

ARTFORUM

“Gilbert & George: Utopian Pictures”

ARNDT | SINGAPORE

9 Lock Road #03-21, Gillman Barracks

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Though this clean, green metropolis is one of the world’s most orderly and secure, Singapore is also known for its draconian fines, corporal punishment, and controversial human rights record. There’s no small measure of irony, then, in Gilbert & George’s choice of Singapore as the site of their first solo show in Southeast Asia.

The twenty-six new photomontages collate text and imagery that the artists discovered on daily walks around their East London neighborhood. The pictures are rendered in black, white, and vivid primary colors. The figures of Gilbert & George appear in the works: often masked, in matching suits, presiding over turbulent images designed (in their words) to provoke bigots and liberals alike.

The works’ repeated signs or slogans range from seemingly straightforward (“No Ball Games”) to philosophical (“Life After Death Proved”) to defiant (“Fight Back!” “Fuck Homophobia!”). Each piece contributes to a mocking, mischievous portrayal of contemporary Britain as a nanny state, as well as a call to rebel against authoritarian and nationalistic culture. Combinations of the phrase “CCTV in Operation” recur throughout, as do warnings about urinating in public, to which the artists answer in one picture, via added text: “Piss Off!”

Their art’s energy derives from a mixture of schoolboy effusion and intelligent subversion. Their message, and its resonance in Singapore, may have slipped past the censors, but it’s not meant to be missed. At the exhibition’s entrance is a cheeky dedication, in black and red on a plain white wall: “With Utopian Love, from Gilbert & George xx xx.”



View of “Gilbert & George: Utopian Pictures,” 2015.

— *Samantha Kuok Leese*

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