



Gilbert & George
Spell of Sweating, 1998

Thur 18 Nov | 19.30 | £10, £8 C
Berrill Lecture Theatre, Open University MK
To include a glass of wine

Gilbert & George in conversation with Michael Bracewell An opportunity to hear Gilbert & George's philosophy of 'Art for All' in discussion with the novelist and cultural commentator Michael Bracewell.

Gilbert & George official website
www.gilbertandgeorge.co.uk

Gilbert & George: The Rudimentary Pictures
Interview with David Sylvester, texts by Michael Bracewell and Stephen Snoddy

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Return to the Administrator.

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Tickets from MK G Information Desk from 8 Oct. Seats limited; book early.

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Opening exhibition at Milton Keynes Gallery

MK G

Gilbert & George The Rudimentary Pictures

8 Oct 1999 – 9 Jan 2000

Exhibition Guide

Exhibition Guide text
by Michael Bracewell
and Stephen Snoddy

Gilbert & George are two of the most important artists working in the world today and MK G is the first public gallery in England to be built from scratch in 20 years. It is appropriate, therefore, to open MK G with a distinctive, important and high profile exhibition. Gilbert & George are also seen as radical and outside the establishment, in many of the same ways as Milton Keynes is seen in comparison with traditional British cities. Both can be viewed as bold, new and progressive.

'Art for All': Themes and Subject Matter

"We want Our Art to speak across the barriers of knowledge directly to People about their Life and not about their knowledge of art.

The 20th century has been cursed with an art that cannot be understood. The decadent artists stand for themselves and their chosen few, laughing at and dismissing the normal outsider. We say that puzzling, obscure and form-obsessed art is decadent and a cruel denial of the Life of People."

Gilbert & George 1986

Gilbert & George have always aimed their art at the 'man in the street', Their work is not only for the 'artworld' or for those who are knowledgeable about art. Fiercely independent, they wish to speak directly to their viewers with pictures that are about the human condition in all its forms through their view of the world. Their pictures can be tough and harsh, but also beautiful and tender. Every substance produced by the human body is by now a potentially lethal weapon. They use elements to ask fundamental questions about human existence at the end of the millennium.

Gilbert & George met at St Martins School of Art in 1967 and have been working together ever since. George was born in Plymouth in 1942 and Gilbert in the Italian Dolomites in 1943. When they met at St Martins School of Art there was an instant friendship. George became Gilbert's mentor, as Gilbert could not yet speak much English. The first sculpture they did together was a human face. Liquid colour was poured into a mould and when it was full the mould was

removed. When photos were taken of Gilbert & George with the sculpture, they immediately realised that they themselves were the sculptures. From that time on they worked together as one artist.

From the beginning of their career in 1967 Gilbert & George have made themselves the main subject of their art. Over the years they have used a variety of different forms: living sculpture, drawings, books, films and meticulously crafted, large-scale pictures. With each new group of pictures, Gilbert & George have extended the intimacy of their presence in the picture, making images which reflect the fundamental experience of being alive in the modern world. In this much, their pictures are mirrors, showing us the feeling of existence.

More recently, Gilbert & George have worked with the very bodily substances, which comprise the 'fundamentals' of human existence: blood, sweat, tears, urine, faeces and semen. They discovered that when these substances were magnified, they made a beautiful and amazing visual vocabulary, which looked like maps, mystical writing, flowers, crucifixes, guns, ladders and so on. It seemed as though the stories of our lives, or the charts of our destinies, could be seen in these extraordinary designs.

Of The Rudimentary Pictures, Gilbert & George have said: "They deal with the thoughts and feelings that lie within us all and with the issues that confront us daily. Our cities, your tears, their money, the rain, our sexuality, your sweat, their views are all in The Rudimentary Pictures."

Rudiment – noun – 1: (in pl.) the elements or first principles of a subject. 2: (in pl.) an imperfect beginning of something undeveloped or yet to develop. 3: a part or organ imperfectly developed as being vestigial or having no function (e.g. the breast in males).

The Rudimentary Pictures

Fournier World (Cube Gallery)

Fournier Street, in the East End of London, is where Gilbert & George live. There is a strong sense in which their house, and the surrounding streets, is their universe and their inspiration. Quite literally, all of human existence is there. In this much, their private, inner world is described by the place where they live.

Money Sweat (Cube Gallery)

Money can be seen as another 'fundamental' of human existence, and this picture describes the way in which most people have to work and struggle to make money. Also, Gilbert & George's 'Fournier World' is located right in the shadow of the financial centre of the city of London, and they have often described how this landscape of high finance sits side by side with the (historically) much poorer streets of the East End. Gilbert & George have always made pictures which use formal shapes and patterns to further articulate their meaning. The wheel, as a sign, has ancient roots in mysticism. Here the spokes of the wheel suggest the inter-connecting nature of lived experience, while the pound coins echo the circular, 'planetary' shapes we can see in other of The Rudimentary Pictures.

Fuck All Nazi's (Cube Gallery)

The Rudimentary Pictures show Gilbert & George consolidating many of the themes which their work has explored over the last thirty years: sexuality, cities, struggle, politics. Formally, the 'grid' system, by which their pictures are created, has become one of the most famous artistic 'signatures' in modern art. But Gilbert & George have also always worked with the 'found objects', which exist in the streets just beyond their front door – from graffiti (as in this picture) to the spat out pieces of chewing gum we can see in 'Gum City'. This picture was completed just before the neo-nazi attack on a Jewish school in America earlier this year.

Spell of Sweating (Gallery 2)

Gilbert & George have always said that their pictures are not made only for elite intellectuals and posh art people – they want them to be generous to everybody. The pictures of Gilbert & George are nearly always extremely literal: on one level, they are exactly what their titles describe them to be. Thus, in this picture, Gilbert & George are standing within magnified images of sweat, linked together as part of a human chain. The suited arms, which are touching them, can be seen to be pointing at Gilbert's shoulder and towards George's heart, suggesting work and passion as causes of sweat. Whether they appear in their pictures wearing suits, or semi-dressed, or naked, Gilbert & George are always presented as vulnerable and exposed to the world – as we all are. Hence, their enduring belief in 'Art for All'.

Crying City (Gallery 2)

As Gilbert & George discovered the 'maps' within images of bodily substances, so they could relate these maps to street maps – in particular the street map of the East End of London, where they have lived together for thirty years. In 'Crying City', we see the East End south of the Thames, with an image of tears imposed upon it. Cities contain all the human emotions, all the time, and Gilbert & George describe the presence of those emotions in the vastness of the city.

Sex City (Long Gallery)

When Gilbert & George began to work with the images of maps – both street maps, and the 'inner' maps of bodily substances – they were interested in the way that these maps communicate their information. Sometimes, it was almost as though they had discovered secret maps, in which there was coded information about the way we live, or the activities we might usually try to conceal. In 'Sex City', each of the twenty-five circular maps contain a reference to sexuality within one of their street names or place names. Within these names – sometimes slang, sometimes witty puns – there is a public, civic, display of hidden sexuality.

Some of the themes and subject matter explored in the work of G&G are of an adult nature and may be considered provocative and challenging. Some people may feel that parental guidance and supervision is required for this work.