiment more with wax?** **NH:** The candles have a great story actually. So, when we do a series of works, meaning that we're releasing the same exact form multiple times, these vases being one of the rare examples where we do that. We usually do a series of 3 +2 AP. So what we ended up with were these expensive, really awesome silicon molds that we could no longer use because we couldn't make any more bronzes. We had them around in our studio, and we were just making candles for our own houses, and then as giveaways to our good friends and very good clients.

In a weird way, we're opening up that inner circle of people who end up with these things. We never sold them we're very obsessive about anything we release: it has to be made perfectly with the finest material we can possibly get our hands on. So making something in wax felt a little counter-intuitive.

But, the fact that we can give all of it away to YoungArts allows us to release these candles in a way that people can get a Haas piece for much less money and do good at the same time. We don't want to profit from something that is sculpturally gorgeous but isn't labored in the same way that we do when we make a finished piece. They're perfect candles, and perfect for a philanthropic project....



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Niki at work in the studio.

**SH:** Definitely more than pursuing wax, we're pushing more of this type of thing, where we'd like to share what we've attained...

**NH:** That's a good point. This is us expressing ourselves through philanthropy, not the material of wax. That's a super complicated answer, but no, we probably won't make more waxes unless we end up with a really similar situation.

**What drew you towards the National YoungArts organization? NH:** *Cultured* invited us to do a talk at the YoungArts campus in Miami. We were vaguely aware of their organization, and we learned a lot about what they do—bringing opportunity to young people who want our careers. So there couldn't be anything more pertinent to us and more relevant to the way that we think. We view our entire art career as hopefully a stepping-stone towards achieving general freedom in somebody's own personal life or reality, but definitely freedom in an artistic sense. So, to support a charity that's doing exactly what we're hoping to do with our career, there couldn't be a more perfect match.

**Speaking of artists, are there any particular artists of art that you are into right now? SH:** I'm obsessed with Chris Ofili right now. Especially the *Virgin Mary*, and *Shit Head* was such a good piece. *Shit Head* kind of sums up a lot of what we're about. Yeah, the *Virgin Mary* and then he has a series of blue paintings that we recently saw in the Aspen Art Museum down in a dark room that I think that I was more emotionally moved by that than I have ever been by a piece.

**NH:** Jeff Zimmerman is making some rad stuff. And Greg Chait of *Elder Statesman*, he's making these insane sweaters. And Tame Impala are coming out with a record that's just blowing my mind



**NH:** Jeff Zimmerman is making some rad stuff. And Greg Chait of Elder Statesman, he's making these insane sweaters. And Tame Impala are coming out with a record that's just blowing my mind recently. Again it just comes down to peers and people that we're associated with because we're all speaking the same language and reaching towards the same goals. I get inspired by the *movement* more than the relic of the movement. Does that make sense? I feel like an art piece is a relic of something that happened and its like being engaged in that happening is more interesting to me than the relic. The fantasy, the abstract is the important aspect, the concrete is way less interesting. Take our candles for instance. Are the candles cool? Yeah, sure its beautiful, it glows, you can have it on your dinner table, it can inspire conversations. But at the end of the day its' just a hunk of wax. Putting money forward to inspire young people to do something that's, kind of how we think about all our pieces of work. Why would we give people candles just so that they have them around their dinner table and brag about it? It doesn't really do any good for anyone unless there's a real reason behind it. That's why I'm saying: I'm not trying to be the obscure weird artist here but the engagement is way more interesting than the perception.



Simon in the studio

**What do you do to find inspiration? Are there any times when you don't know what you're**



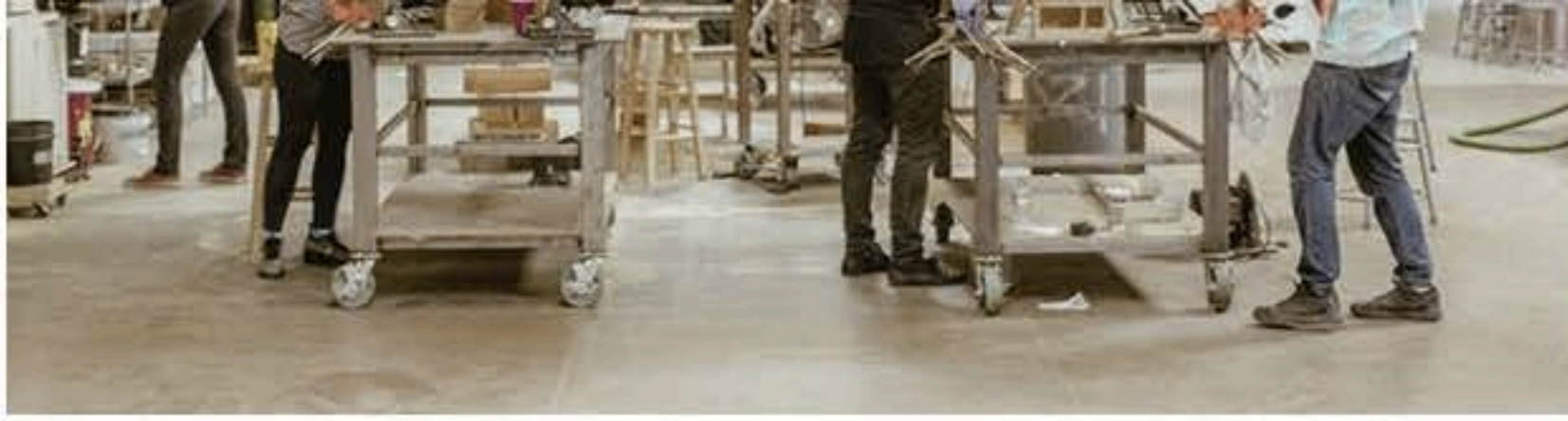
Simon in the studio.

**What do you do to find inspiration? Are there any times when you don't know what you're going to do next? NH:** Just hanging out with Simon, we chill out, smoke, go out in the desert, hang out with buddies- know what I mean? Talk about what it means to be an artist. I'm having a dinner tomorrow with Simon, and our friend Johnny Smith, and our buddy Devendra and Vincent, my fiancée Djuna, we're just going to chill out and our plan is to talk about what it means to be human and an artist. The conversation is what is inspiring.

The truth is, if you don't have fodder for your fire just by being who you are then you may have lived that piece of your life out. So the inspiration comes from the social interaction and engaging with people around you. It doesn't all have to be all feel good. We just did this project in Africa where we perceived a lot of atrocity and it fueled us in such a way that we were like, "oh shit, we have to reorganize everything about the way we were thinking. Initially it stumped us and made us feel like we were shit artists and then what it led to was a major growing and a handle on what it means to be an artist, a human, what the point of living is even in general, which I think is all pretty heavy, but it's a nice experience and a lesson to have under your belt.

**SH:** And for me, personally, it led me to explore the idea of privilege and what it means for creators and people in general. That's a huge focus for me, for both of us- And that's driving me more than anything.

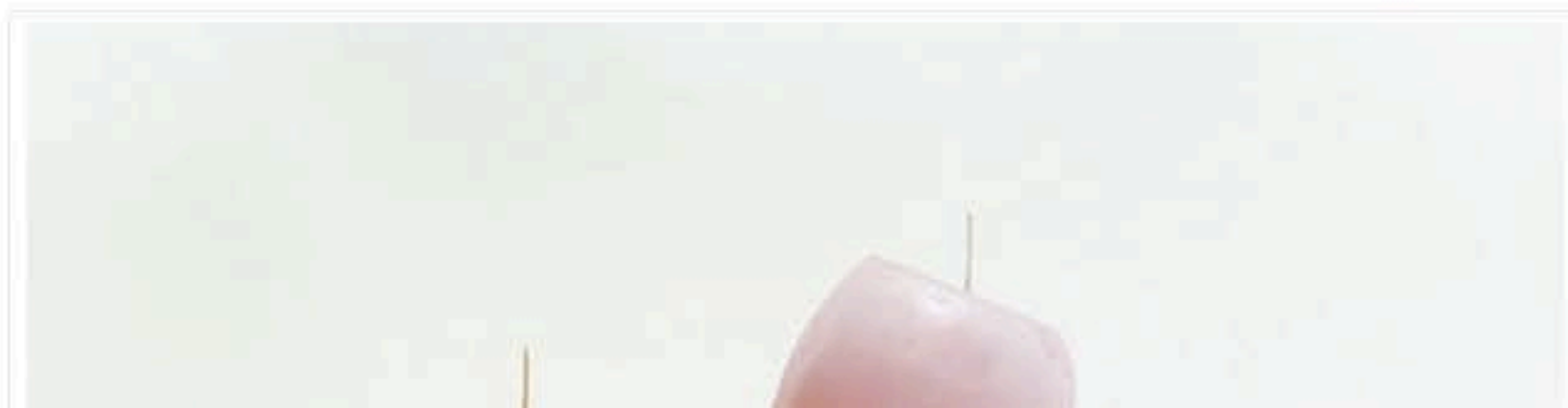




Team Haas Brothers

**How did the trip to Africa and the Afreaks project come about? SH:** It came about by chance, we were at Basel and R+ Company had made a casual relationship with a gallery in South Africa, Cape Town called Southern Guild. And they invited R to show at a fair they were doing down there called Guild, which was part of the world design capital that year. So we went to represent the US. We were so taken by the energy in Cape Town, especially by the women that we met who were making this beadwork —By the way we met them absolutely by chance. We just came across a booth that had their pieces, and it was at a different fair than we were in. We just managed to see it. We basically were so enthralled by how animated they were and the freedom of expression of the beaded animals that we saw. There is a correlation between the types of attitudes and energy that are in them and with what Niki produces. And I personally got really excited with using beads because you can treat them as an abacus and units. And I like to get all crazy with that stuff. Once we saw that we couldn't help ourselves and it turned into the next year and a half.

**NH:** It's just more to the point with what we were talking about. That once you start to engage in a community or a social reality, that becomes more the artwork than the product of it. Once we met these women in South Africa, there really was no turning back. We discovered a piece of ourselves that we really knew nothing about. And had no choice but to explore it at that point. So making a collection was really a conduit for learning from these women and hopefully for them, learning from us as well. It was cool! It was probably our most proud moments in our career so far and we haven't even gotten to show them yet. So excited to get everyone to see them.





Set of three *Hematite* candles. Photo by Mason Poole.

So tell me, what is it that makes each of you tick? SH: Niki is very dedicated to not only

**So tell me, what is it that makes each of you tick?** **SH:** Niki is very dedicated to not only supporting himself but everyone around him. He's fearless about approaching anything new. I think He approaches everything as though he's already conquered it and that's a really amazing style. That's the key to reaching this, actually.

**NH:** and I think Simon has an insatiable curiosity for the world and the way that it works on a philosophical and a scientific basis. And won't ever stop exploring it until he understands everything which is impossible, so he'll be up all night long until he dies probably. That's what makes him tick; he's trying to discover everything there is to discover. And it's an impossible feat, so he'll always have fuel.

**SH:** So I'll always be sad (laughing).

**NH:** No, no, no! That's not it, it's the opposite. You'll always have something to explore, which is what you live for!

**What do you think about people using your candles? Do you care?** They should use them! We have friends who've gone to this guy's house, that we gave a candle to, and he never burns it, and they're like "we've seen your sculpture on a Noguchi table", I'm like "which sculpture?" and they're like: "it's orange..." it took me forever to figure out what they were talking about. So I'd be like "that's a candle, dude!" Then they'd say, "Oh, but it didn't have a wick and it's never been burned," I think he cut the wick off so that no one ever lights it. Anyways, *Of course* they should use it! I have like 30 in my house that are burning every single night and melted all over the place. It's super cool. They're literally all over my house.

**You can have a séance!** Ha! Yeah, exactly! A colored, poop, burning séance...

**A Chris Ofili, poop séance...** That's the quote for the article!

*The Haas Brothers' Hematite candles are available in a limited edition of 25 sets of three for \$800. All proceeds from the sale will benefit the National YoungArts Foundation. To purchase, [click here](#).*