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Gert & Uwe Tobias

18.04 > 10.06.2017

The visual language of Gert & Uwe Tobias is like a vibration between realms. It teeters on an imaginative edge between the contemporary and the archaic, the figurative and the abstract, portraiture and still life, the deeply alluring and the grotesque. For their fifth solo exhibition at rodolphe janssen, the Tobias brothers' quirky play of opposites feels familiar, as if from a dream.

Engaging with the technique of xylography, the artistic duo's woodcuts redevelop and subvert this ancient craft for their own conceptual ambitions. The resulting imagery is absolutely signature-autobiographical, even – for it is also a visual ode to their home country of Romania, its costume and mythology, where they grew up before their family immigrated to Germany.

There is distinct rhythm and movement to the Tobias brothers' compositions as one's eyes graze over their entire body of works, as though figures and graphic lines partake in a mysterious choreography. The whites of eyes of creatures and figures contrast the soft washes of color – their cryptic gaze seductive and unsettling. Decapitated heads with empty eyes and the silhouette of a demon lurking conjure a feeling of foreboding, as we stand witness to esoterica or cult ritual.

Narratives crop up and then fade in a lyrical smoke and mirrors; the logic of these fantastical sequences remains deliciously obscure. Feminine hues and female-like figures are set against decorative architecture, stirring connotations of the domestic. However, each is interrupted by the presence of exotic birds, hovering mosquitoes or creeping foliage. The idea of an interior is being permeated by the dreams of an outside world. Natural motifs make up bodily forms; it is a psychic state, as if they have internalized the exterior wild for which they yearn. Though each figure seems powerful and strong, we begin to wonder, are they free?

Kate Brown

About the artists :

Twin brothers Gert & Uwe Tobias (born in 1973 in Brasov, Romania) live and work in Cologne, Germany.

Recent solo exhibitions were held at Sprengel Museum Hannover, Hannover, Germany; Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich, Germany; Contemporary Fine Arts, Berlin, Germany; Team Gallery, New York, NY USA; Museum Morsbroich, Leverkusen, Germany; Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Deurle, Belgium; Rodolphe Janssen, Brussels, Belgium; Whitechapel Gallery, London, UK; Kunstmuseum Ravensburg, Ravensburg, Germany; Team Gallery, New York, USA; Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden Kupferstichkabinett, Dresden, Germany; Collezione Maramotti, Reggio Emilia, Italy; Maureen Paley, London, UK and many more.

Tobias are included in several museum and public collections such as MoMa, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY USA; UCLA, Hammer Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA USA; Kunstmuseum Bonn, Bonn, Germany; FRAC Auvergne, Clermont Ferrand, France; Kupferstich-Kabinett Dresden, Dresden, Germany; Kupferstichkabinett Berlin, Berlin, Germany; Sammlung Goetz, München, Germany