

Gilbert & George 2012

Lehmann Maupin Gallery and Sonnabend Gallery are pleased to present Gilbert & George's LONDON PICTURES on view 26 April – 23 June 2012 at both Lehmann Maupin locations 540 West 26th Street and 201 Chrystie Street, and at Sonnabend Gallery, 536 West 22nd Street.

For their first gallery exhibition in New York since THE PERVERSIVE PICTURES, 2004, Lehmann Maupin and Sonnabend present LONDON PICTURES. These monumental pictures with titles such as "ARRESTED", "ATTACKED STRAIGHT", "BOMB", "LOVER", "MISSING", "SUICIDE", take their names from newspaper posters and as a whole, portray the sorrow and humanity of western city life.

Gilbert & George have described in several interviews how London, its grandeur, mystery and drama has been a major inspiration of their determinedly confrontational and richly atmospheric art for nearly five decades. Over this period, Gilbert & George have shadowed London's moods, identifying within the city's sleepless thoroughfares all of the messy, precious, undeniable aspects of the modern human condition.

These 292 new LONDON PICTURES enable the city to speak for itself, in the language of 3712 newspaper posters, stolen/retrieved, one by one by the artists themselves for more than 6 years, and then sorted and classified by them according to subject. This method, in the words of the artist, allows each picture to 'decide itself' – its subject, title and size determined and denoted alphabetically and numerically by the findings of the classification process. In this, Gilbert & George have sought to eliminate the conscious act of 'art-making', asserting instead the reality, as reported by the print news media of London, that lies at the heart of their subject: the routine volatility of contemporary society. Behind each poster, however blunt or abbreviated, lies the truth and inviolable realism of a human situation, its impact and consequences. It is this truth that Gilbert & George have described as the 'moral dimension' that they must identify within a subject before they can engage with it within their art.

Brooding and violent, at times absurd and at others disquieting, the LONDON PICTURES reveal what might be termed the nervous system of quotidian contemporary society: the impulses, outbursts, sorrows, hopes, temper and desires of daily urban life.

The extraneous detail in these pictures is sparse and limited: the figures of Gilbert & George, their expressions at once stern or seemingly distracted; streets, net curtains, reflections in car windows. Within the townscape of this moral audit, the artists appear to pass like ghosts or seers, alternately watchful and inert, as though their spirits were haunting the very streets and buildings that these pictures describe. In this the artists have been inspired by their readings of Lord Dowding's published accounts, as delivered to him, he claimed, by the ghosts of killed R.A.F. pilots, of an induction into the afterlife.

In addition to their 'automatic' means of creation, Gilbert & George have distinguished by the suffix 'STRAIGHT', after the title, those pictures that are comprised of newspaper posters printed in a bold sans serif typeface, rather than the more cursive, 'handwritten' typography of the remainder. This distinction, the artists have said, also highlights the divisive and irrelevant use of the word 'gay' – as a meaningful adjective. For example: one needs not to refer to 'gay marriage', when 'marriage' alone will suffice.

In their epic and relentless extent, simultaneously Dickensian and ultra-modern, the LONDON PICTURES comprise a great visual novel, revealing without judgment the ceaseless relay of urban drama, in all its gradations of hope and suffering.