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Gilbert and George
The Believing World
20th March - 4th May 1984

Gilbert and George's exhibition of new photo-pieces - their first in this country for three years - opens at our Dering Street galleries on Tuesday: large works at Number 23, smaller ones at Number 9. Gilbert and George treat every show as important, but this one is of more than usual significance for them. We hope by now you have received our private view card for The Believing World and that you will be joining us for a drink at 6.00 pm with the artists, who are just back from launching their big American touring show in Baltimore. (It finishes at the Guggenheim Museum in New York in July 1985).

More than fifteen years have passed since Gilbert and George set out on their expedition to create a new kind of sculpture. It started as a pilgrimage, remember the early idyllic works, the Singing Sculpture, The Drawings, The Paintings, the images of the summer countryside so shockingly and deliberately interrupted by the Drinking Sculpture. Gradually they emerged from the welter of blood and broken glass with a martial art, which by the end of the seventies had the makings of a full-scale crusade, for a radical, intellectual art, by the people, for the people, which aimed to pursue beauty with relentless honesty through every aspect of Gilbert and George's life and of society, whether in nature or the streets of the city or in the mind.

At first their neat-suited double persona was the main focus of attention, but from the end of the Seventies they went out into the world, and since 1980 no hidden beauty seems to miss their eagle attention, from their local East End skyline to a graffito head on a lavatory door. Their emotional response has turned from tramps to soldiers and war memorials, from religion to sexuality, from happiness to unhappiness. It has embraced the mad, the drunk, local workers and budding plants and flowers. It has become increasingly metaphorical and complex psychologically and philosophically.

These glittering panels of steel, glass and photographs, of Everyman and his surroundings, are the equivalent of mediaeval tapestries depicting the adventures of knights in armour. In 1980-81 Gilbert and George often used the mediaeval parallel, dubbing young Londoners going about their business as 'knights'. They were not poking fun, rather giving them due dignity. By the simple use of metaphor they give them a precise position in the history of the world. (Indeed time and place are vital elements in everything they do).

Heraldry and pageantry play a substantial role in Gilbert and George's work as they do in our British lives in general. Gilbert and George's pursuit of a vernacular art is part of their crusade. For to them it is of the utmost importance that the aesthetic forms they have invented are not only ahead of the rest (they have influenced many of the younger new painters world-wide) but that they are also British.

Gilbert and George see themselves as belonging to that line of radical British artists which passes through the pre-Raphaelites, the architect Augustus Welby Pugin and the great decorative artists of the nineteenth century, from Owen Jones to Christopher Dresser and William Morris, and on to Wyndham Lewis, the inventor of Vorticism. The intellectual aspect of art in Britain has, they feel, been grossly underestimated by a basically anti-British art establishment. The injustice only adds fuel to the fire of Gilbert and George's argument and determination to their industriousness.

Like their spiritual predecessors Gilbert and George's work is both didactic and moralistic and they make similar use of the power of the heraldic and the symbolic. Many of their recent photo-pieces have been on a monumental scale similar to or even larger than their historical - Baroque perhaps - counterparts. As much as sheer size, another immediate aspect of the recent work is its brilliant and extraordinary colour. In 1980 the artists added yellow, green and blue to the original red dye used to colour their images and last year they incorporated violet, orange, pink, brown and even a gold metalized sheeting as collage on the top.

Less than ever are the new works to be seen as photographs. Since their first use of photograms (direct exposure of an image or object onto light-sensitive paper) Gilbert and George have developed this technique for use with photographs and on its own, almost as if once more they are making giant drawings or paintings. With this and the help of new techniques of masking-out and outlining their images, the artists have created a Space Age art, a new visual language which is at once symphonic and magic, and which can contrast natural forms with man-made images and create a huge range of perspective effects.

Gilbert and George have said that every day marks a 'frightful foray' into the human soul. It also finds them exploring new ways of articulating things which people otherwise think and feel, which are vital parts of their lives, but which often have had no recent or even past expression in art. Gilbert and George see beauty everywhere, in all the fundamentals of life, love, hate, sex, violence, religion. They don't criticise or judge. One of their great values is that from the beginning they have retained a peculiar ability to respond to the ideas of youth, the ideas of the rising generation. And in many of their recent works children and youths have a special place. In a sense they have become the heroes while Gilbert and George act as the donor figures, to the future.

In 1978 Gilbert and George wrote a text for use in catalogues, which you may find useful:

We believe in the Art, the Beauty and the
Life of the Artist who is an eccentric
Person with something to say for Himself.

We uphold Traditional Values with our
love of Victory, Kindness and Honesty.

We are fascinated by the richness of
the fabric of Our World and we honour
the High-Mindedness of Man as the
ultimate Form and Meaning of our Art
Beauty is Our Art.

Do let us know if we can help with further information. Photographs of the new work will be available from next week. Please call Judy Adam or Anne d'Offay on 01-499 4695.



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