

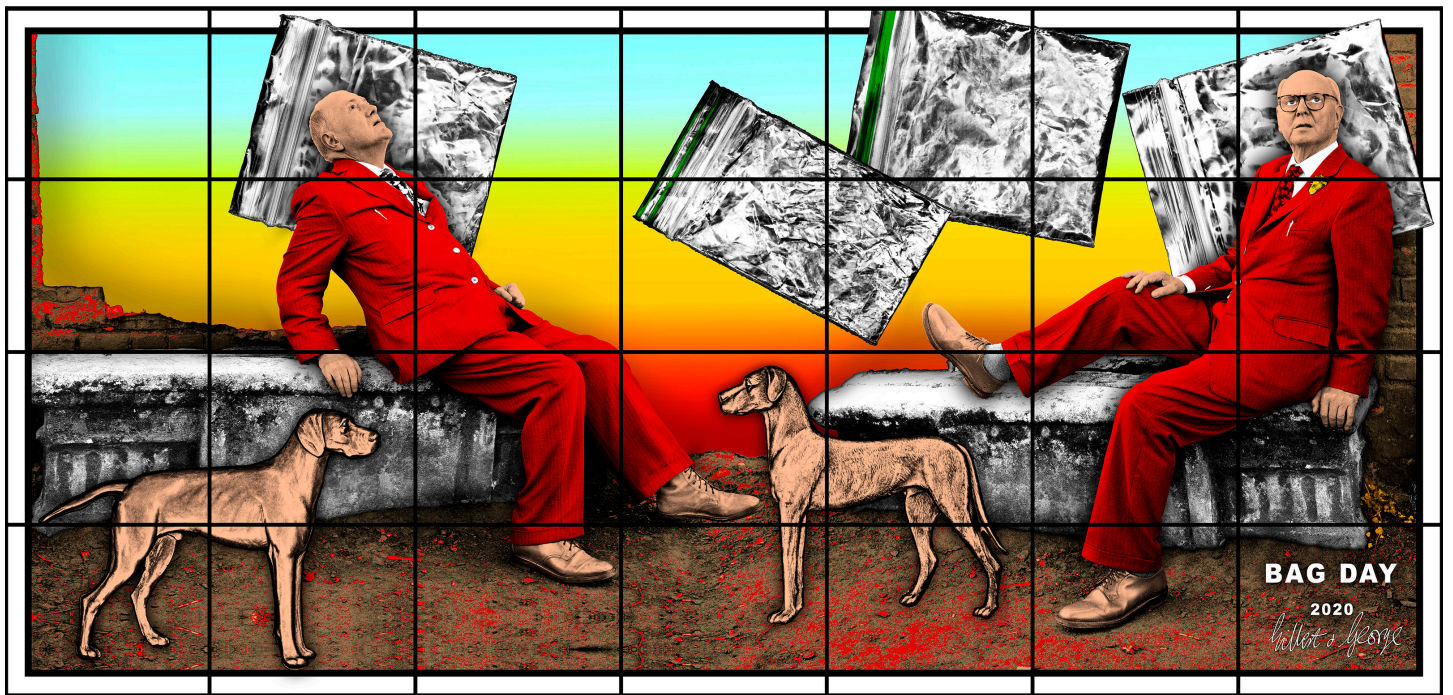
Press release

Gilbert & George

NEW NORMAL URETHRA EXHIBITION

20 March—18 May 2024

Thaddaeus Ropac
Seoul Fort Hill
2F, 122-1, Dokseodang-ro, Yongsan-gu, Seoul



Gilbert & George, *BAG DAY*, 2020.
Mixed media, 28 panels. 254 x 528 cm (100 x 207.87 in).

What we confront in our life is in our pictures, so we have all these subjects. Our subjects that are inside ourselves are part of universal thought: death, hope, life, fear, sex, money, race, religion, shitty, naked, human, world. All the thoughts and feelings that lie inside everyone. — Gilbert & George

Coinciding with the first anniversary of The Gilbert & George Centre in London, a solo exhibition at Thaddaeus Ropac Seoul brings together two bodies of pictures by the artists centred on human life: *NEW NORMAL PICTURES* (2020) and *THE URETHRA POSTCARD PICTURES* (2009).

Gilbert & George have felt a strong affinity with Korea since 1997 when they participated in the Gwangju Biennale. The *NEW NORMAL URETHRA EXHIBITION* presents their distinctive vision of the streets of our modern world that they have walked together since 1967. Yet the pictures on view simultaneously speak to the unifying nature of the volatility, tragedy and routine violence that play out in cities worldwide. Following their enduring mantra of 'Art for All', through the exhibition Gilbert & George strive to forge connections across national borders with their representation of the shared experiences of modern urban life.



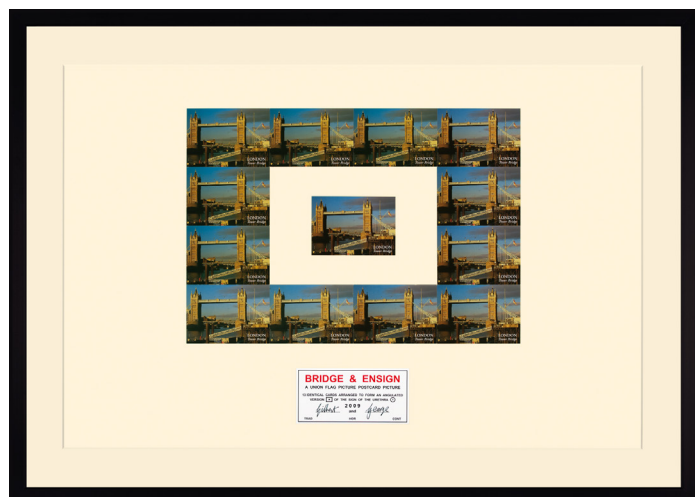
Gilbert & George, *GROUND FLOOR*, 2020.
Mixed media, 20 panels. 254 x 377 cm (100 x 148.43 in).

We don't believe too much in looking at sunsets – they say very little. You realise the reality is in the streets of London. Once a year we'll go up the hill to look at the sunset. But you have to come down to where life really is. — Gilbert & George

Six *NEW NORMAL PICTURES* follow Gilbert & George on an otherworldly pilgrimage through East London. Coloured with exaggerated, non-naturalistic tonal contrasts, the large-scale pictures capture the artists' observation of their surroundings as viewed

from the perspective of their Spitalfields home in London's East End. The images are often split and misaligned within their signature gridded frames to skew reality, presenting a world that is subtly off-kilter through distortions of scale and perspective. As writer Michael Bracewell describes, it is 'as though Gilbert & George have just crossed through a fissure in time to a place that is almost but not quite familiar – a place that looks normal but is not normal, is skewed, perhaps abandoned.' London parks, bus stops, cemeteries, and the artists' home at 12 Fournier Street become the settings for pictures in which the artists depict themselves in states of tension or uncertainty as they encounter the discarded detritus of daily life.

[Gilbert & George] are witness-participants within the visionary world of their art; they become agents of the scenes they traverse. — Michael Bracewell, 2021.



Gilbert & George, *BRIDGE & ENSIGN*, 2009.
Mixed media. 88 x 123 cm (34.65 x 48.43 in).

Presented alongside the *NEW NORMAL PICTURES* is a selection of *THE URETHRA POSTCARD PICTURES*, which offer a distinct perspective of our world through the reuse of commercially manufactured printed materials. One of the rare groups of pictures in which the artists do not place themselves within the frame, the series offers a snapshot of life as

represented in postcards, sexually explicit telephone box cards and flyers. Each picture is composed of 13 identical cards. 12 are arranged in either a horizontal or vertical rectangular formation and an additional card is placed in the centre to approximate the anatomical cross section of the male urethra. First introducing postcards to their practice in 1972, the artists assert a distinct mode of artmaking through their engagement with the found materials: 'Postcard Pictures themselves are sort of the automatic we believe in. Because once we decided upon the shape, a circle with a dot in the middle, and the subject had been found, they made themselves.'

The eight postcard pictures selected for the Seoul exhibition illustrate popular tourist sites in London, as well as images of the Union Jack. They foreground themes of national identity and cultural interchange in an irreverent manner characteristic of the artists' approach to modern life and artmaking. Intended to cross borders by design, postcards are often sent to relay news of our travels to loved ones. 'I think everyone has an emotional incident in their lives related to postcards,' says Gilbert, 'just as everyone has something related to the telephone.' In the context of the Seoul exhibition, the postcard pictures that were originally conceived and made in London offer another point of contact between the two cities.

Offering a rare opportunity to see pictures from different series together in a single presentation, this exhibition at Thaddaeus Ropac Seoul stands as



Gilbert & George, *WHEEL & HALL*, 2009.
Mixed media. 123 x 88 cm (48.42 x 34.65 in).

a love letter from London, presenting the city in all its complexities and contradictions as seen through the eyes of the artists. With the *NEW NORMAL URETHRA EXHIBITION* Gilbert & George invite visitors in Seoul to share in this vision of our modern world and the experiences of urban living.



Gilbert & George in front of the gates of the Gilbert & George Centre, 2023.
© Gilbert & George

About the artist

Gilbert & George's creative life was formed when they met as students at Saint Martin's School of Art in 1967. The indivisibility of their art and everyday life was given early expression in their *Living Sculptures* from 1969, but it was not until two years later that they created the first of their landmark pictures. Simultaneously the subject and object of their art, they declared in 1971: 'Art is life and we create art for all.' Their home and studio on Fournier Street has formed the epicentre of their art ever since. By relentlessly challenging social conventions and the artistic canon, their art has radically transformed the landscape of contemporary art in Britain and the wider world. Gilbert & George have exhibited internationally since 1970 and their art is housed in major arts institutions worldwide. They were

awarded the Turner Prize in 1986, represented the UK at the Venice Biennale in 2005, and were the subject of a large retrospective at Tate Modern, London in 2007. More recently, their art has been the subject of solo exhibitions at institutions including Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki (2022); Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt (2021); Luma Westbau, Kunsthalle Zürich and Reykjavík Art Museum (all 2020); Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2019); Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris (2019); Luma Arles (2018); Helsinki Art Museum (2018); Neues Museum, Nuremberg (2018); Brighton Museum and Art Gallery (2018); and The MAC, Belfast (2018). In 2023, they opened The Gilbert & George Centre in Spitalfields, which serves as an exhibition space and permanent home for their artistic legacy.

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