

Patch



Constant Carnival: The Haas Brothers in Context Opens At KMA

By: Jeff Edwards
March 11, 2022

The Katonah Museum of Art installation explores the work of twins Simon and Nikolai Haas within the tradition of the carnivalesque.

A new installation opening this weekend at the Katonah Museum of Art offers a timely and captivating look at the religious traditions leading up to the Easter celebration that aren't always what they seem.

"Constant Carnival: The Haas Brothers in Context" which explores the work of contemporary artists Simon and Nikolai Haas within the art historical tradition of the carnivalesque. The exhibit will be on view March 13–June 26. The exhibition is the first to pair the Haas Brothers' sculptures and drawings with historical, modern and contemporary works.

In medieval Europe, the festival of Carnival, like modern-day Mardi Gras, was a time of liberation and inversion. Carnival leveled social hierarchies, encouraged free expression and celebrated behaviors that were usually prohibited. Although the Carnival tradition eventually went into decline, its transgressive spirit survives in artworks that use humor or grotesquery to challenge social norms and destabilize power structures, according to curators.

The spirit of the carnivalesque, which transcends cultures and time periods, animates the Haas Brothers' innovative artworks. Their brights, beaded beasts, which balance playfulness and gleeful carnality, are the modern-day ancestors of Hieronymus Bosch's fantastical creatures and Mike Kelley's scatological assemblages. By merging the realms of craft, design and contemporary art, the Haas Brothers also demonstrate just how arbitrary the boundaries and hierarchies of the art world truly are.

The exhibition, which traces the history of the carnivalesque from the fifteenth century to the present is loosely organized around two themes: "The World Turned Upside Down" and "Celebrating the Profane." Each section will put historical and contemporary works in conversation with each other and with the Haas Brothers' designs. Other artists represented in the exhibition include Leonora Carrington, Salvador Dalí, Joan Miró, Niki de Saint Phalle and Kiki Smith.

Constant Carnival also marks the debut of *Jungle Fool*, a new, large-scale work by the Haas Brothers. Perched outside the KMA, the sculpture's glowing eyes will guide visitors up the Museum's drive. The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue.