

Gilbert & George

Guest of honour of BRAFA 2019

In the half century that they have lived and worked together, Gilbert & George have created powerful Anti-Art that is poetic, primal and emotionally driven. Famed and celebrated for their pioneering work, they address social issues, taboos and artistic conventions, exploring a wide breadth of subjects pertaining to race, sexuality, religion, and mortality.

'Art for all' is the belief that underpins Gilbert & George's art. Although their art draws inspiration from daily life, the vision they offer is in turn metaphysical, mystical, or polemical, but always with a touch of humour and with the aim to convey a message. At Brafa they will present five recent large-scale works that will be placed at various spots throughout the fair. Their quirky vision of the world is sure to be a perfect fit in the land of surrealism and BRAFA is proud to welcome them as guest of honour of its 2019 edition.



Early morning. The Artists set out for breakfast at Jeff's Café in nearby Brune Street. Seated are the Artist's friends George Crompton and Tara McKerr. Image courtesy Gilbert & George and White Cube.

Short biography

Gilbert was born in the Dolomites, Italy in 1943; George was born in Devon, UK, in 1942. Together they have participated in many important group and solo exhibitions including 51st International Venice Biennale (2005), Turner Prize, London (1984) and Carnegie International, Pittsburgh (1985). They have had extensive solo exhibitions, including Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (1971–72); National Gallery, Beijing and Shanghai Art Museum (1993); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (1995–96); Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (1998); Serpentine Gallery, London and Kunsthau Bregenz (2002);

Kestnengesellschaft, Hannover (2004–05); Tate Modern, London and Haus der Kunst, Munich (2007); Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York and Philadelphia Museum of Art (2008); 'Jack Freak Pictures', CAC Malaga, Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb and Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels (2010); Deichtorhallen, Hamburg and Kunstmuseum Linz (2011); Laznia Centre for Contemporary Art Gdansk (2011–12); and Museum Kuppersmuhle, Duisberg (2012).

What Is Gilbert & George?

Gilbert and George are two men who together are one artist: Gilbert & George.

The vision of Gilbert & George is their art, of which they are the embodiment. Therefore Gilbert & George are the art of Gilbert & George.

The art of Gilbert & George is based upon feelings rather than intellect.

Gilbert & George are a total modern independent visionary artist, alone.

The vision of Gilbert & George is firstly their singular and particular way of seeing, experiencing and celebrating life.

The vision of Gilbert & George is also and simultaneously their way of seeing and making art.

The inspiration and subject of the art of Gilbert & George is modern life.

The life of Gilbert & George is art.

Gilbert & George, with the viewer, explore and test their feelings in their art.

On walks around their home in the East End of London, Gilbert & George see the modern human condition. Acceleration, religion, politics, business, dullness, leisure, celebration, violence, money, history, poverty, age, sex, work, hope, newness, sickness, desire, intoxication, beauty, dereliction, love, despair; the radicalized world; the virtual world. They see the daily routines and feelings of their fellow citizens, from all backgrounds: the fast modern multi-cultural and multi-technological world. Office workers and junkies. They see the spectrum of human behaviour.

Gilbert & George observe the constantly changing life of the city the way one might observe the weather, or study the ceaseless current of a vast river.

The vision of Gilbert & George is committed to raw realism, but is also deeply romantic: finding heightened or disturbed emotion in ordinary things, in a way that renders the subjects of their art extraordinary and richly atmospheric; individual, yet connected by common feelings.

The vision of Gilbert & George derives from the union of lucidity and heightened feeling; their art from the balance of control and loss of control.

Michael Bracewell, 2017

Five pictures @ Brafa 2019

The five pictures that will be presented at Brafa have all been selected by Gilbert & George. There are from big scaled recent series: the 'JACK FREAK PICTURES' (2008), the 'LONDON PICTURES' (2010), the 'SCAPEGOATING PICTURES' (2013) and the 'BEARD PICTURES' (2016).

The 'JACK FREAK PICTURES' (2008)

The 'JACK FREAK PICTURES' are among the most iconic, philosophically astute and visually violent pictures that Gilbert & George have ever created." The dominant pictorial element is the Union Jack, itself an internationally familiar, abstract, geometric pattern and a socially and politically charged symbol whose significance spans the cultural spectrum from contemporary fashion to aggressive national pride. Equally prominent, and linking the 'JACK FREAK PICTURES' to almost every picture previously created by the artists, are Gilbert & George themselves in a variety of guises: dancing, gurning, howling, watching, waiting. Sometimes their bodies seem complete; other times they have been fragmented or contorted. Invariably they feature as both subject and object, artwork and artist; they are players in the epic and complex pictorial drama they have created.



HANDBALL, 2008, 302 x 444 cm

Image courtesy Gilbert & George, White Cube and Albert Baronian

The 'LONDON PICTURES' (2011)

In the 'LONDON PICTURES', Gilbert & George present an epic survey of modern urban life in all its volatility, tragedy, absurdity and routine violence. Brutal and declamatory, these brooding and disquieting pictures have been created from the sorting and classification by subject of nearly 4000 newspaper headline posters, stolen by the artists over a number of years. In their lucidity, no less than their insight into the daily realities of metropolitan life, the 'LONDON PICTURES' are Dickensian in scope and ultra-modern in sensibility.

'Drawing directly on the quotidian life of a vast city, the 'LONDON PICTURES' allow contemporary society to recount itself in its own language. Within the townscape of this moral audit, Gilbert & George appear to pass like ghosts and seers, alternately watchful and distracted, as though their spirits were

haunting the very streets and buildings that these pictures describe. The 'LONDON PICTURES' seem to comprise a great visual novel, revealing without judgment the ceaseless relay of urban drama, in all its gradations of hope and suffering.'

Michael Bracewell, 2012



TEACHER STRAIGHT, 2011, 302 x 317 cm

Image courtesy Gilbert & George, White Cube and Albert Baronian

The 'SCAPEGOATING PICTURES' (2013)

The 'SCAPEGOATING PICTURES' unflinchingly describe the volatile, tense, accelerated and mysterious reality of our increasingly technological, multi-faith and multi-cultural world. It is a world in which paranoia, fundamentalism, surveillance, religion, accusation and victimhood become moral shades of the city's temper. Gilbert & George take their place in these 'SCAPEGOATING PICTURES' as shattered and spirit-like forms – at times masked, at times as grotesquely capering skeletons, at times dead-eyed and impassive. These 'SCAPEGOATING PICTURES' consolidate and advance the art of Gilbert & George as a view of modern humanity that is at once libertarian and free-thinking, opposed to bigotry of all forms and dedicated to secular realism.

Dominating the 'SCAPEGOATING PICTURES', becoming almost the imagistic signature of this new group of pictures, are images of the sinister bomb shaped canisters used to contain nitrous oxide, also known as 'whippets' and 'hippy crack' — recreationally inhaled to induce euphoria, hallucinations and uncontrollable laughter. Gathered by the artists on their early morning walks from the side streets and back alleys that surround their home, the presence of these canisters, mimicking that of 'bombs' pervades the mood of the 'SCAPEGOATING PICTURES' to infer terrorism, warfare and a stark industrial brutality.

Echoing the maxim of the great Victorian architect, A.W.N. Pugin, 'Not a Style, but a Principle', the vision of the 'SCAPEGOATING PICTURES' both affirms and intensifies the historically iconic art of Gilbert & George, in its tireless, emotional and profound engagement with the viewer and the modern world.



SFG, 2013, 302 x 381 cm

Image courtesy Gilbert & George, White Cube and Albert Baronian

The 'BEARD PICTURES' (2016)

Sombre and crazed, stark and lurid, the 'BEARD PICTURES' confront the viewer with a disquieting vision of modern times. Their temper conveyed through successive symbols – ruins, barbed wire, grotesque cartoon-like caricatures of Gilbert & George – the unifying motif of these maddened paranoid fairy tale pictures is the image of the beard, pictorially extrapolated to the point of surrealism. Secular and sacred, the throwback emblem of hip millennial youth as well as a mark of religious faith, the beard is depicted in the 'BEARD PICTURES' both mask and meaning: a sign of the times.

Michael Bracewell



BEARD MAD, 2016, 317 x 452 cm

Image courtesy Gilbert & George,
White Cube and Albert Baronian



BEARD RAIDS, 2016, 302 x 380cm

Image courtesy Gilbert & George,
White Cube and Albert Baronian

For more info : www.gilbertandgeorge.co.uk