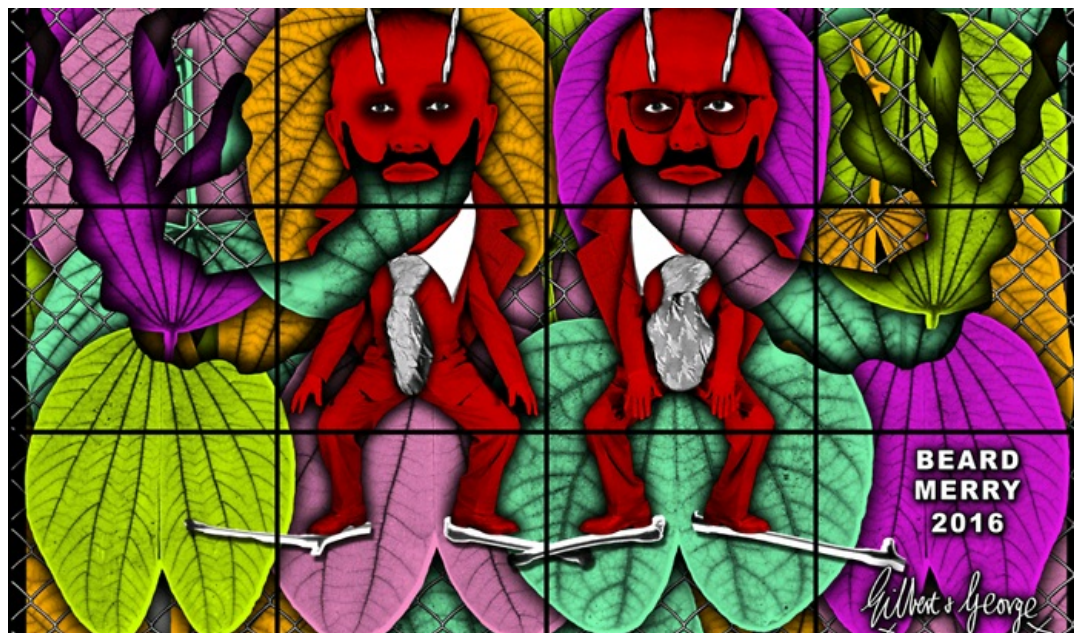


GILBERT & GEORGE

THE BEARD PICTURES

PARIS PANTIN

18 Oct 2017 - 20 Jan 2018



Opening: Wednesday 18 October 2017, 10pm in the presence of the artists

Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac is delighted to announce an exhibition of Gilbert and George's newest body of work *THE BEARD PICTURES*. Created over the past two years, the pictures will be unveiled over the next months in a series of exhibitions in New York, Paris, London, Brussels, Naples and Athens. The artists have made a selection of the *BEARD PICTURES* for Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac in Paris Pantin, which will vary in size up to the 23 m long triptych *OLD BEARD RUIN*.

Regarding this exhibition, the British writer and novelist Michael Bracewell states: "*THE BEARD PICTURES* are violent, eerie, grotesque, lurid and crazed. They show a dream-like world of paranoia and destruction and madness. Their strange sickly colours and creeping, smashed up, absurd landscapes confront the viewer with relentless aggression. They depict a world bereft of reason, in which negotiation no longer exists.

Gilbert & George take their places within the *BEARD PICTURES* as intense, red, staring, empty-headed and sinister versions of themselves. Their eyes are shadowed and bizarrely prettified. Mutant impish explorers or dead-headed sentinels, they seem to look at, into and through the viewer. They look possessed and serious. They look as though their spirits might have left their bodies. They look stern, absurd, imprisoned, mocking and mocked. In each picture they wear beards that are surreal and symbolic. Beards made of wire mesh, beards made of beer foam, beards made of flowers, beards comprising rabbits with snakes for tongues. 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* as both mask and meaning: a sign of the times.

In some of the *BEARD PICTURES*, the artists stand either in front of a barbed wire or mesh fence, or behind one. Elsewhere, rusted steel rods sprout from collapsing buildings of pre-stressed concrete. In yet other pictures, Gilbert & George are unsmiling comic grotesques, with tiny bodies and huge heads. Behind them a blank silvery void, extravagant ornamental foliage, wire mesh fencing, newspaper advertisements for bouncers, builders and sex workers, the heads in relief of popes, monarchs, worthies and heroes.

Aggressively absurd, trashing contemporary artistic niceties but resonant with intense symbolism, *THE BEARD PICTURES* turn history into a mad parade, their mood shape-shifting between that of science fiction, lucid dreaming and Victorian caricature. It is a vision and a form which brings to mind Oscar Wilde's account of Walter Pater's 'Essays': "...others are medieval in their strangeness of colour and passionate suggestion, and all of them absolutely modern, in the true meaning of the term modernity. For he to whom the present is the only thing that is present, knows nothing of the age in which he lives."

In the half century that they have lived and worked together as Living Sculptures, embarked on a visionary journey through the modern world, always together and always alone, Gilbert & George have made fiercely singular Anti-Art that is poetic, primal and emotionally driven. Order and madness are held in tension, vaudevillian and nursery rhyme absurdity take on the air of paranormal ritual.

The more the viewer contemplates the *BEARD PICTURES*, the more Gilbert & George appear like poltergeists within the cause of art and spirit sentinels within a world gone mad. In this chaos of trashed aesthetics and reversed values, all has become symbol and surface: mad symbols, presented with deadly seriousness. And as such they study the viewer."

Gilbert (born in the Dolomites, Italy in 1943) and George (born in Devon, England in 1942) met in the sculpture department at St Martin's School of Art in London in 1967. For their end-of-year exhibition, the *Snow Show*, Gilbert and George created their first work as a joint effort, a far cry from the formalist criteria of the art taught at the time. Their first break-through came with *Singing Sculpture* in 1969, when they covered themselves in multi-coloured metallic powder and sang the music-hall classic *Undemeath the Arches* in various locations around London. The pictures dating from the early 1970s are their first grid-arrangements, a format that would henceforth become their formal signature. In the 1980s, their iconography became more complex, drawing upon symbolism and allegory to explore themes of eroticism, religion, and politics.

During a career that has spanned 50 years, Gilbert & George have worked together as one artist and enjoyed significant international recognition. They have won several awards, including the Turner Prize (1986) and have been honoured with many distinctions, including the title of Honorary Professor of Philosophy at London Metropolitan University. They represented the UK at the 51st International Venice Biennale in 2005.

Their extensive number of solo exhibitions includes The Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven (1980), Guggenheim Museum, New York (1985), National Gallery, Beijing (1993), Shanghai Art Museum (1993), Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (1998), Serpentine Gallery, London (2002), Tate Modern, London, Haus der Kunst, Munich (both 2007), Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York (2008), CAC Malaga, Spain, Museum of

Contemporary Art, Zagreb, Croatia, Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels, Belgium, Deichtorhallen, Hamburg, Germany, Lentos Kunstmuseum, Linz, Austria, Laznia Centre for Contemporary Art, Gdansk, Poland (all in 2010), Nouveau Musée National de Monaco (2014), Museum of Modern Art, New York (2015), Museum of Old and New Art, Tasmania, Australia (2015) and Ludwig Museum of Contemporary Art, Budapest (2017). A fully illustrated catalogue with an essay by writer, novelist and cultural critic Michael Bracewell accompanies the exhibition of Gilbert & George, coinciding with the 50th anniversary of their collaboration.