

Press Release

October 14th
November 11th, 2023Opening
Saturday, October 14th
from 11am to 8pm*An Ocean in Between the Waves*
Gert & Uwe Tobias

“No ideas but in things”¹ declared the American poet William Carlos Williams (1883-1963). No matter how one defines ideas, no matter how they are expressed: shapes, figures, volumes, languages, words, motifs, points, lines, designs, notes, colors, lights... Every oeuvre by the artists Gert & Uwe Tobias stems from this register: there is not an idea, nor a construction, nor a space that is not embodied by juxtaposed, assembled superimposed and/or amalgamated things, even if these things finally end up incarnated as landscapes, characters, animals, objects, artefacts or other more or less identifiable elements... In this way, they belong neither to our own tangible reality nor to any other established universe, yet still they appear perfectly natural, quite plausible and even universal: they are of the order of myths, legends, parables or oral narratives, that have been transmitted or shared and are rendered perceptible through the multiple metamorphoses each work undergoes. And the more perplexing and bewildering they might appear, the more we are, on the contrary, enchanted or even seduced, captivated, almost carried away by them, along the less travelled pathways these things suggest to us. At the heart of Gert & Uwe Tobias's oeuvre, there are no questions and equally no answers: everything is maintained in a meticulously nurtured space where nothing is resolved, and from which, now and again, sparkling formulations emerge, of a poetic continent anchored in the deepest recesses of those collected narratives that have fertilized and nourished the most ancestral of thoughts, stories and representations. We are nowhere here, yet paradoxically everywhere. We are both here and there, where things are allowed to exist, flourish and gleam.

Born in Transylvania, Romania in 1973, the twin brothers Gert & Uwe Tobias currently live in Cologne, Germany. Over the past twenty years, they have developed a four-handed body of work, whose conceptual and production process is unique from every point of view. This process begins with an initial life-sized drawing, from which shapes and figures are cut out in extremely fine plywood. These are in turn coated with a specific color, which is subsequently transferred to the work's definitive support—paper or canvas of varying formats. This approach combines the techniques used in marquetry and stained-glass production, with those of collage and monotype. The different elements are made to fit in and interlock with each other, with the utmost care and precision, so that the final result reveals only the composition desired from the outset. Likewise, the colors are superimposed and juxtaposed with extreme finesse and delicacy to precisely express the harmony of hues envisaged in the conceptual stage. These procedures do not however exclude the appearance of lines, either in reserve or in between the elements, or as the result of slight discrepancies between each application of color, or in the form of finer, more delicate lines that are sometimes allowed to blossom into loose shapes and arabesques. Gert and Uwe Tobias artistic experiments have also explored the fields of woodcut, typewriter drawing, gouache, watercolor, ceramics and lacemaking, yet their basic principles of production remain unchanged. With the passage of time and the development of their oeuvre, nourished by this continual back and forth between the various techniques and forms of expression, their lexical corpus of characters, animals, objects, artifacts and other elements—in other words, Gert & Uwe Tobias's “things”—has become a veritable caravanserai, which they parade endlessly before their eyes. So today, we find them cutting out forms from their earlier canvases to explore other possible combinations. Thus, new shapes and figures have appeared, while others seem to disappear. It is true that

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Transylvania, their place of birth, is considered by some as the land of vampires. Notions of non-existence and existence, night and day, sleep and wakefulness, shadows and light, repulsion and fascination, constraint and pleasure, form and substance, nature and culture and space and time, all alternate naturally, sometimes in surprising and unexpected ways.

In the epilog of his *Histoire(s) du Cinéma* (1988-1998), Jean-Luc Godard cites a poem by the British poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge: “And what if in your dream you went to heaven, and there plucked a strange and beautiful flower. And what if, when you awoke, you had that flower in your hand... Ah, what then?”² What is there to say? Or to recount, believe or express? St. Thomas was so incredulous before the divine resurrection that he had to literally thrust his finger into Christ’s body, to make sure there really was muscle and membrane below the surface of the skin, between the lips of the wound in his side. Caravaggio produced one of his finest canvases about this event. A painting is not just a window on the world, or a mirror of the world that surrounds us. It also opens up otherwise unimaginable infinities. It embodies otherworldly realms we have never previously imagined. It lends shape and form to paradoxes we normally consider as unrepresentable. It makes journeys to the farthest reaches of the universe a clear possibility. It affirms the existence of alternative spaces. Some might object to a certain lack of reality or realism. To which one could answer: whether we fell asleep with a flower we had picked and placed on our pillow—a flower whose color and scent touched the dream that ensued—or whether the dream itself deposited part of its own story, on the pillow, during the night, the most important thing is to convince oneself that the narratives formed by reality and dreams constantly interweave their threads, so that these alternating strands form the most enchanting tapestry of our past, present and future existences. Indeed, what we desire the most sometimes molds our identities more profoundly than what we have actually achieved or experienced. This is what the oeuvre of Gert & Uwe Tobias reveals to us: the power that our dreams, desires and wishes hold over our destinies. It is not so much a question of their magician-like powers, but rather one of their qualities as wise men, prophets or shamans, from that part of the world that only art or poetry allow us to reach.

Marc Donnadieu

1. William Carlos Williams, , *Paterson*, New Directions Books, New York 1963.
2. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *What if you slept...*, publication date unknown.

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Marc Donnadieu is an independent art critic, researcher and exhibition curator. He has been a member of the ICOM (International Council of Museums) since 2010. He was curator in chief of Photo Élysée (Cantonal Museum of Photography, Lausanne, Switzerland) from 2017 through 2023, curator responsible for contemporary art at the LaM – Lille Metropole from 2010 to 2017 and director of the FRAC Haute-Normandie between 1999 and 2010. Since 1997, he has been a member of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA) and has regularly contributed to the magazine *artpress* since 1994 and *The Art Newspaper* since 2023. He was awarded the *Prix Spécial* on the 10th anniversary of AICA France prize in 2022 and named Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in 2004. He has curated or co-curated a number of major monographic or thematic exhibitions devoted to the pictorial field, drawing practices, contemporary photography, identity related processes within today's social space, the current representation of the body, the relationships between art and architecture and between art brut and photography. He has also contributed to a large number of catalogs and specialized publications in the fields of the visual arts, architecture, design and fashion.