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## GILBERT & GEORGE

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### URETHRA POSTCARD PICTURES

PARIS DEBELLEYME

17 Thursday - 19 Saturday

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*'The form of the Post Card Piece lends itself to the expression of finer feelings, stirring thoughts and beautiful views. Through our hearts, brains and bodies the cards crystallise into our crosses of Monarchical, Christian, Nationalistic, Violent, Pagan, Floral, Sexual Post Card Pieces. They are our shields, our swords, our emblem, our vision, our tombstone and our life-masks'*  
Gilbert & George 1981

Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac is delighted to announce the forthcoming Gilbert & George exhibition, Urethra Postcard Pictures. These new pictures consist of works of art made from postcards of London, telephone box cards, advertising cards and flyers that can be found in public places.

Since 1972 Gilbert & George have used postcards widely in their art, those dating from the Edwardian period or the First World War up until the more modern, mass-produced ones for the tourist trade.

In the Urethra Postcard Pictures, they describe, as they have always done throughout their artistic practice, the modern urban world, by tackling subjects in a simple and direct way which are close to their hearts, like nationalism, patriotism, sexuality, but also the city in which they live and work, London along with its touristic and sexual attractions ...

For each picture, Gilbert & George have gathered all the existing cards like a monomaniac anthropologist or a scientist to compose thematic and repetitive boards. They created 564 pictures in total, 76 of which are presented at the gallery.

Gilbert & George do not use these images taken from everyday life in order to develop a Pop Art aesthetic. They neither celebrate nor denounce mass culture or contemporary production and consumer systems. They use these images as a simple medium, filled with thoughts and meaning. Moreover they speak about the way in which they make use of the cards like automatic writing. They find efficient sources of inspiration in the voice of the people, a repertory of canonical images to create what they call "Art for All".

These new pictures display more familiar formats than the monumental Jack Freak Pictures, which were the subject of their last exhibition at the gallery. However the compositional geometric découpage is again at large in the Urethra Postcard Pictures. Each composition, whether horizontal or vertical is subjected to the same template: a ring of 12 attached cards framing a central card. Beneath each arrangement, a dated and signed label bears the title of the picture in red capital letters which also serves as a reminder about the importance bestowed upon the text and the titles by the artists.

Gilbert, born in the Italian Dolomites in 1943, and George, born in Devon, England in 1942, both art students, meet in 1967 at St Martin's School of Art in London (now Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design). At the end-of-year-show, the Snow Show, Gilbert and George created their first art as a joint effort, far removed from the formalist criteria of the art taught. In 1969, they created their first "singing and living sculptures", making themselves both subjects and objects of their works in a perfect fusion of their art and their everyday life. Gilbert & George then start to appear as "living sculptures" in museums and galleries. In 1970, during a renowned presentation, they sang and moved along Flanagan & Allen's song Underneath the Arches for hours. The pictures dating from 1971 are the first grid-arrangements, which would henceforth become their formal signature. In 1980, their iconography becomes more complex containing endless levels of meanings from symbolic and allegorical to the most unbridled eroticism, to the religious, political and personal. Gilbert & George have worked as one artist for over 40 years and have created more than 2000 artworks.

In 1980, the Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven put together their first retrospective exhibition showing their pictures of 1971-80. In 1997, the Musée d'art moderne, Paris hosted a major retrospective exhibition of their art. The Tate Modern in London organised an extensive survey of Gilbert & George's art in 2007, which travelled to Munich, Turin and then to the United States. In 2005, Gilbert & George represented Great Britain at the Venice Biennial. The touring Jack Freak Pictures exhibition launched in 2009 has not yet concluded its international route. And very recently, they have been made Honorary Professor of Philosophy by London Metropolitan University.

An important two volume retrospective book accompanies the exhibition: The Complete Postcard Art of Gilbert & George, about the use of postcards in their art. It includes a fine text by the novelist and cultural critic Michael Bracewell.