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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SIMON HAAS  
*Grottos*

July 8 – September 2, 2023

Lora Reynolds is pleased to announce *Grottos*, an exhibition of new drawings by Simon Haas—the artist’s first solo project with the gallery.

In the center of each of Simon Haas’s newest graphite drawings on panel is a glory hole—offering a tight view at a carefully rendered cock, a peeping eyeball, a pair of solicitous fingers, a slightly parted mouth, or a deep, dark (empty?) void. This body of work pays tribute to Haas’s queered forefathers and the persecution they endured, offers a tender counter-narrative to the heteronormative view of cruising culture as dirty and dangerous, and is a deeply personal reflection on the internalized homophobia many gay men—including Haas himself—struggle to overcome in their own journeys toward self-acceptance.

Glory holes, four to six inches in diameter, were originally cut into the walls of bathroom stalls in men’s rooms to facilitate anonymous gay sex. The first recorded glory hole foregrounded a court case about a blackmail conspiracy in early 18th-century London; American vice squads used them to entrap gay men throughout

much of the 20th century. Given the rise of hook-up apps like Grindr, glory holes play less of a role in popular gay culture today than they do in kink circles—BDSM, adult arcade booths, swinger parties—that include people of all sexual orientations. (Although in 2020, glory holes had a moment in the mainstream spotlight when the New York Department of Health and the British Columbia Centre for Disease Control both suggested they could be used during the Covid-19 pandemic to “get a little kinky” while minimizing aerosol transmission during sex.)

Haas’s photorealistic drawings on small panels (between 6×6 and 12×12 inches) are rendered with warm obsessiveness. He dotes on the wood grain of a hole-bearing partition (a nod to Fire Island, where architectural timber is ubiquitous) as much as an unknowable partner’s pubic hair or chin stubble or the stitching on his underwear. His silvery graphite is both materially and illusionistically reflective—his images capture glints of light on a wet tongue or in a wrinkle of duct tape at the same time as their deepest shadows gleam as if lit by some internal source. He scratches and abrades highlights into his drawings with steel wool or a carbide-point scribe, a technical eccentricity that recalls a guy with a hard-on carving his phone number into a toilet stall. And he is showing his drawings unframed—raw, direct, unprotected, courting a little danger.

Craigslist’s M4M personals led Haas to his first real-life sexual experiences. The artist, still in high school, snuck out of his parents’ house to meet up with an older guy at his apartment. Later that night, when he climbed back through his own window, the only way he could process the overwhelming whirlwind of pleasure and shame and adrenaline he both loved and hated was to cleanse himself by shaving his head. It would be three more years before the Supreme Court invalidated sodomy law across the US with *Lawrence v. Texas*, and two excruciating months before Haas gathered enough determination to invite himself over to the man’s apartment again. Haas’s drawings of physical barriers between sex partners are ultimately about the *psychological* barriers that keep people from what they most want—until they find a way through to the other side.

Into his 20s, cruising became the avenue for Haas to recreate the risk and heart-pounding excitement that made his first encounters so intoxicating. Seeking out anonymous sex—in a public bathroom, city park, parking lot, the subway—was a way for Haas to satisfy

his desires while avoiding reckoning with the implicit and explicit homophobia that pervades the heteronormative world. Assault, robbery, coercion, and infection are all serious risks when having sex with strangers, but Haas found that sometimes (and for some people) it is easier to give up a measure of physical safety to gain the emotional safety that comes from remaining nameless while reaching for ecstasy. “I love the weird, delicious desperation on both sides of a glory hole,” says Haas. In a similar vein, poet and novelist Garth Greenwell has argued that “Cruising itself *is* a form of poetry....enabl[ing] face-to-face encounters across gulfs of difference and privilege...where background, race, and class are scrambled by desire.” These days, Haas spends less time cruising than he does sublimating his fantasies (for a thrilling and ravenous one-off) into his drawing practice.

Haas calls this show *Grottos* because it makes him think of home, of growing up and coming of age in the Texas Hill Country, spending weekends exploring spring-fed swimming holes and limestone caves. Grottos can be deep and dark enough to give cover for an afternoon tryst, just out of earshot of friends and family. Like glory holes, grottos are places to explore, to discover yourself, hopefully to find beauty and pleasure and comfort, and to negotiate (and perhaps dissolve) the boundaries between who you are, who you want to be, and who you show the world.

Simon Haas, one half of the artist duo known as the Haas Brothers, was born in Austin in 1984 and lives and works in Los Angeles. Haas’s drawings have been included in shows at Tom of Finland Foundation and several galleries in Los Angeles; *LALA Magazine* did a cover story on his drawing practice in 2018. *Grottos* is Simon Haas’s first solo show of his drawings.