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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

KARL HAENDEL

Love and Capital
3.30 - 6.1.24

Lora Reynolds is pleased to announce *Love and Capital*, an exhibition of graphite drawings (that sometimes include ink) by Karl Haendel—the artist’s first show at the gallery.

“Don’t be selfish—don’t be a schmuck—be a mensch.” So goes Karl Haendel’s self-castigating mantra that animates both his work and daily life. “I never actually get there, but the attempt is the point. I just try to stay on the path.”

Haendel’s drawings—sometimes modestly scaled, often gigantic, installed unconventionally (high, low, salon style and solo, across corners, snaking onto the ceiling)—are mostly rendered in a striking photorealistic style. They play with a wide range of imagery: from medieval suits of armor, big cats and dead bees, human hands, oversized scribbles, introspective and deeply vulnerable texts, embodied punctuation, portraits of famous politicians, barrel-racing girls on horseback, all manner of cartoons, to aerial views of flooded neighborhoods and the rotunda at the Texas State Capitol. (He wants to make work that’s approachable from many angles, that’s as thin on pretension as possible, that you don’t need advanced degrees to engage with.) Haendel’s drawings look inward, to probe at his most intimate fears and insecurities, as well as outward, toward the many contradictions that frame our cultural/political/historical realities. All the while, he is asking himself: How do I put more good into the world than bad? Give

more than I take? Show compassion for both the people I know and those I don't? Feel my feelings fully and take responsibility for my failures? Minimize my carbon footprint? (Cringing after reading about himself in the first draft of this text, he countered, "I think it's a bit hyperbolic in regard to my decency. I can be quite indecent, I assure you.") Haendel's project is a reconsideration of American masculinity—an exchange of outdated and destructive stereotypes for a more nuanced alternative: an empathetic, feminist, inclusive, anti-macho, occasionally cheeky, invariably sincere framework for living a life.

If you call Haendel when he is at the studio, and if you listen closely enough, you can usually hear the faint whisk-whisk-whisk of a pencil in the background; he does not stop drawing to pick up the phone. He is always working—in part because his compulsively productive Jewish dad would shame teenage Karl if he tried to sleep in on a weekend, but also because his drawings are long on labor intensiveness: "Sometimes I think the medium for my work on a checklist should read 'time and pencil on paper.'" Toiling is how Haendel shows care; whatever he does, he's all in. He recounts the logistics of how he makes his work as such:

During one of my frequent in-studio generative time-wasting sessions when I always seem to read shit that upsets me, I come across an image I think has potential. Bring it into Photoshop and experiment with it—collaging, deleting, cropping, inverting, mirroring, etc. Print it out. Photograph it with slide film. Drive halfway across LA to the photo lab for processing. The slide ends up with lots of others in a tiny box next to my light table. Pick one when it's time to start a new drawing. Staple up a big sheet of roll paper, drop the slide into a projector, and draw the outline of the image as it's projected. Flip the overhead lights on and off, going back and forth between the projection and the print I'm holding to guide me. Listen to audiobooks from the LAPL. Don't use Audible. Tax dollars in all likelihood already bought that book for the local library.

Whether he finds the source image for a drawing or, as is more common, shoots it himself (he began his art training as a photographer), he is interested in the *thing* in the image, the content, and what it has to say about how the world is—or how it could be.

Haendel's series of barrel racers are more than eight feet tall, with teenage girl and horse both frozen in a grimace of exertion as they fly through their cloverleaf-shaped course in pursuit of glory and

honor. This body of work arose after the artist visited the 19th-century wing of American art at the Denver Art Museum, which overflows with paintings and sculptures of cowboys. He was surprised by how taken he was with all the Remingtons, Russells, and Millers, especially considering their problematic approach to representation. If women were ever included in those antiquated images, they were supporting characters. Haendel did not need to invent a new rodeo event to recast women as champions, he just opened his eyes—professional barrel racing is exclusively a women's sport. So he rented a telephoto lens, drove out to a ranch hosting a qualifying event for the Women's Professional Rodeo Association, and asked attending parents and their daughters if he could take pictures of them competing. Haendel was hugely impressed by the young amateurs he watched and photographed that day—they rode fast, hard, with great skill, and zero discernible fear.

"I ask no favor for my sex. All I ask of our brethren is that they take their feet off our necks," demanded Ruth Bader Ginsburg, quoting Sarah Grimké (the mother of the women's suffrage movement) at her first oral argument in front of the Court. In Haendel's portrait of the feminist icon RBG, the top and bottom of the drawing fall off to paper white in a smooth gradient, as if she is fading away. Should she have stepped down? Will the setback of Dobbs be temporary? Will the arc of the moral universe indeed bend back toward justice? However inspirational or contentious her image might be, Haendel sees in Ginsburg an idealized Jewish mother figure. "On Wednesday I missed my mother and thought I would trade everything to have her hug me once more," he confesses in another drawing, titled *Three Days Ago I Cried (white on black)*.

Today, Haendel has his own parenting to do. His daughter Hazel is ten years old; sometimes she collaborates with her dad in the studio and the result ends up in an exhibition like this one, as in *Drawing of Houston Flood Annotated by My Daughter*. Haendel found an image of Hurricane Harvey's aftermath on a news site during one of his "frequent in-studio generative time-wasting sessions." It depicts a highway interchange that seems to rise out of a lake, an 18-wheeler halfway submerged, downtown visible in the distance. When the initial graphite drawing was complete, Haendel sprayed it with fixative, gave his daughter a fistful of Sharpies, and asked her to draw whatever she wanted on top of his bleak tableau. She obliged with a Loch Ness Monster or two, a tall ship with cannons, a flock of concerned birds, a blimp towing a banner advertisement

for sandwiches, and a swarm of cartoon stick figures—armed with floaties and pool noodles, dilly-dallying on their phones, casually dropping a fishing line from the stranded tractor-trailer’s roof. The playful innocence of Hazel’s doodles collide with a Category 4 hurricane that dumped 60 inches of rain, killed more than 100 people, and caused \$125 billion of damage. “Hazel doesn’t know it yet—right now it’s just play in the water—but she is screwed,” Haendel says. “My daughter’s generation and all who follow will have to deal with the climate catastrophe caused by my generation and those before me.” The drawing captures the cognitive dissonance between Hazel’s current worldview and her father’s—a superimposition equally jarring as being made to giggle through the apocalypse.

What is there to do about the state we find ourselves in? For Haendel, he tries to look it square in the eye. Talks about it. Finds space to laugh. Claims responsibility for his complicity. Makes drawings. And when a show is ready, he rolls them up as tightly as he can, puts them in as small a tube as they will fit, and ships them to the gallery as slowly and economically as possible. He staples or pins most of his drawings directly to the wall. Some of the biggest ones he “frames” by screwing strips of MDF into the sheetrock around the drawing’s edges. These are strategies he developed in grad school, when his framing budget was nonexistent. He continues the practice today because he realized being able to roll up his drawings when they are not being shown makes shipping and storing them easier on the planet (and everyone’s budgets)—by taking up less space, using less fuel, emitting fewer hydrocarbons—which is one small way he checks his ego at the door and minimizes his impact on the environment. Haendel acknowledges that his actions, on their own—what he chooses to draw, how he connects with his daughter, the guys he helps stay sober, his solar panels, the meals he cooks for his artist friends—will never be enough to make much of a difference. But if everyone does just a little bit...

Karl Haendel was born in 1976 in New York and lives and works in Los Angeles. He will be the subject of solo museum exhibitions at the Kimball Art Center (Park City) later this year and the Frederick R. Weisman Museum of Art (Los Angeles) in 2025. He has had solo shows at Human Resources (Los Angeles), Locust Projects (Miami), Museo de Arte de El Salvador, Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles), and Utah Museum of Contemporary Art (Salt Lake City). He has been included in the Biennial of the Americas (2015), Whitney Biennial (2014), Biennale de Lyon (2013), Prospect New Orleans (2011), and California Biennial (2008, 2004). His work can be found in the collections of the Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto), Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art (Oslo), Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College (New York), Colección Jumex (Mexico City), Collection Lambert (Avignon), Deutsche Bank Collection (Frankfurt), Fogg Art Museum (Cambridge), Hammer Museum (Los Angeles), Henry Art Gallery (Seattle), Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Kunsthalle Bielefeld, Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles), Museum of Modern Art (New York), Pérez Art Museum (Miami), Rubell Family Collection (Miami), Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (New York), Walker Art Center (Minneapolis), and Whitney Museum of American Art (New York).