

CONTEMPORARY FINE ARTS

GERT & UWE TOBIAS

NOT ENOUGH ROOM TO SWING A CAT

9 JUNE – 14 JULY 2018



Gert & Uwe Tobias, Untitled, 2018
coloured woodcut on canvas
200 x 168 cm

Contemporary Fine Arts is pleased to present **Gert & Uwe Tobias'** fifth exhibition with the gallery, *Not Enough Room to Swing a Cat*.

Since the early 2000s, Romanian-born twins Gert & Uwe Tobias have developed a practice that blurs the lines between fine art and craft, abstraction and decoration, history and folklore. In large woodcut prints on canvas, *Not Enough Room to Swing a Cat* is comprised of a series of fanciful scenes in muted pastels and moody blues. Overlaying the faint, boxed outlines of the woodcut, cross-hatched lines become a perch or a cage for avian creatures. The recurrent figure of the cage builds upon the motif first explored in *Auf*, their current exhibition at Kunsthalle Recklinghausen, as part of the Ruhr-triennial 2018, which engages the coal mining legacy of the region. The Tobias brothers were drawn to the cage-like contraption that lowers miners underground. These cages simultaneously invoke fairy tale narratives of capture and freedom, decorative figuration and exploration of the line. The stylized cages also broach a dialogue with more abstracted works that resemble the sky. *Not Enough Room to Swing a Cat* carves a space informed by folklore and folk art, as the brothers formally investigate mythical and material inheritance.

This examination of childhood storytelling takes place alongside an exploration of folkloric ornamentation and floral patterns as precursors to abstraction. Widely recognized for their self-developed woodcut method, the Tobias brothers repurpose the ancient stamping technique of small-scale, black-and-white printmaking to create elaborate, enlarged and colourful compositions. This wilful anachronism is telling, as they draw upon a broad history of art, design and visual culture, citing the medieval and the avantgarde, Dutch florals and pop art themes. Birds perched in various stages of confinement and shape-shifting clouds prompt dialogues across the works, inviting the viewer to bring her own associations, perhaps of the canary in a coal mine or the caged bird who sings, to the brothers' dense trove of reference.

The large-scale woodcuts create a complex and collaged visual world, melding the ornamentation of folk art with artistic ascetism. The stylized settings their hybrid figures inhabit also bear traces of the Tobias' interest in the graphics of the 20th century, such as Jan Tschichold's experimental typography or El Lissitzky's exhibition designs. Gert and Uwe Tobias craft multivalent scenes that are at turns haunting and playful, macabre and humorous, immersing the viewer in a fantastical world.

Gert and Uwe Tobias (b. 1973 Brasov, Romania) live and work in Cologne. Recent institutional exhibitions include *Auf*, on view through September 9 at the Kunsthalle Recklinghausen, Oberhausen, Germany; Sprengel Museum, Hannover, Germany (2016); Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich, Germany (2016); Museum Morsbroich, Leverkusen, Germany (2015); Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Deurle, Belgium (2014); Kunstmuseum Ravensburg, Ravensburg, Germany (2013); Whitechappel Gallery, London, UK (2013); GEM Museum for Contemporary Art, The Hague, The Netherlands (2011); Kestnergesellschaft, Hannover, Germany (2009); Kunstmuseum Bonn, Bonn, Germany (2009) and Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA (2008).

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