

## GERT & UWE TOBIAS: DER OSTEN IM NORDEN DES WESTENS

TEAM GALLERY, NEW YORK

8 MAY - 14 JUNE

Although the brothers Gert and Uwe Tobias staged a lively show at MoMA last year, this exhibition is their first major commercial outing in New York; and perhaps hoping to start anew, they've quieted the whispering about their origins in Transylvania. In fairness, the media have always made more of that juicy tidbit than the brothers – who actually relocated to Germany when they were kids – yet the fact has been wheeled out with regularity in gallery blurbs, no doubt because it serves to explain the *völkisch* qualities in their work – the glimpses of grotesque puppets and mangy peasants in their collages, their use of woodcut and their penchant for eccentric handicraft.

One could wonder what remains to license their folksy primitivism, but maybe that's a question for later. For now the brothers want to cut loose, and have titled the show accordingly, calling it 'the east in the north of the west' (clinging to homeland only by leaving it untranslated). The installation also echoes a desire to be open to all: the show at MoMA last year was installed on walls painted in bold hues and angular designs reminiscent of the hopeful showcases of the Russian Constructivists; at Team, most of the work hangs on areas of wall painted grey and shaped to resemble sheets of paper punched with ring binder holes; and the assorted pictures are hung with less regard for the viewer than for the logic of a page layout, leaving some pictures 'skyyed'. The sense is of a Tobias Brothers swatch book – a little of what you fancy, in no particular order.

One of the largest abstract pictures (all are untitled and were completed this year) resembles a boardgame, with coloured circles and semicircles and triangles all hugging a grid lying on a rich, mustard-yellow ground. Another picture suggests a toolbox of the sort of characters you might use to fashion emoticons; a sawtooth design with pendulous tassels extends from the box. And two other large works employ flat hunks of colour to describe clumsy fairground dummies.

Gert and Uwe Tobias make very flavourful abstract paintings – pungent in palette and inventive in motif – and their use of woodcut on paper achieves surfaces that feel simultaneously old and new – sundried and still tacky with fresh paint. Their finest works, though, are often their smaller offerings, in particular their ingenious typewriter drawings, of which there are several examples here. Typewritten glyphs spill from the end of a loudhailer in one image; in another, a grotesque head is constructed from a cascade of red and black type; another has areas of type arranged around a series of lines like clothes hanging out to dry. With these, Gert and Uwe resurrect a printing technology that has barely gone to its grave, and discover that already it's redolent of much earlier modern times, when a little savagery still coexisted with progress. It feels appealingly spooky. Maybe, even, a little Transylvanian? *Morgan Falconer*



*der osten im norden des westens*, 2008 (installation view). Courtesy the artists and Team Gallery, New York