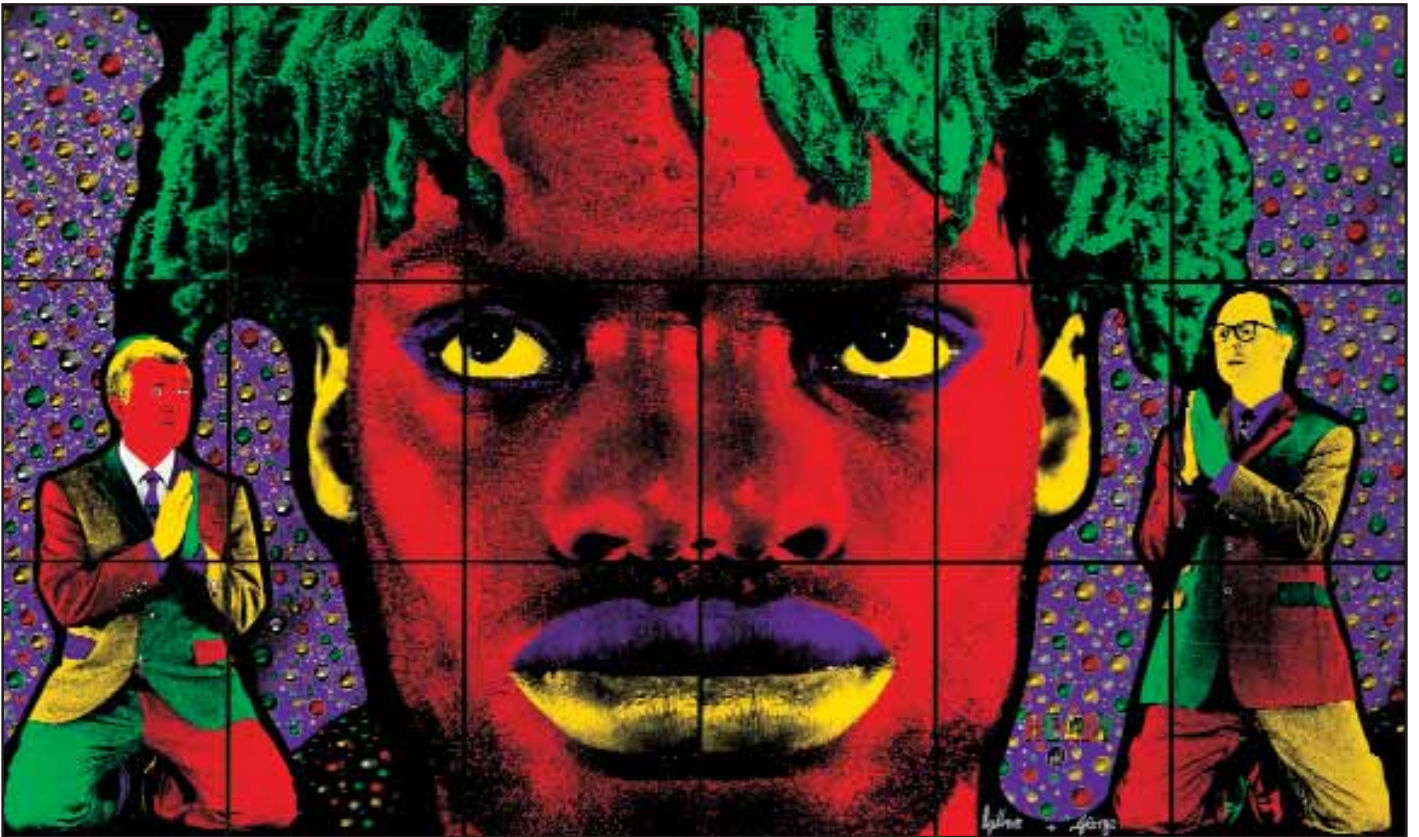


MODERN
TATE

GILBERT & GEORGE MAJOR EXHIBITION

15 February – 7 May 2007

Information and Activity Pack for Teachers



This pack contains five posters showing images of key Gilbert & George artworks on one side, with information, ideas for discussion and activities on the other. Designed for use in the gallery or classroom, the pack can be used to accompany a visit to the Gilbert & George exhibition at Tate Modern, or to support varied classroom discussions and project ideas.

Produced with support from



Introduction

HEADY 1991
(cover image)
McMaster Museum of
Art. Gift of Herman
Levy, Esq. OBE

'...We like to think that we're forming our tomorrows, that we're making pictures that don't exist in reality, that maybe tomorrow will be a little bit more like our pictures than it would otherwise.'

Gilbert & George are an artist partnership who have worked and shared their lives together for forty years. Their art explores universal themes such as death, poverty, religion, identity, being an outsider, and youth culture, and doesn't shy away from difficult issues. At the same time, it remains highly ambiguous and playful.

The Gilbert & George exhibition at Tate Modern is the first time a British artist has been given a monographic show in the gallery, and is the biggest single-artist exhibition that the gallery has ever put on. (Although they are two people, Gilbert & George are always seen as one artist). The whole of level 4 at Tate Modern has been taken over by the artists; even the cafés, windows and public concourse are covered in their artworks. When you visit the exhibition you will feel that you are entering the world of Gilbert & George.

About Gilbert & George

Gilbert, born Gilbert Proesch in the Dolomites, Italy in 1943 and George born George Passmore in Devon, England in 1942, met and studied at St Martin's School of Art in London from 1967. By 1969 they were reacting against approaches to sculpture then dominant at St Martin's, which they regarded as elitist and poor at communicating outside an art context. At that time, artists such as Richard Long, Hamish Fulton, Barry Flanagan and Bruce McLean studying under Anthony Caro in the sculpture department at St Martins were involved in making and discussing art in conceptual and formal terms. Consideration of truth to materials, colour, scale, weight and form predominated. Referring to the dominant ethos in the art school at that time Gilbert & George have said '*the bad things in art then were emotion, colour, sentiment, feeling, sexuality, all those were taboo*'. This was the exactly the direction they chose to pursue. From the outset, Gilbert & George wanted to collapse the distance between art and the artist. They say they cannot separate their art from any aspect of their lives.

Although working in a variety of media, Gilbert & George referred to all their work as sculpture. Their early work took the form both of what they called Postal Sculptures and work in which they presented themselves as Living Sculptures. One early Postal Sculpture consisting of a drawn image of themselves looking out of their window at falling snow, accompanied by a text ('as we began to look we felt ourselves being taken into a sculpture of overwhelming purity life and peace a rare and new art-piece'), was typical in taking quotidian banality as the stuff of art.

A similar equation between their art and their life was proposed in other Living Sculptures, such as OUR NEW SCULPTURE 1969, THE SINGING SCULPTURE 1969 and RED SCULPTURE 1975, which focused attention on their own

stylised actions and on their image as old-fashioned gentlemen. Between 1970 and 1974 they also made drawings (referred to as Charcoal on Paper Sculptures) and paintings to give a more tangible form to their identity as Living Sculptures. These were drawn from projections of photographic images as part of their consistent rejection of traditional techniques.

In the early 1980s, Gilbert & George began to add a range of bright colours to their photographic images. In 1984 they were awarded the Turner Prize and in 1987 they had a major exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in London. In 1992 their largest production ever, NEW DEMOCRATIC PICTURES, was exhibited at Aarhus Kunstmuseum, Aarhus, Denmark. Their belief that they are making an 'Art for Life's Sake' and an 'Art for All' was, at the beginning of the 1990s, given a renewed emphasis through their exhibitions mounted in Moscow (1990), Beijing and Shanghai (1993).

The series of work produced in 2003, TWENTY LONDON E1 PICTURES, introduced computer-generated imagery for the first time. NEW HORNY PICTURES 2001, GINKO PICTURES 2005 (first presented in the UK pavilion at the Venice Biennale) and SONOFAGOD PICTURES 2006 are all represented in this exhibition together with the BOMB PICTURES which have been made this year and are being shown for the first time at Tate Modern.

Biographical material taken in part from Grove biography's entry on the Tate website

How to use this pack

The pack is primarily designed to facilitate teaching key stages 3, 4 and 5, although activities can be adapted to suit all ages. Each thematic poster has a full-colour key work image on one side which you can put up on your classroom wall. Photocopy the other side first. The key work image is backed-up by contextual information about the work and broader theme, links to other works by Gilbert & George and other artists, discussion points and gallery-based activities.

The pack suggests discussion activities that could take place in the classroom as a preparation for visiting the gallery, and we recommend that you use some of these ideas to prepare for your group visit. Gallery-based activities can be done in the exhibition. Some of these activities can be followed up back at school.

We recommend that teachers make a preparatory visit before bringing a group.

Please note: the exhibition contains imagery of male nudity, sexuality and bodily functions, which some people may find challenging.

Curriculum links and schemes of work

For schools, the exhibition presents a good opportunity to work in a cross-curricular capacity, approaching a broad selection of themes and ideas, many of which may directly impact upon young people's lives and experiences.

The following schemes of work are relevant to this pack:

- Key Stage 3: 7A Self Image / 8C Shared View / 9C Personal Places Public Spaces.
- Key Stage 4 and 5: The themes presented in this pack will lend themselves to a collection of subject areas, such as Citizenship, Graphics, Art and Design, English, Sociology and Psychology.

Booking Information

How to Book

All groups must book in advance to visit temporary exhibitions. Ticket price is £4 for students and teachers who are visiting in a group.

To make a booking email education.bookings@tate.org.uk, or call Education Bookings on 020 7887 3959.

- For General Information, call 020 7401 5128
- For Education Information, call 0207 401 5234

Have the following ready when you call:

- A range of possible dates
- A full address and telephone number
- Group size and age of pupils

For a lunch slot and place to store coats and bags, please book well in advance and ask for these when booking.

- The advised maximum group size is 60 for school groups. Groups larger than 30 will be asked to split into smaller groups and enter the Exhibition at different time slots.
- For school groups, the following teacher-student ratios are required at all times: 1:5 for under 5 yrs, 1:10 for 6–11yr olds, 1: 15 for 12–16yr olds and 1: 20 for 16–18yr olds.
- We strongly recommend a planning visit to check that the content of the rooms is suitable to the level of your group.
- To take advantage of our special group discounts all Group tickets for Tate Modern Exhibitions must be booked and paid for in advance.

Guidelines

On confirmation of your booking we will send you important Guidelines and a Health and Safety statement. Please fully brief all responsible adults and visiting students and ensure the Guidelines are observed throughout your visit. You will need to sign that you have read and understood these Guidelines on your arrival at the reception desk.



CHRISTS
1992
MaxmArt

Being an Artist

Work in Focus – THE SINGING SCULPTURE 1969

Image of a performance of THE SINGING SCULPTURE 1970



THE SINGING SCULPTURE brought Gilbert & George their first taste of fame in 1969. The piece consists of the artists performing a 1930s music hall song called 'Underneath the Arches'. Gilbert & George would stand on a table and sing along to a record of the old song, wearing tweed suits, with their faces painted bronze, and using a glove and a plastic walking stick as props. The song's lyrics tell about the life of a tramp in London whose home is outdoors underneath the arches of a bridge. Gilbert & George first performed the piece under a bridge in London, and were soon invited to perform it in many European cities where it was always received as a sensation. You can watch a film of a performance of THE SINGING SCULPTURE on the exhibition concourse, near the lifts, and the actual props used are also on display on the concourse.

Collaboration

Very early on in their career Gilbert & George established themselves as a partnership involved in a collaborative practice, notably in their Living Sculpture pieces, in which they **are** the artwork. By becoming one artist, both subject and object of their work, in a sense they rejected their individual identities.

If we started to argue, everything would fall apart very fast. Because it is based on accepting the two, the view of two people together.

Discussion

- Think of some examples of partnerships where the identity of each person is presented as one. Refer to the worlds of music and sport to find examples such as the Beckhams.
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of working as one?
- What would the ground rules be for working as a partnership?
- What could happen to make the partnership go wrong?

School-based Activity

Performing a Collaboration

Divide the class into pairs. Provide half of the pairs with a small selection of images of city life culled from magazines and the internet and some randomly selected text to cut up. The task is to assemble a collage upon a theme of 'city life'. The collage needs to contain a clear focus or message. One pair of students makes the collage whilst another pair observes the process, referring to a set of questions they have devised beforehand about issues around collaboration.

The observers then feedback their findings to the whole class. The observed pair can also provide their viewpoint and answer questions from the rest of the class.

What are the main issues in collaborative working and how do students think they perform best, in a duo or solo?

How did the collaboration affect the imagery that was created?

How significant is the partnership to the type of work produced in each case?

Gallery Activity

A Portrait of the Artists

Look at the range of work displayed on the level 4 concourse which includes early black and white photographic works and films of performance pieces. After some careful looking and 'fact finding', present a written or verbal portrait of the artists of these works to your group. Look at the display closely for clues to their identity, lifestyle, public persona,

communication style, themes, preferred medium etc. Imagine that the person reading or hearing your description has no idea what an artist is or what they do and you are presenting them with a very comprehensive description.

Links to other works

Look at the work produced by some other well-known partnerships in the visual arts, for example: The Chapman Brothers, Sue Webster and Tim Noble, Jane and Louise Wilson, Peter Fischli and David Weiss. Is the collaboration evident in the final art works? If so, how?

The Artist as Outsider

Gilbert & George have often said they align themselves with society's outsiders, such as the tramp they sing about in the 'Underneath the Arches' song of their 'Singing Sculpture'.

If you are submerged in normal life, then your view will be normal. So we have to keep separate from normal life in order to be able to say something that is not known. People come to art for something that they don't understand, that's not in their life already.

Throughout history, the artist has often been represented as an outsider, set apart from other members of society, due either to the nature of their gift to see the world through different eyes; or possibly because of being unconventional and different in their habits and lifestyle choices. Some artists have deliberately chosen to position themselves so that they remain outside societal norms. Some artists make work through social activism and being engaged directly on the inside of political action. The idea that artists can hold a mirror up to society and reflect what is going on without being a part of what they observe is an interesting conundrum.

As well as aligning themselves with outsiders, Gilbert & George can also appear to be apart and distant from what is going on around them. Sometimes they are literally elevated above other characters in their images. For example, look at the image *CHRISTS* 1992 (illustrated overleaf), on display in room 12. Echoing the shape of the outstretched arms of Christ on the cross, Gilbert & George are upside down and floating off the edge of the image. In contrast, the portrait of a young man with long hair is placed dead centre and facing outward with his eyes gazing just above the viewer's head. Are the artists floating between heaven and hell, between the earthly cityscape and the non-earthly realm of God? The totemic shape of the connected-up figures is balanced by the symmetry of two dead

moths and the radiating patterns on either side. Could the moth be read as a symbol of death?

Discussion

- By the very nature of being radical or extreme do you automatically position yourself as an outsider in society?
- If you are unconventional are you likely to gather more attention than if you 'follow form'? Is this a way of getting known or creating notoriety?
- Can an outsider be a better commentator on the social norms and values because they live outside the rules?
- Think of some examples, either from real life, literature or film to support your discussion.

Gallery Activity

Ask students to focus on the theme of 'the position of the artist in the work'. Choose several rooms and make sketches, notes, diagrams or charts that analyse the literal position and the role of the artists in relation to the overall image. Ask students to report back and to comment on what they have discovered.

How is the position of the artist central to an understanding of what the work is about?

Do the students view the work differently now that they have examined the artist's position in their body of work?



NINE from NINETEEN NINETY NINE 1999
 A quadripartite picture
 Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna

Representing the Body / Representing People

Work in focus – NINE from NINETEEN NINETY NINE 1999

On display in room 15 (illustrated overleaf).

In this four-part group of pictures that bridge the end of the twentieth century and the start of a new millennium, each numeral of the date is spread over four panels. The work seems to reassert the artist's home location in East London of which they have said '*There is nothing that doesn't happen in the world that doesn't happen in the East End*'. In the third image of the group, nudity seems 'natural' and the pose is natural, if a little self-conscious. In the background, two figures photographed in the street are casual passers by in a world that is cluttered with slogans and symbols of a political nature, but perhaps of no consequence to either the artists or 'the man in the street'? The images include microscopic views of blood and urine and a street map view of East London. The interior world of the artists and the exterior world seem to collide. In the first and last pictures of the series (the last image is illustrated overleaf), a frenzy of signs is placed around a massive close up of the eyes of the artists. The signs framing their eyes are like thought bubbles, fragments of speech or snatched pieces of other's lives. The choice of words echoes the plight of people in despair (for example, 'everybody has problems worse than mine'), sexual slang, religious and political slogans and a deliberate and comical despoiling of street signs and names.

The Body

'One man naked is a male study; more than one, well ... that's quite serious – two men naked are more naked than one'.

Traditionally, in the history of art it is the naked female body that is used as a subject to represent ideals of beauty and the natural. In Gilbert & George's artwork however we see the mature, naked, male body, revealed without inhibition or any attempt at idealisation. The artists have said that by literally baring themselves, the public will see them as they are and be able to trust them more than if they took on a superior role. They also suggest that by humiliating themselves, they are free from being attacked and therefore strengthened.

The artists have also turned their gaze inward into the microscopic world of their own body fluids and represented these in rich colours and on a vast scale. They present a biological or medical view of the body. In some images, the forms and colours of bodily fluids take on the nature of a vast cosmic backdrop against which the artists are minor figures.

Discussion

- One of the main subjects and themes in visual art is the human body. Why is it such a cause of endless fascination?
- Do the large-scale representations of bodily fluids in the work of Gilbert and George make us think differently about our bodies and bodily processes?
- Are bodily fluids a good subject for art work?
- Images of the human body reveal a great deal about the cultures that produce them, be they fashion ads, state portraits, news photos, or works of visual art. Discuss how TV programmes such as CSI open up a new terrain for the visual and the psychological through the internal view of the human body.

School-based Activity

Students could research the structure of bodily organisms such as cells or bacteria and use these as the basis for artworks in which key characteristics of the organism are radically changed, for example through formal qualities or contextually.

Gallery Activity

Explore Layers of Meaning

Look at the series of works titled BLOOD TEARS SPUNK PISS 1996 on display in room 14. These works are visually overwhelming, richly-coloured and patterned. Some people might think they resemble abstract paintings. Draw up four columns labelled: Body Fluid, Function, Fact, Associated Idea. Make word lists by writing in each column. For example: Blood/keeps the body alive /can get infected/symbol of life itself 'life blood'. Or, Sperm/creates new life/only men/virility and fertility.

Compare what people have written and how the image has opened up a discussion about a much wider range of themes and issues than disgust. Is it only by association with certain ideas about bodily fluids that we may find the pictures repulsive or horrific?

Links

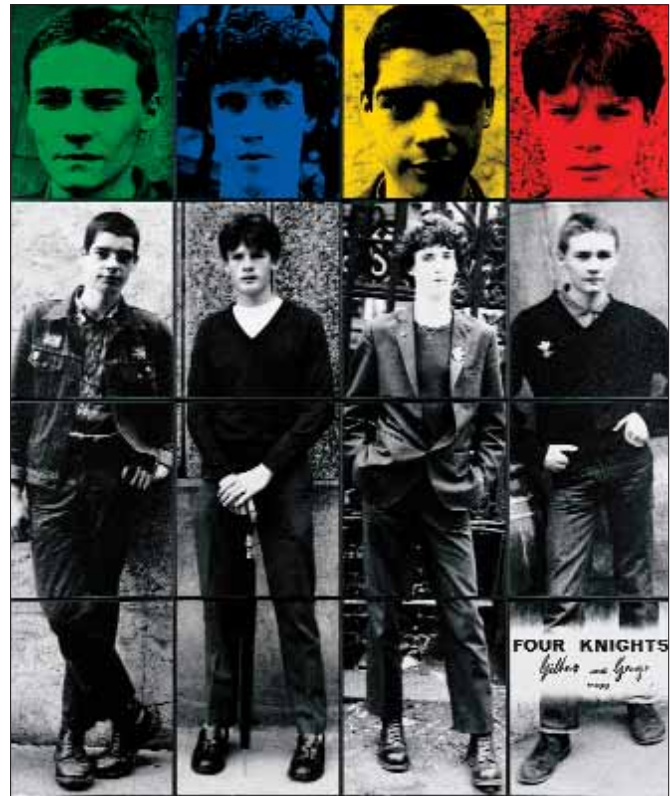
In contemporary art, artists might use body fluids themselves in art, rather than representations of them. Examples include the highly controversial *Piss Christ* 1987 by Andres Serrano, a photograph of a crucifix submerged in urine; *Self* 1991, recast 1996 by Marc Quinn, a frozen cast of the artist's head made entirely of his own blood, and *Piss Flowers* by Helen Chadwick 1991–2, twelve white-enamelled bronzes cast from cavities made by urinating in the snow.

Representation

To make an image of someone is a powerful act. To represent a person is to make a statement about them. In *FOUR KNIGHTS* 1980 (illustrated here), we see four young men of around the same age posing for the camera/the artists. They seem at ease, casual, slouching; but also formal, not smiling,

FOUR KNIGHTS 1980
Southampton City
Art Gallery

self-conscious. The title suggests something heroic, but the appearance of the young men is not one of action or nobility, if anything there is an underlying sense of menace. The perceived threat of young men who 'hang about' in groups on the streets persists throughout all social periods. The only clues we have to individual personality and identity are the details of their clothes, shoes and personal adornments.



We can read these as clues to the style icons of the time (1980). The enlargement of the faces in colour gives a heraldic importance to their identity, but the very fact of their ordinariness leaves us uncertain and unsettled about why we are looking at them and them back at us. In that silent encounter we question that very relationship. Is it one of admiration, desire or fear?

Discussion

- Gilbert & George use a range of young people in their images. These people are paid for modelling and there is no attempt to disguise their identity. Some critics describe these models as stand-ins for the artists themselves, presenting youthful identities as the artists grow older. Is there empathy between the artists and their subjects? Or, is their way of looking at people the detached and objective eye of a social documentarist?
- When an artist uses portraits should they avoid stereotyping and present a truthful or meaningful image of that particular cultural identity? Do portraits of young people in the media usually endorse a stereotype?
- Think of examples in music or visual culture where an identity is expressed and explored through an art form. Rap music talks about certain social groups and the codes they live by, but which singer's version is the true version of the lived culture? Do women rappers tell the same story as the male rappers?
- Are the only people able to make a true image those inside the culture being discussed or shown? If someone else looks into your personal world and makes images about it – are they being a cultural tourist?

Gallery Activity

Identity and Stereotypes

Look at the images titled PATRIOTS 1980, MAD 1980 on display in room 8, THE ALCOHOLIC 1978, THE QUEUE 1978 on display in room 6 and MY WORLD on display in the Espresso Bar. Ask students to write a short statement or sentence a) from the point of view of the subject of the image and then b) from the viewer's point of view.

Compare the statements that people have written for each image and how many different messages the image communicates about the subjects of the photographs.

You could adapt some of the statements to create newspaper headlines and create a mock up of a newspaper article.

School-based Activity

Young people and youth culture often get bad press. Where does this attitude come from? Is it because society says young people are a problem?

What does a true image or statement about youth culture look like?

How do public and private images of young people differ? Is it only in terms of the context in which we see each type of image?

Research and then discuss the representation of youth in the media at different points in the twentieth century. You could look back to the early 1960s at mods and rockers, or skinheads and punks from the 1970s and 1990s. More recently, there have been the East/West Coast rapper rivalries in the USA.

In contemporary times, how has the media shifted in its representation of 'hoodies' and gang cultures?

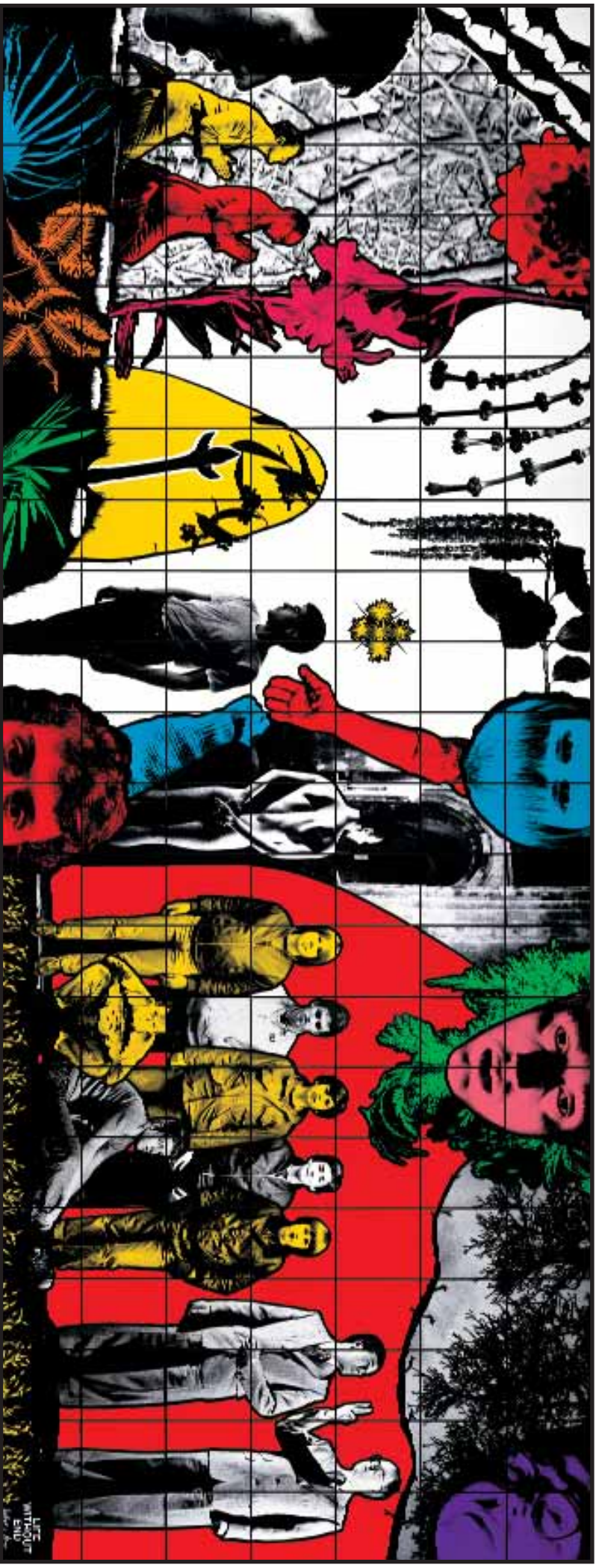
Compare different media reports and rewrite them from the class's own perspective, using their own life experiences.

Perhaps use a digital camera for students to take their own photos to insert into the articles in order to disrupt their meaning or create new meanings.

Links

Look at social documentary photography from different points of the twentieth century. Discuss how different types and groups of people are treated by different photographic styles and approaches.

Examples to look at might include the work of Robert Frank, Diane Arbus, Chris Steele Perkins and Martin Parr, Richard Billingham (he documents his own family) and Gillian Wearing.



LIFE WITHOUT END 1982
Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown,
Massachusetts, museum purchase, Kathryn Hurd Fund

Reading Images and Making Pictures

Work in focus – LIFE WITHOUT END 1982

On display in room 10 (illustrated overleaf).

The artists have said that this image *'is like a medieval journey into what you call a paradise, a new world'*. They also say the title means that *'we know that nobody goes to heaven and we know that nobody goes to hell. But life will continue forever'*. As we look at the image's details and symbols we can see trees in bud or fruit, leafless trees, tombstone shapes, a star or cross, a church doorway, a naked boy and clothed boys, a fist and an open hand, a row of corn, and the artists themselves both kneeling in prayer and gesticulating. At the left-hand edge is a shouting face. This is a young man who approached Gilbert & George to ask if he could model for them. And he did. All the parts of this image combine in a colourful emblematic parade of references to nature, Christianity, youth, humanity, contained within the format of modern day fable, a history painting, a fresco or a stained glass window.

Reading Images

The work of Gilbert & George is rich in the use of symbols and signs from a wide variety of sources. Many of these sources are from the immediate urban landscape in which the artists live in East London. Signs and symbols are also drawn from an eclectic range of categories, amongst which are nature and the city, the body, geometry and organic forms, religion, street graphics and architecture. We can access the pictures on different levels, from recognising details with which we are personally familiar, to becoming sophisticated viewers able to decode and recognise a wide variety of sources for these images.

For example, in the SONOFAGOD PICTURES, 2006 on display in room 18, there is a mixture of references to Judaism, Islam and Christianity and the style of Celtic and Moorish patterns. In FINGLE FANGLE, ISHMAEL AND DEVOUT from 2004 on display in room 17, the artists use Hebrew and Arabic check script as a part of an elaborate decorative schema. In the GINGKO series of pictures from 2005 and in FATES 2005 both on display in room 17 in particular there is a disturbing fusion and confusion of symbols, text and expressive gestures that seem to plug directly into a heightened emotional state around fundamentalism, faith and systems of belief.

Discussion

- Gilbert & George draw upon what they see happening in their neighbourhood, an area of London made up of many cultures, languages, religions and lifestyles living closely together. What do students think about the ethics of appropriating different cultures and blending them together? Does the overall message become confused by doing this? Does the

culture being shown become out of context or weakened? Think about and discuss examples of contemporary music where many different styles or cultures are fused together.

Gallery Activity

Devise a trail throughout the gallery to collect examples of symbols used by the artists. For example, the cross, crucifix, flowers, trees, hand gestures etc. Sketch and make notes on how each symbol appears in different guises throughout the exhibition. Compare how these symbols might appear in other contexts or in their original context.

School-based Activity

Styles and icons of youth culture operate like a password to another world. Gather together images that symbolise your culture, perhaps clothes, music, gestures, key words or phrases, styles, popular figures or celebrities. Make two lists:

- How your culture is seen by others: outsiders
- How your culture is known by us: insiders
- How many of the symbols or elements mean the same in each category?

Making Pictures

Gilbert & George have been using photography as their primary medium since 1971. Their contribution to contemporary art is significant because of the way that they first used photography, in a non-documentary way (see the PHOTO PIECES, 1971 displayed on the concourse), which broke with traditional treatment of the medium of photography.

We think of our art as just pictures, not as photographs. We're using photography, not being photographers ... We like it very much when the pictures take over. When they're bigger than the viewer. You go to a museum to look at a picture, but we like it when the picture looks at you.

Gilbert & George use formal devices of colour and composition that associate with their other visual forms and become a highly recognisable visual style. Bold colours and strong black outlines define each part of the image and evoke the experience of looking at stained glass. The primary colours and detached floating objects also have a cartoon element to them. The giant scale of their pictures pushes them into territories beyond even the largest-scale paintings. Their physical placement equates more to murals because of both their large size and the way in which they are integral to the architectural environment in which they are situated. Pictures hang end to end and covering all available wall space at the Tate

Modern exhibition, with an effect which is almost like collage, or fresco painting. The Sistine Chapel by Michelangelo may be an interesting point of comparison.

Gallery Activity

Mind Map a Response

Sit in the middle of any room you choose and after a few minutes looking time ask each person to give a *one* word response to the experience of being in the room. Ask students to be both spontaneous and honest in their choice of descriptive word.

Note down each word given (ask for no repetitions) and read them back to the group. This word list becomes a snapshot of multiple interpretations and readings of the room. Build up a group 'mind map' from the word list. Discuss each word and expand upon it to show a whole range of associated ideas to include memories of other places seen, visited or imagined. Write all the emerging words ideas and associations as part of 'mind map' to show connections, themes and overlaps.

Production Process

Each piece is created from single, separate images and from separate photographic negatives that are superimposed in the darkroom. The subjects are taken against a black background and then the prints are hand coloured. The composition is assembled with a system of numbering each print in the grid and following the numbered sequence to assemble the final image.

Because of this laborious hand-made process there is only ever one copy of the final image. The artists state they have never had to reject an image that has gone wrong, or reject an image on the grounds that it was not right.

We say that how we are one day made us do that picture and we have to respect that. If you have another thought that's another picture then, it would be another one.

The artists work with some assistance at the final colouring stage. However, when the image is being constructed Gilbert & George prefer to work entirely alone. This high level of expertise is the result of a very long period of experimentation and 'working things out as you go along'. The early work was made with conventional darkroom facilities – photographic film, enlarger, photo chemical baths and hand applied colour dyes. More recently the artists have started using digital photography, scanners, computers and digital printers.

Gilbert & George spent two years researching how to use computers and they made their first series of digital prints in 2003 (the E1 series). Another recent work using computer generated imagery is illustrated here, FATES, 2005 on display in room 17. Gilbert & George now have nine machines which hold their vast image bank and they use them to perform the complicated editing and montage sequences which are then output to a specialist company for printing onto panels.

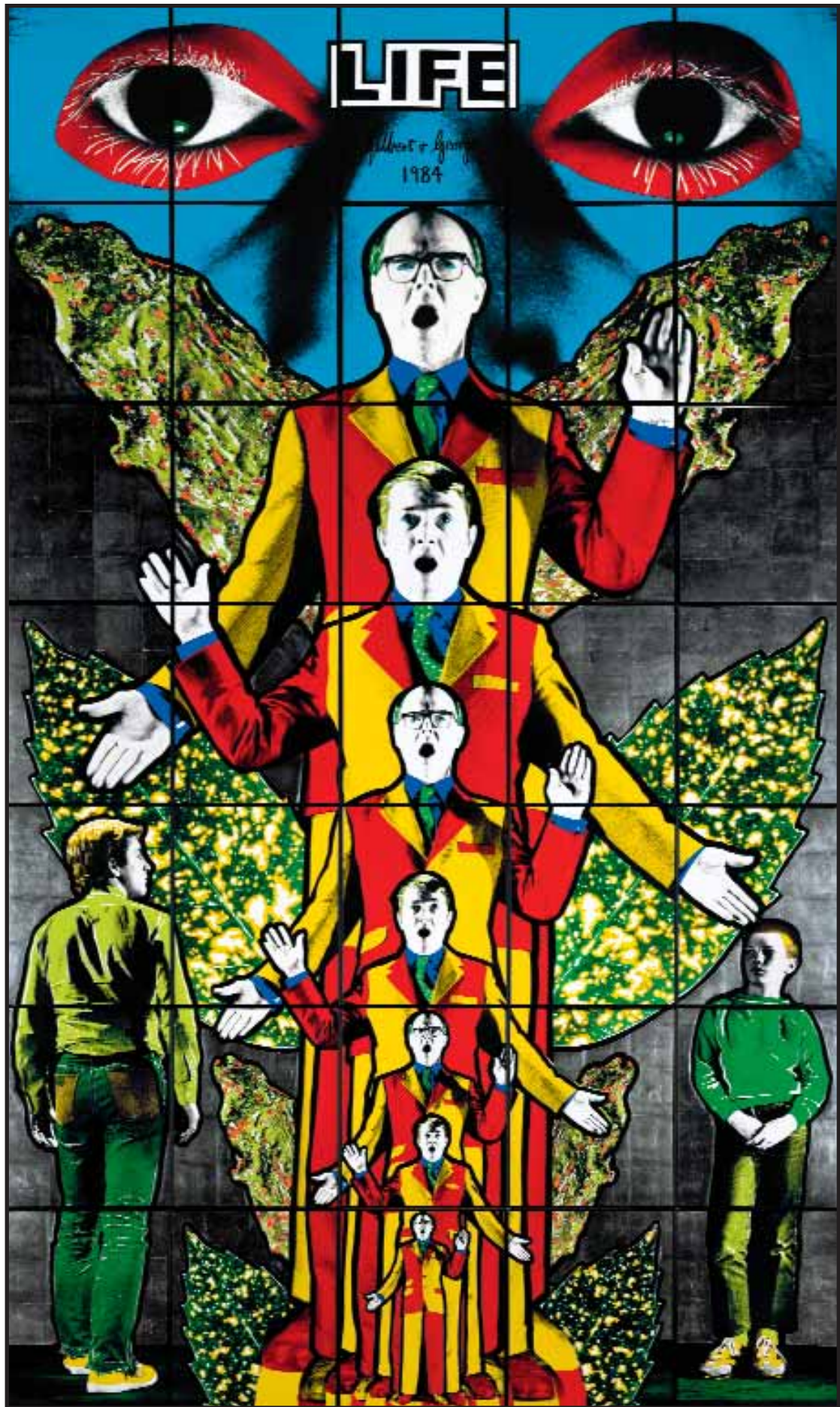
The artists' process is entirely based upon making artworks for specific exhibitions. They only ever make pieces for this purpose and do not make pictures just for the sake of making a picture. Therefore, each group of artworks is designed with a building in mind and will be shaped and sized up according to the amount of space available. In this way the whole show is conceived at once and then each individual picture is made up to a given size. Tate Modern's exhibition however is a retrospective of many series of works, made for different exhibitions over the years.

FATES 2005
Tate. Purchased with
assistance from Tate
Members 2006



Discussion

Why is photography a medium well suited to the work of Gilbert & George? What are the differences between photographically-generated imagery and 'hand-made' imagery such as drawing or painting? For example, photography is the language associated with advertising and the media. It can be scaled up or down as part of its mechanical process of reproduction. A photograph can be taken or made by anyone. Photography carries the authority of an objective gaze and it preferences subject matter and content over process. The surface of the photograph is 'neutral', smooth, printed and flat, there are no signature marks or hand-made marks.



LIFE from DEATH HOPE LIFE FEAR 1984
A quadripartite picture
Tate. Purchased 1990

'Art for All' and Universal Themes

Work in focus – LIFE from DEATH HOPE LIFE FEAR 1984

On display in room 14 (illustrated overleaf).

There is hardly a subject of life that isn't universal that we haven't discussed in our work.

DEATH HOPE LIFE FEAR is one of a group of large complex allegories of fundamental aspects of the human condition made in the early 1980s. It is a four part work, like several others by Gilbert & George. Some of the symbolism has been elucidated by the critic Wolf Jahn in his 1989 monograph 'The Art of Gilbert & George'. In DEATH the gold ground is equated with flame and therefore burning and obliteration. Images of the artists themselves simultaneously rise towards engulfing mouths and descend towards a black opening at the heart of a rose. Each image of the artists is interleaved with a rose behind and a daisy in front. The yellow petals of the daisy tipped with red create an image of consuming fire. The artists are richly dressed in funereal purple. In LIFE the ground is silver symbolising life and growth. Also emblematic of growth and the renewal of life are the leaves, also suggesting wings, behind the artists who are now actively shouting or singing where in DEATH they were silent. They are also making signs with their arms whereas in DEATH they are standing rigidly, arms by their sides. The flame colours are now transferred to their suits creating a pulse of life. Similar contrasts or polarities are set up in FEAR and HOPE where the artists now appear only as tiny witnesses or observers. The protagonists, as in many of their works of the 1980s, are East End youths who have taken on in Gilbert & George's work something of the role of the ideal male image in Classical and Renaissance art.

Published in: Simon Wilson, 'Tate Gallery: An Illustrated Companion', Tate Gallery, London, revised edition 1991

Universal themes

Some of the themes that emerge through Gilbert & George's imagery speak of religious concepts mixed up with private fantasies and contemporary urban life. Comedy, tragedy, emotion, love, sex, death, heaven and hell are the 'grand' themes that are addressed in the classic Victorian literary works of the 19th century. The analogy with stained glass and religious art is very evident. Many of the works have a Christian altarpiece-like quality, picturing singing mouths, lines of figures like saints, apostles, cherubs or seraphim, figures kneeling or worshipping and objects as crucifixes. Constantly the levels within the images seem to shift between heaven and hell, resurrection or reincarnation.

It is important to us to publish our art in books and catalogues, so as many people as possible are able to see it, but we also want them to see the real pieces.

Discussion

- Does the use of popular forms necessarily guarantee a popular audience?
- If the work is shown mainly in art galleries (many of which ask you to pay to view) is this accessible to most people, or are books, catalogues and magazines more easy to access formats?
- What other formats or approaches can artists use to make Art that is for All? As a way of finding links, discuss and look at examples of web-based art, art in the street or public places, and look for examples of work that are open and accessible to a very wide audience operating outside of the traditional gallery space.

Gallery Activity

Gilbert & George's biography on the Tate website lists amongst the subject matter of the artist's work: religion, class, royalty, sex, hope, nationality, death, identity, politics and fear. What else would students add to this list of universal themes? (For example, love, war, morality, truth, age and ageing, fame).

Gallery or School-based Activity

Personal Manifesto

Make up some statements that are an expression of your personal beliefs and ideas that are important to you.

Design a layout into which the statement will fit.

Make up some statements that are an expression of what you think society believes about young people.

Use a clear visual language and a pared-down graphic style to communicate for maximum effect. Reduce statements to one or two words only.

Links to other works

You could look at the work of Yoko Ono, Keith Arnatt, Barbara Kruger or Jenny Holzer or the Guerrilla Girls.

'Art for All'

In their early years, the artists used the words 'Art for All' as their mission statement or motto. In 1970 the motto appeared as part of their address and on all their correspondence. A large-scale Charcoal on Paper Sculpture from the same year features a wall text that says: *'Oh Art, what are you? You are so strong and so powerful, so beautiful and so moving. You make us walk around and around, pacing the city at all hours, in and out of our Art for All room.'* Gilbert & George say that by using images and language with which the general public are familiar their work is accessible to a general audience. It is Art for All. For many people, 'Art for All' would mean art that is soothing, beautiful, pleasing to the eye, easy to take in and of a non confrontational nature. However, part of the way Gilbert & George's work engages us is to create a tension between comfort and discomfort; between aesthetic form and uncomfortable subject matter. The idea that art could be a universal language for all people (not just a cultural elite) and that faith in art could act as redemption, is a notion that was current in the nineteenth century. Does this still apply today?

In THE NATURE OF OUR LOOKING 1970 on display in room 1, a large scale Charcoal on Paper Sculpture (illustrated here), each of the five sheets is inscribed with 'Art for All 1970 The Sculptors Gilbert & George' along the bottom. The work folds down and fits into a specially-made box that is also inscribed 'Art for All'. This box was used several times by the artists as their 'Life Box' which functioned as a portfolio.

Panel from
THE NATURE OF OUR
LOOKING 1970
A five-part Charcoal on
Paper Sculpture
Tate. Purchased 1982



Discussion

- Discuss what students think of as 'Art for All'? Is it art in a gallery or art in the street? What is a good subject for art? What makes a popular artwork that speaks to all people? Find out from your local art gallery which is the most popular artwork in their collection. Make a short sociological survey of opinions by showing other people a range of images of artworks, asking them to place them in order of best and worst.
- The Turner Prize is nearly always controversial (Gilbert & George were awarded the prize in 1984) because it represents the 'cutting edge' of contemporary art. Look at the Tate's Turner Prize website to find out about the prize over the past ten years and to discuss the merits of various winners.

Gallery Activity

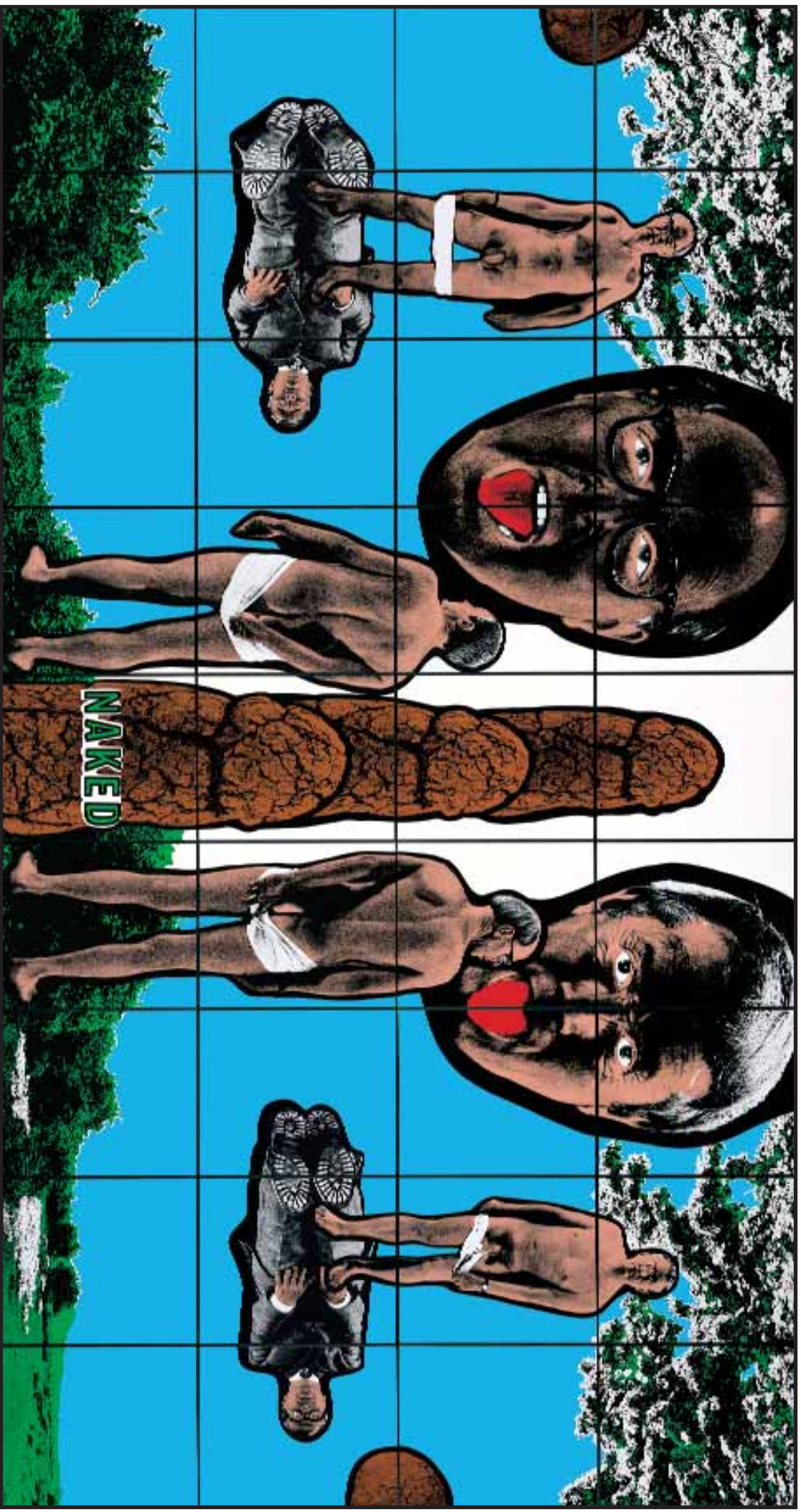
'This work is an example of Art for All'

Conduct a survey amongst your group about whether they think this is Art for All. It is therefore advisable to look at the whole exhibition for an overview at first. Then get into small groups, go back into the exhibition and discuss which images would be placed on a list as 'Art for All' and 'Art to Avoid'. Come up with the list within 30 minutes.

Get back together as a large group and agree upon an overall favourite (you could use a scoring or a voting system) that best fits the title 'This work is an example of Art for All'.

School-based Activity (follow-up)

Make a copy of the chosen image (from the Tate website or Tate catalogue) and place it in a prominent part of the school with the label 'This is Art for All'. Ask other members of the school for their opinions (you could use a comments box) and extend your survey.



NAKED 1994
From SHITTY NAKED HUMAN WORLD
A quadripartite picture
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

Shock Value and Censorship

Work in focus – NAKED 1994 (from SHITTY NAKED HUMAN WORLD)

On display in room 13 (illustrated overleaf).

This image could elicit very different reactions ranging from childish glee to deep disgust; from cheeky, naughty, ridiculous, to badly-behaved and an absolute taboo. The psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud suggested that a child's early creativity is expressed in the impulse to play with its own bodily waste.

In some ways the artists seem to be acting out this type of impulse in a deliberately confrontational style. Between a glorious heavenly blue and a green landscape the artists are pictured four times over. The giant faces confront or mock and poke out their scarlet tongues in a seeming challenge to the viewer to react. Are these the actions of a court jester daring us all to look and to pass judgement upon something that we all universally share as a common attribute? We all have to produce our own waste in order to live.

In the four part series SHITTY NAKED HUMAN WORLD each word forms a title for a separate image, thereby making a cycle of images. The theme of the work places the artists, vulnerable in their nakedness, in an urban, religious and worldly context. When thinking about the Christian faith's belief in Jesus as God in human form, the artists thought they would make a literal symbol of the divinely human: a cross of shit. The series, produced in 1994, led to a considerable amount of reluctance amongst museum and gallery curators to exhibit it. The shock value was high and the artists were made to feel '*awkward, difficult, full of sin, full of unhappiness*'. This gave them grounds to state that '*We dislike religion that way.*'

Links

Other scatological works of art to explore in the Tate Collection include: Chris Ofili's use of elephant dung, Piero Manzoni's *Artist's Shit* (in a can), Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (a urinal) or Sarah Lucas' *The Old in Out* (a toilet cast in resin).

Shock Value

If a picture doesn't say 'fuck you', it's no good anyway. It has to defy the viewer first of all, then it can go on to say other things, of course...

You want them to stand in front of the picture and say, 'What the shitting hell does this mean to me?'

Historically, there have been many artists whose primary intention has been to shock an audience as a deliberate strategy within their work. Many of the artists in the Dada period worked in this mode, for example. The Surrealists followed suit. Shock tactics can work on a number of different levels: to expose social weakness; to portray the artist as an independent thinker or a fearless commentator; to alienate and exclude an audience or audiences; or to delight and entertain them.

Gilbert & George state that they do not aim to create shock through their pictures. The shock value is a reaction that belongs to the viewer or interpreter of the work. The artists ascribe to themselves a more neutral role, a desire to say what's what, to show life as they see it and feel it.

Shocking is a media idea. It is not an artist idea. Our pictures are not attacking or confronting, but exploring.

Discussion

- Should artists take responsibility for reactions to their work?
- If an art critic writes a review will people rely on the review or come and make up their own minds in the gallery?
- What do you find shocking? Can we all agree on what is shocking?
- What influences the way we decide what is and isn't acceptable in our lives?
- What are the grounds on which you or other viewers could find these works shocking?
- Is there a different code for acceptability in an art gallery than 'out there' on the streets?
- Do artists have the freedom to say anything – or is this an issue of personal morality?
- Are artists answerable for what they do? If so, to whom are they answerable?

School-based Activity

Points of View

Choose an example of a recent 'shock' event or a story in the media. The chosen example may well involve a celebrity in the public gaze. Discuss how the writer has interpreted and represented the event. Define 'the moral of the story'.

Re-write the news copy or make short videoed reports on the story from different points of view: to shock, to entertain, to inform, to make a moral point etc.

Entertainment

Some things that challenge or confront our personal or social values can also be good entertainment. We can enjoy watching or looking at the more difficult things that challenge 'taste' and 'decency' just because we know we are not supposed to enjoy them.

Discussion

- Discuss some programmes or films from popular culture that use subversive humour, for example, Little Britain, Green Wing, Shameless, The Simpsons, South Park or the latest film by Sacha Baron Cohen, 'Borat'.
- If students appreciate these cultural items, is it because they recognise that they cross the line of conventional taste?
- Can something be subversive without being sensationalist – or sensationalist without being subversive?

Gallery Activity

The Moral of the Story

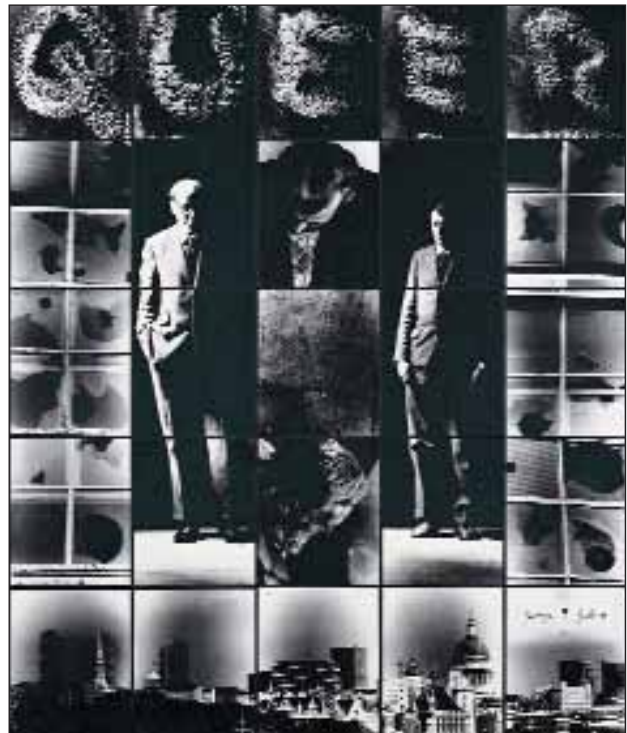
In small groups choose a role from the following list (or similar): a teacher, a parent of a young child, a pensioner, a member of the legal profession, a religious leader, a market stall holder, a soldier, a gallery owner. Choose one key work from the exhibition. In response to the picture, write or improvise a short spoken or written text to interpret the image. The text must conclude with the phrase: 'and the moral of the story is:'

Freedom of Speech

And we didn't write those words on the walls, we don't swear.

QUEER 1977 (from THE DIRTY WORDS series)
Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam

In some of their work Gilbert & George have used language that is not considered acceptable within certain sectors of society, whilst in others such language is accepted as commonplace. The DIRTY WORDS series (QUEER is illustrated here, and many works from the series are displayed in room 6) uses photographs of graffiti from the streets where they live in East London. Gilbert & George do not censor the words, rather by presenting them in the context of art the words are given a status that they would not usually acquire.



Discussion

- Many of the words used in the artworks would not be allowed in coursework at school. Can you write your English projects in the same

language you use to talk to your friends? Why not?

- Who has the power to control what we can and can't say?
- When is it alright to say certain things in certain contexts, but not in others?
- We recognise that we need to abide by written and unwritten rules around conduct and language – but do we?
- Who do you think should decide these rules?
- Why do we have to have censorship?
- If it is to protect people from ideologies that might pervert society or damage people's right to freedom, can or should art be free from censorship?
- Does the artist occupy a privileged position if they can get away with using 'dirty words' in an art gallery?

Argue for and against the case of using everyday language to express your ideas at school.

Gallery or School-based Activity

Say What You Mean

Sometimes direct language is necessary to express what you mean.

Compare different ways of saying the same thing.

Make a list of words and phrases you use everyday to chat or text to your friends. Translate these words into 'plain English'. Compare how the sense changes when you use either phrase.

Make a list of 'unacceptable words' and their 'acceptable' alternatives.

Make up some phrases or statement using each word and compare how the sense changes when you use either word.

School-based Activity (follow-up)

Think of examples of writers, films, TV programmes, music, DJs that use explicit language. When and where are these programmes broadcast or shown? Which ones are shown on television after the watershed (i.e. after 9.00 pm)? Why do we have to have a watershed?

Links to other works

Censorship of the visual arts has a long and inglorious history, a widely known historical example being the imposition of breach-cloths on naked figures in Michelangelo's *Last Judgement*. Mark Wallinger's *State Britain* at Tate Britain, which recreates Brian Haw's anti Iraq war outside the Houses of Parliament, attacks the Government's clampdown on freedom of speech and erosion of civil liberties, according to the artist.

Students may also be interested in the political and humorous work of Banksy, the pseudonym of the renowned English graffiti artist, whose street art can be found in London and in other cities worldwide.