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Gert & Uwe Tobias

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Drawing sits at the heart of Gert & Uwe Tobias' development of their formal language, and of their subsequent explorations in painting and large-scale woodcuts. Their process alchemically combines a highly personalised mythology with a continuous appetite for popular culture and an expansive knowledge of art and folk history. The Tobias' works emerge as animistic depictions of unclear yet disarming narratives – ones that we as an audience recognize, but cannot immediately place.

For their fourth solo exhibition at Galerie Rodolphe Janssen, Gert & Uwe Tobias present a drawing series of portraits depicting ghoulish female figures. Here, elegant yet decidedly grotesque feminine forms are delineated through continuous graphite lines, and bordered by washes of delicate colours deriving from the same printing ink used for the brothers' woodcuts.

While drawn from the Tobias' uncanny imagination, the gestural, dancer-like poses of their subjects hint at the brothers' deep appreciation for art history. Even as the female figures seem to decay and drip, their gracefully outstretched arms and serene facial expressions recall renaissance portraiture. And yet, as smoke-like lines billow in, out, and around the female figures, an air of macabre is unmistakable. The subjects' ethereal gestures are curiously condensed in their hands and eyes, which succumb to penetrating detail and betray their inevitable deterioration.

The Tobias' subjects emerge from vase-like forms as part of a continuous metamorphic process, one that tellingly never discloses whether the female form is emerging from the feminine object – or the feminine object is emerging from the female form. Some subjects are accompanied by a cast of creatures – a cat in one drawing, and skeletal or bird-like forms in others. These companions do not stand alone, but intertwine with the female subjects' physiognomies, as if a winding narrative is self-contained within, or emerges from their bodies. Characteristic of the Tobias' oeuvre, these narratives appear ambiguous, perhaps even dream-like, awaiting the audience to fill in the details through their own narrative faculty.

Bitsy Knox

About the artist

Balula was born in France in 1978 and currently lives and works in New York City. His practice takes on a wide range of forms such as recording the effects of nature through soaking canvases in rivers and burying paintings in soil, to developing performances that explore ideas including geometry, time, dance, food, etc. Balula's work is represented in numerous major museum and public collections including Fonds National d'Art Contemporain, Paris; Musée d'Art Contemporain du Val-de-Marne, Vitry-sur-Seine; Fonds Régional d'Art Contemporain Poitou-Charentes; Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris; Fonds Régional d'Art Contemporain Provence-Alpes Côte d'Azur. His work has been included in a number of solo and group shows at Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Wiels centre d'art contemporain, Brussels; Le Confort Moderne, Poitiers; Bielefelder Kunstverein; Madison Museum for Contemporary Art; Museum of Contemporary Art North Miami; Museums Quartier Wien; Garage Center for Contemporary Culture, Moscow; Centre d'Art Scénique Contemporain, Lausanne; Casino Luxembourg – centre d'art contemporain; Frac Poitou-Charentes, Angoulême; Musée d'Art Contemporain du Val de Marne, Vitry-sur-Seine; Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie, Besançon.