

CASSINA PROJECTS

GERT AND UWE TOBIAS

Selected Press



Art

The 11 Best Booths at Frieze New York

• By Alina Cohen May 3, 2018 3:25 pm [f](#) [t](#) [e](#)



Installation view of Rodolphe Janssen's booth at Frieze New York, 2018. Photo by Mark Blower. Courtesy of Mark Blower/Frieze.

Romanian-German brothers Gert and Uwe Tobias exhibit fairy tale-inspired ceramics and woodcuts on canvas that infuse this Belgian gallery's light-blue booth with a sense of fantasy. The paintings at first appear to be simple, pastel depictions of women, flowers, and birds against patterned backdrops—yet each distinct section of the canvas actually derives from a separate woodcut that the artists used as a stamp. The accompanying egg-shaped vases feature pictures of winged animals and a cat's face. As of Wednesday evening, ceramics priced at \$6,000; a woodcut at \$75,000; and other works ranging from \$15,000 to \$22,000 had already sold.

Gert and Uwe Tobias at Ben Brown Fine Arts, Hong Kong

BY BLOUIN ARTINFO | MARCH 23, 2018



Ben Brown Fine Arts will host Gert and Uwe Tobias at its Hong Kong venue.

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This is the first solo exhibition of collaborative twin brothers Gert and Uwe Tobias to be held at the Hong Kong gallery where the artists will present a new series of large-scale handmade woodcuts on canvas, mixed-media works on paper, and unique ceramic vases. The 44-year-old Romanian-born brothers, based in Cologne, Germany, work as a collaborative, producing fantastical, enigmatic, otherworldly imagery, employing a diverse range of traditional and contemporary artistic practices in their woodcuts, collages, ceramic sculptures and installations. The brothers draw profound inspiration from their native Transylvania, incorporating folkloric legend, vernacular motifs, customary and handicraft into their work, while distinguishing it with references to contemporary culture and other art historic influences such as Russian Suprematism and Surrealism. Their ability to blur and subvert the lines between fine art and craft, decoration and abstraction, folklore and history, hand-made and processed, and the ancient and post-modern, results in a highly unique, inimitable and fascinating body of work.

The exhibition also includes a group of unique ceramic vases, on which the artists have hand-painted surreal hybrid creatures and eerie flora, as well as a group of intricately detailed, uncanny portraits in mixed media on paper. The Tobias brothers' myriad references to art and craft histories and practices, idiosyncratic adaptation of woodcut printing techniques, and their irreverence, humor and subversion, make them two of the most compelling figures in the contemporary art world.

The exhibition will be on view from March 27 through May 12, 2018, at Ben Brown Fine Arts, 303 Pedder Building, 12 Pedder Street Central, Hong Kong.

For details, visit: <http://www.benbrownfinearts.com/>

GERT & UWE TOBIAS

by David Rhodes

WHITECHAPEL GALLERY, LONDON | APRIL 16 – JUNE 14, 2013

Collaborative woodcuts made on paper and mounted on canvas, sculptures, collages, and drawings from twins Gert & Uwe Tobias occupy the ground floor of the Whitechapel Gallery. It is an effective curatorial choice, given that the Tobiases use much organic imagery; upstairs there is also an exhibition of the German photographer Karl Blossfeldt and in an adjacent gallery, a Bloomberg commissioned tree sculpture by Giuseppe Penone.

Literature that analyzes or mythologizes twins is world-wide and reaches far back into history. That twins can communicate in an unusual way, sharing sensations and thoughts, can neither be explained nor denied. Fairy tales abound with stories of twins and their powers, “The Two Brothers,” by the Brothers Grimm, being one example. So it seems appropriate that these particular twins aestheticize myth and folklore, whether from Modernism or the Dark Ages, in conjuring their polymorphous images. The Romanian born Tobiases moved to Germany in 1985 and completed their studies in Braunschweig, before moving to live and work in Cologne.



Gert & Uwe Tobias, “Untitled,” 2012. Colored woodcut on canvas, 200 × 300 cm. © photo Alistair Overbruck, Cologne/Gert & Uwe Tobias/VG. Bildkunst, Bonn.

The walls of the Tobias's exhibition are painted a moss green. This color was much favored by Victorian era museums in England when displaying anthropological specimens, or folk and tribal artifacts. The shade lends the space an air of faux seriousness that the objects presented playfully subvert (in the manner of children pinning butterflies to a classroom display wall). Several plinths support ceramic sculptures that double as vases and contain dead plants, indicative of the huge revival ceramics is undergoing amongst painters as artists both in Europe and the U.S. Tal R's recent ceramic sculptures are a case in point; Tal R is another artist who, like the Tobiases, mixes medium and message.

"Untitled" (2012), is a 200 × 168 cm colored woodcut, printed and mounted on canvas. The configuration of elements is decorative: a spikey floral motif twists and turns evoking growth, while also included are stems and thorns, geometric shapes, and what could be animal or fish parts. The effect of the discreet, frontal, and jagged parts against a deep blue ground recalls Jackson Pollock as much as patterned fabric from 1970s Eastern Europe. Much more figurative in its reference to modernist art is "Untitled" (2012), a 200 × 300 cm horizontal colored woodcut. Populated by creatures—part bird, part human—against a ground of flat rectangular shapes, the rust orange horizontal rectangle reads as a floor, schematically forming an interior for the creatures to inhabit. The creature to the far right sits at a spinning wheel, an image that often recurs in folk and fairy tales. In Jacques Rancière's *The Aesthetic Unconscious* he states that, "The new poet, the geological or archeological poet, performs the same sort of inquiry that Freud conducts in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. He poses the principle that nothing is insignificant, that the prosaic details that positivistic thought disdains or attributes to a merely physiological rationality are in fact signs encrypted in history. But he also poses the paradoxical condition of this hermeneutics: in order for the banal to reveal its secret, it must first be mythologized." Rancière goes on to add "insofar as they are first transformed into elements of a mythology or phantasmagoria." This

is exactly what the Tobiases attempt in their inclusivity and images of enchantment.

Large-scale woodblock prints and wall paintings create a diverse range of narrative imagery. Patterns of folk art—including that of their native Transylvania—as well as shapes from the tradition of modernist geometric abstraction are combined with influences originating in Communist-era East Europe. These include animation, the constructivist poster designs of El Lissitzky, and post-war German painting. Transformation and enchantment are a constant theme, sometimes in uncanny and disturbingly humorous form. Body parts and animals, plants and flowers proliferate, as if in a dream. In every direction domestic objects, decorative motifs, embroidery, and typography—especially that of Jan Tschichold—fragment and unite in fantastical compositions. It's a dystopic forest of fun to be enjoyed at the viewer's own risk. As if to counter this playfulness, grotesque faces derived from traditional apotropaic amulets appear in some works, playfully warding off mischief whilst remaining animistic. Borders are crossed and the old hierarchies of artistic media and references are ignored as craft and fine art, modernity and folklore, intellectual constructs and unconscious desire dissolve, before coming into focus as hybrids.

Twin engine: Gert and Uwe Tobias at Whitechapel Gallery, London



Artwork by Gert and Uwe Tobias. Photo by [unreadable]

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Collaborative artists Gert and Uwe Tobias look pale and tired in the unforgiving strip lighting of their shared studio, and, at last, I am able to detect some subtle differences in their expressions. Aged 39, the identical twins live and work together in the same building, the former HQ of a potato storage company, on an industrial island in west Köln. They dress in a similarly fashionable, understated manner, and talk - much to the frustration of this journalist who recorded the conversation with an audio device - with the same intensity, in the same octave and sometimes finish one another's sentences.

But their affinity extends further than that, because the brothers are striving (in their work, at least) for the same thing. So much so that on first meeting I had begun to wonder if they are no longer two individuals but one super-individual, born out of more than ten years of what they call 'permanenter Austausch', continuous exchange. This means critiquing one another, and refining each other's concepts, with their disarmingly direct way of communicating. This dialogue may have given them a head start, given how quickly the duo has caught the art world's attention.

The Romanian-born Gert and Uwe's mural-sized woodcuts, fantastic tableaux of colourful, carnivalesque figures, earned them an exhibition at MoMA in 2007, and stole the show at Charles Saatchi's group exhibition of new German art in 2011. Saatchi owns four of their prints, which now sell for up to €165,000. After an international run of exhibitions this year, they were chosen by Whitechapel Gallery for its annual commission for The Gallery at Windsor in Florida, which coincides with Art Basel Miami. Now, the Windsor installation has travelled to London.

I meet the brothers on a chilly evening after a full day in the studio. Using their signature pictorial language, which borrows imagery from anything from folklore to typography, their latest canvases see the brothers experimenting for the first time with a box-like, three-dimensional space, with objects and forms arranged decoratively, as in a treasure trove or an altarpiece. 'It's more surrealist than our previous work. We wanted to hint at a narrative by combining these different forms,' says Uwe, letting me delve into one of their shoeboxes filled with nightmarish cut-outs: a woman's leg snatched from Vogue, a headless figure in Bavarian garb from an old pamphlet.

The concept of collage forms the basis of their working relationship. 'We both work in many mediums, from ceramics to drawing,' explains Gert. 'Every piece we produce is made by just one of us, but we both sign it at the end.' They won't, though, tell me which of them has designed the collage for Wallpaper's limited edition subscriber cover (W*166) - they don't think it's relevant. 'The reason we work together is that one of us might suggest something, maybe another colour, or one of us will draw something and the other will borrow a form from it. This dialogue is, in principle, a collage, too.'

The Tobiasases connect the idea at the centre of their working process - borrowing styles from one another - to borrowing styles from everywhere, a method of source-gathering that reflects the unpredictability of the metropolitan experience, increasingly informed by digital media and other mash-ups of culturally diverse images. Incidentally, Gert and Uwe are picking up the baton from Wallpaper* cover designer David Hockney. It was Hockney who observed: 'Television is becoming a collage. There are so many channels that you move through them making a collage yourself. In that sense, everyone sees something a bit differently.'

The Tobias twins are sensitive to pop culture and its potential to distort reality. Born in Transylvania, they moved to Germany in 1985, aged 12. As adults, they became interested in a worldwide myth about their birthplace. 'Dracula is now known from Köln to Tokyo from films that stem from Bram Stoker's book.

The themes vary, but there's always this cliché about Transylvania.' This forms the basis of one series of works, 'Come And See Before The Tourists Will Do - The Mystery Of Transylvania', which borrows colours, naïve forms and masked figures from the folklore and craft that surrounded them in their childhood, as well as ideas from B movies such as 'American Vampire' and 'Dracula's Dog'. 'We wanted to create something between these two worlds, something that feels uncannily familiar, but also foreign,' says Gert.

Studying fine art under the German artist Walter Dahn, a member of the rebellious 1980s artist group, the Neue Wilde ('Wild Youth'), the brothers worked separately. It wasn't until after they graduated that they worked together. 'Something happened,' says Gert. 'We realised we were both interested in the same themes and mediums.' The twins use the term Zusammenarbeit ('collective work') to describe their creative process - a term encouraged in the former German Democratic Republic, which shunned the ideal of the individual artist genius.

The combined face the brothers present to the world is surprisingly harmonious. Do they ever fight? The question is greeted with the first silence of our interview. 'We discuss,' they eventually insist. I say I don't believe them. 'Sometimes loudly,' adds Gert, grinning. Nonetheless, they manage to share the same living quarters, Uwe in one side of the building with his wife and daughter, and Gert alone on the other side - a set-up that eerily echoes the living arrangements of the 17th-century, fairy-tale spinners, the brothers Grimm, in nearby Kassel.

Despite being born in Romania, the Tobiases come from an old Saxon family, and their aesthetic is rooted in Germanic culture. It was an interest in the quintessentially German craft of woodcutting that cemented the brothers' partnership. 'In our early experiments together we developed our own way of making woodcuts,' says Gert. 'Rather than carving into a wooden block, we cut clean individual shapes out of plywood and use a roller to apply printing ink, and use our hands or feet to layer the colour onto the canvas.' It is a complex process that requires a huge amount of space, so their studio is barren and chairless. On the floor is a giant jigsaw puzzle comprised of hundreds of coloured wooden shapes, and mounted on a podium in the middle of the room is an electric woodcutting knife.

'The important thing for us is to keep the expressive mark [of the traditional woodcut] out. That gives it a more contemporary feel,' says Uwe. The effect is almost the large-scale equivalent to the punch-print achieved by a typewriter, their favourite tool for more intimate drawings. The process opens up a space for them to play with the history of the more democratic medium of print. For every solo exhibition they have staged, a poster 'invitation' has comprised one of the artworks in the show. The fact that it looks like a poster, but they call it an invitation, is telling. It is in this space between the public and the personal, the machine-cut and the handmade, that the twins find themselves most at home.

Similarly, each of their woodcut murals comes in a handmade but almost identical edition of two. The contradiction inherent in that statement does not escape them. As I stand in the studio comparing the matching prints, I cannot help but try and seek out their differences. It occurs to me that no matter how hard the hand of man will seek to create perfect repeating forms, the human eye is programmed to seek out the authentic, to reach for evidence of an individual. Nature never produces the same thing twice.

Gert & Uwe Tobias' exhibition runs until 14 June at Whitechapel Gallery



photography: Aislin Gibbon
 some of the bywood remakes the progress used to create new woodcut prints for their travelling exhibition.



'Untitled', 2012. © Gert & Uwe Tobias/VG Bildkunst, Bonn. Photography: Alistair Overbrück, Cologne



'Untitled', 2012. © Gert & Uwe Tobias/VG Bildkunst, Bonn. Photography: Alistair Overbrück, Cologne

Art

Gert and Uwe Tobias: brothers from another planet

Adrian Searle

🐦 @SearleAdrian

Wed 28 Jul 2010
17.01 EDT

Born in Transylvania, twins Gert and Uwe Tobias paint, sculpt and draw with a typewriter. It's bold stuff, says Adrian Searle, and the product of a lifetime of shared obsessions

There have been several pairs of twins who make art collaboratively. In the 1980s, the American Sarn twins began working together on sophisticated photographic projects. The British artists Jane and Louise Wilson, who dislike being referred to as twins, continue to work in film and photography, although like the Chapman brothers (not twins) they have sometimes played up their sibling rivalries in their art. Gert and Uwe Tobias make art that looks as if it has evolved from the kind of private language twins occasionally develop, from mutual shared obsessions, with its repetitive motifs. The work of these Romanian-born identical twins is full of funny heads and scary faces, weird beings with pendulous noses, creepy expressions and peculiar extruded bodies.

But there is more to them than funny faces. Theirs is a hybrid art that mixes the old but complex technology of woodcut printing with painting, typography, and the creation of image-poems; they use a typewriter to tap out, rather than draw, hollow-eyed, drooling and grinning satanic faces. Occasional words and exclamations erupt among the red and black "x"s and "o"s, the dashes and dots, like a kind of magic, automatic writing. In fact it is a laborious technique, much used by concrete poets, and by writers and artists as diverse as Carl Andre, the late BS Johnson and by Lawrence Sterne, in his 1759 novel *Tristram Shandy*.

Like Sterne, the Tobias twins parody and recycle all sorts of styles and quotations in their work. Their sometimes mural-scaled woodcuts are on occasion entirely abstract, using repeated forms and shapes taken from Romanian folk-art decoration and 1920s Russian suprematism, to create a sort of complicated geometric abstraction that looks like painting, or poster art, but is neither. Other woodcuts appear both folkloric – shapes that

look cut out with pinking shears - and peculiarly modern, playing on the carnivalesque and the biomorphs of Joan Miro. But the Tobiaseses are good at covering their tracks; it's hard to know exactly where their influences lie. Their art is a sort of grand fabrication.

In this show, the presentation of their work (which includes prints, paintings, collages, ceramic sculptures) is further complicated by painting directly on the walls behind and in between. The twins are playing games with us. In one corner, a group of ceramics crowds a shelf. A misshapen, lumpy head emerges from a commercial jug. A turd-like thing stands on a bird's-foot-cum-tree-root in a little bowl. There are dirty, slip-glazed, excremental figures, horrible shiny white creatures with brown stains running down them that you wouldn't want to touch. All this is very deliberate and scatological.

Among the woodcuts, there is a figure (*pictured, top left*) whose ear is a lamb chop or a map of South America; an eye like a fish set in a doily; a red tit with a white nipple grows inexplicably out of his forehead. Oh, deary me, I feel for this figure. I also feel my credulity is being stretched. Some of the Tobiaseses' small, delicately painted, translucent heads are more like photographic negatives of ghosts, or scraperboard illustrations of long-dead relatives.

Their work has always intrigued me, not least because of its collision between outmoded skills and a knowing postmodernity. Their art is unmistakable, but unplaceable. Sometimes they are like faux-naive outsider artists playing at being insiders, or, conversely, art world operators playing at being visionaries. Much is often made - not least by the artists themselves - of their Transylvanian childhood, and of the Dracula legend they were entirely unaware of until they moved to Germany when they were 12. All

this, too, has been morphed into their art.

At Nottingham Contemporary, the Tobiaseses share the gallery with a large selection of photographs by Diane Arbus, one of the best of the travelling Artist Rooms devised by collector-turned-donor Anthony D'Offay. Arbus's photographs of mental patients dressed up for Halloween, proud transvestites and a catalogue of bizarre and alarming eccentrics, are far stranger, as well as more sophisticated and direct, than anything the Tobias twins have yet cooked up.