

GILBERT & GEORGE  
*THE CORPSING PICTURES*

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New York



Gilbert & George, *HA-HA*, 2022. mixed media, 74.8 x 88.98 inches (190 x 226 cm)

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Lehmann Maupin presents *THE CORPSING PICTURES*, a new group of pictures by Gilbert & George. The exhibition marks their tenth solo presentation at the gallery. The exhibition comprises a suite of richly colored pictures starring the artists themselves in various poses of alarm and resignation as bones encroach in intricate patterns over their faces and bodies. Masterfully employing their signature use of bold color and symmetrical composition, Gilbert & George confront the subject of mortality and life itself with winking gallows humor, leaving each picture open to multiple interpretations.

Gilbert & George met as art students in 1967 at Saint Martin's School of Art, where they developed the concept of "living sculptures." Meticulously groomed and dressed in suits, the artists' legendary promenades through the streets of London, heads and hands coated in metallic powders, formed the blueprint for future art that centered on the performative and sculptural potential of the body. Since then, they have lived and worked together in London's East End, their individual identities subsumed into a vision of animate sculpture. Gilbert & George have long been beloved fixtures and keen observers of their changing world. As attentive to the detritus in the gutters of London as they are to the shifting social mores of the citizens who walk its streets, the artists have provoked strong reactions and critical thinking on subjects ranging from sex, violence, identity, and death.

From its title, *THE CORPSING PICTURES* promises to elaborate these long running thematic concerns through a destabilizing play on words. "Corpsing" is a term that comes from theater. It refers to the instant an actor breaks character by doing something unprofessional such as accidentally laughing or moving when they are supposed to be playing dead. In such moments, the character is revealed as an actor, the illusion broken, and the scene killed. In many of *THE CORPSING PICTURES*, Gilbert & George stare out at the viewer, breaking the fourth wall through direct address and deliberately embracing the cardinal mistake of rookie actors by "corpsing" death.

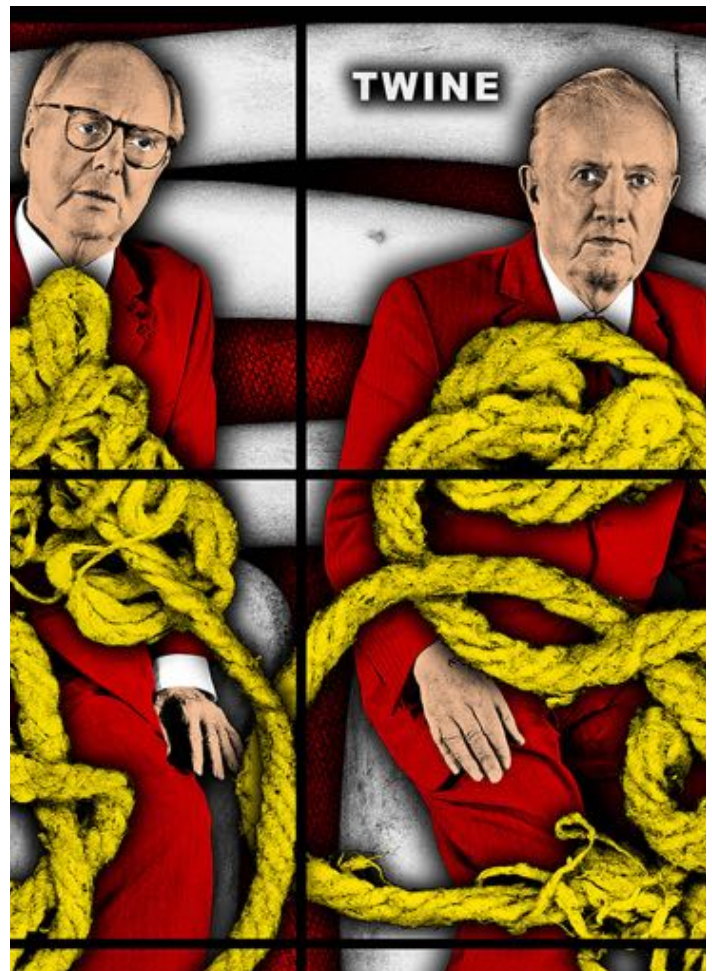
Each picture is richly colored in a red and gold palette that features Gilbert & George alternately ensconced, entombed, and enclosed behind a lively formation of bones. Skeletons of various origins make a sepulchral appearance. Many are human (*BONE BOX* and *HA-HA* have a distinctly archeological character); some are vegetal (*RIB TIES* and *TIES* include the delicate fringes of desiccated flora); other bones are implied, as in *CHAINS*, which features no visible bones at all but simply Gilbert & George—still en fleshed—whose skeletons provide the armature for their signature suits.

The heft and character of the bones play out a drama of memento mori told in visually striking vignettes. *EQUALS* centers two large bones across the bodies of Gilbert & George, playfully recalling the adage that death is the great equalizer. *KISS BONE* anoints the pair with the kiss of death or life—a hulking X formed by two massive femurs. *BONE WHEEL*, on the other hand, features delicate patterns of bones arranged in pleasing ornaments across the picture plane. Indeed, *THE CORPSING PICTURES* are insistently horizontal, signaling the position of final repose by references to pavement, litter, vegetation, prone bodies, and

upturned shoe soles. Many of these bones are no longer held in vertical alignment by ligaments and muscles, but clattered to the floor—perhaps the result of a divining incantation or a diverting game such as pick up sticks. As Shakespeare's Hamlet put it to the gravedigger:

"Did these bones cost no more the breeding but to play at loggets with them?"

*THE CORPSING PICTURES* debut as the Gilbert & George Centre opens its doors in London's East End. An important addition to the London museum landscape, the Centre will provide dedicated exhibition space for Gilbert & George, ensuring that the arc of their singular career remains publicly accessible. Museums have long been analogized to mausoleums. Ever alive to the power of language and the language of power, the artists' *CORPSING PICTURES* might be understood as a characteristically sideways gloss on the enshrinement of their legacy. Like Shakespeare's wise fool, Gilbert & George embrace the comedic role of the gravedigger, entombing themselves while asserting that they have never been more alive.



Gilbert & George, *TWINE*, 2022 (detail). mixed media, 74.8 x 59.45 inches (190 x 151 cm)

**Gilbert & George** (b. 1943, San Martin de Tor, Italy & 1942, Plymouth, United Kingdom) met in 1967 in art school at Saint Martin's, where they first developed their signature form of "living sculptures" by walking around the streets of London with their heads and hands coated with multi-color metallic powders. Since then, they have lived and worked together, their individual identities subsumed into a vision of animate sculpture, becoming representations of the universal human condition, which is a central theme in their work. Their embrace of video technology, along with their well-known photo-collage works, allowed Gilbert & George to extend their living sculptures beyond a particular time and place and broadcast their art to wider audiences, establishing their motto of "art for all."

Shortly after art school, they moved to London's East End, then a bustling immigrant and working-class neighborhood, which has served as their home and studio for almost 50 years. Their changing neighborhood, which has become a gentrified creative center, has significantly influenced their work. The artists often appear in their work as witnesses to life unfolding in the sociopolitical and urban conditions of this area. Through imagery specific to London and the East End in particular, Gilbert & George create an ongoing portrait of the city that includes street signs, ginkgo trees, graffiti, posterage, and gum-stained sidewalks.

Gilbert & George received their B.F.A.s at the Munich Academy of Art, Germany, and Oxford Art School, England, respectively and received their M.F.A.s from Saint Martin's School of Art in London. Recent solo exhibitions of their work have been organized at Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand (2022); Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt, Germany (2021); Kunsthalle Zürich, Zürich, Switzerland (2020); Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo, Norway (2019); Reykjavic Art Museum, Reykjavic, Iceland (2019); Louis Vuitton Foundation, Paris, France (2019); Helsinki Art Museum, Helsinki, Finland (2018); Ludwig Museum of Contemporary Art, Budapest, Hungary (2017); Museum of Old and New Art, Tasmania, Australia (2016); Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY (2015); Diechtorhallen, Hamburg, Germany (2011); the Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, the Netherlands (2010); de Young museum, San Francisco, CA (2008); Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, WI (2008); Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY (2008); and the Tate Modern, London, United Kingdom (2007). Select recent group exhibitions featuring their work include *The Double: Identity and Difference in Art Since 1900*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (2022); *Alter Egos / Projected Selves*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY (2021); *The Royal Academy of Arts Summer Exhibition 2017*, Royal Academy of Arts, London, United Kingdom (2017); and *Take Me (I'm Yours)*, Jewish Museum, New York, NY (2016).

Gilbert & George's work is in numerous international public and private collections, including Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL; Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY; Musée d'Art Contemporain de Bordeaux, Bordeaux, France; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA; Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY; and Tate, London, United Kingdom.



Portrait of Gilbert & George, 2021

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# LEHMANN MAUPIN

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## ABOUT THE GALLERY

Rachel Lehmann and David Maupin co-founded Lehmann Maupin in 1996 in New York. Since Inception, Lehmann Maupin has served as a leading contemporary art gallery with locations in the U.S., Europe, and Asia. For over 25 years, Lehmann Maupin has been instrumental in introducing international artists in new geographies and building long-lasting curatorial relationships. Known for championing diverse voices, the gallery's program proudly features artists whose work challenges notions of identity, and shapes international culture. Today, the gallery has locations in New York, Hong Kong, Seoul and London, as well as a team in mainland China. In the past year with growing opportunities in new markets, the gallery has opened seasonal spaces in Aspen, Palm Beach, Taipei, and Beijing.



Lehmann Maupin in New York. Photo by Matthew Herrmann