

GILBERT & GEORGE

DRINKING PIECES & VIDEO SCULPTURE 1972-1973

LONDON ELY HOUSE

28 Apr 2017 - 29 Jul 2017



Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac presents *Gilbert & George: Drinking Pieces & Video Sculpture 1972-73* as part of the inaugural programme for the new London Gallery at Ely House, 37 Dover Street. This exhibition, installed in the spacious ground floor gallery at Ely House, provides a unique and timely opportunity to review the importance and resonance of Gilbert & George's early art.

After selling their first work of art in 1970, Gilbert & George celebrated by getting drunk at Balls Brothers Wine Bar in Bethnal Green, London, and recorded their experience in a series of black and white pictures. In this series, referred to as *Drinking Pieces*, the distorted and blurred images evoke a feeling of inebriation. As Gilbert & George states: 'Artist's would get smashed at night, but in the morning they would go to their studio and make a perfect minimal sculpture. They were alcoholics but their art was dead sober. We did the *Drinking Sculptures* as a reflection of life'. This highly original approach epitomises how Gilbert & George expand the notion of object-making to encompass the variety of their living experience. With titles that reflect their moods, such as *Swaying, Falling, Toy Wine and The Glass*, the fragmented scenes are installed directly onto the wall in groupings and patterns, a precursor to the distinctive e grid-format that has since become their recognisable style.

First presented in four separate exhibitions in Europe and in the United States between 1972 and 1973, the *Drinking Pieces* have a distinctly English air of melancholy, reflecting and rejecting much of

the social and political turmoil that was unfolding in Britain at that time: growing unemployment, general strikes, 'black-outs' and intense sectarian violence in Northern Ireland. Breaking away from Minimal Art's deliberate lack of expressive content and rigid sense of form the *Drinking Pieces* are a testament to Gilbert & George's highly original art making that makes them amongst the most influential artists of our time.

The three *Video Sculptures* included in this exhibition (*A Portrait of the Artists as Young Men, In the Bush, and Gordon's Makes Us Drunk*) show the artists smoking, walking, and drinking to the sound of thunder, birdsong, Edward Elgar's orchestral piece *Pomp and Circumstance* and Edvard Grieg's idyllic *Morning*. The juxtaposition of the titles' evokes youthful energy with the impassive, slow, stately rhythm making the works both alluring and provocative. Video Art was still a relatively new artistic medium in the early 1970s so the choice to experiment with video reflects Gilbert & George's ambition to make their practice as 'living sculptures' accessible to a larger audience. Installed in front of the fire-place two stern looking wooden green chairs and a table from *Morning Light on Art For All* add to the unique atmosphere.

Although they rarely travel far from their home in London's East End, their art relentlessly engages with the world beyond this microcosm. In Gilbert & George's words: 'Whatever happens here is happening everywhere else five years later'. Now in their 70s, they have continued to unsettle their audiences with their lifelike art, adhering to their credo of 'Art for All', tackling the subjects of sex, money, violence, religion and social class in a captivating and direct way.

[WATCH THE EXHIBITION VIDEO](#)