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Karl Haendel, "Informal Family Blackmail," installation view, Suzanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects



Karl Haendel, *Shame*, 2012, published by KLTB



Karl Haendel, *Lego White House*, 2012, Suzanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects

## Karl Haendel FAMILY BLACKMAIL by Hunter Drohojowska-Philp

Just in time for Father's Day, [Karl Haendel](#) explores the relationship between fathers and their sons -- generated one suspects by feelings about his own father -- in a show with the incisive title, "Informal Family Blackmail," May 26-June 28, 2012, at [Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects](#) in Culver City.

For over the past decade, Haendel has been celebrated for his extraordinary gifts as a draftsman and the entire gallery has been given over to drawings that often touch on themes of masculinity and the ways in which the family dynamic constructs identity.

Walking into the gallery, you see that the artist built a small reading room where you can sit and read a black-covered book titled *Shame* with shades of gray paper bearing printed confessions of acts that are illegal or immoral or statements of low self-esteem tied to addiction and self-abuse. The artist found these confessions on the internet and, as a companion installation on the gallery's bathroom walls, he wrote the numbers of various aid agencies, including alcoholism treatment centers, bankruptcy assistance, food banks, psychologists, synagogues and even tattoo removal.

The reading room includes two nearly identical drawings of a headless man in a suit, each titled *J. Edgar Hoover*, that bring up the specter of a conflicted authority figure obsessed with control. From inside the room, you can see a large pencil drawing of football players in the middle of heated play, needless to say a prototypical manly sport.

In addition to drawings, Haendel installed a 12-minute-long video called *Questions for My Father*. A number of men, including Haendel, all appearing to be in their 30s, ask disturbing, funny and moving questions, such as, "Are you embarrassed about your bald spot?" "Did you ever think about going out for a pack of cigarettes and not coming back?" "Why are you so sure I will never meet your expectations?" Others are frankly sexual, but the most moving ones are simple. "Do you have any regrets?" The absent father has no answers.

The third gallery is painted Pepto-Bismol pink and covered with drawings large and small, mounted high and low, framed and unframed. While the works have no literal connection, many have to do with some aspect of masculinity or power, ranging from drawings of the White House made out of Legos and a snarling German shepherd to a graffiti scrawl over the face of Picasso and an exclamation mark shot full of holes, .45 caliber, by the artist's father.



Karl Haendel, *Scheme (Football #5)*, 2011, Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects

In the final gallery, one wall is dominated by a complex drawing called *Arab Spring* that depicts men in states of exultation and despair after battle. One of them wears a dark hood but its interior is black, vacant, like the grim reaper. The opposite wall features eight drawings of collected newspaper headlines that isolate emotions like doubt, fear, hope and change. On adjacent walls, gorgeous nine-foot tall drawings illustrate suits of armor worn by the knights of old, conjuring thoughts of chivalry as well as the sense that struggle among men may be an inescapable imperative.

Perhaps a visit to the show will inspire visitors to come to their Father's Day brunch with their own unanswered questions.

Karl Haendel, "Informal Family Blackmail," May 26-June 28, 2012, at Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects, 6006 Washington Boulevard, Culver City, Ca. 90232

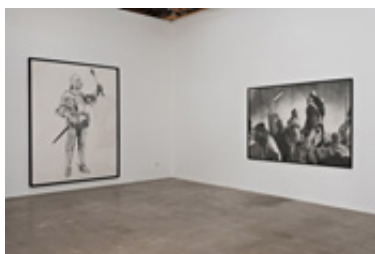


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Karl Haendel, *Arab Spring*, 2012, Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects



Karl Haendel, "Informal Family Blackmail," installation view with *Knight #8* (2011) and *Arab Spring* (2012)