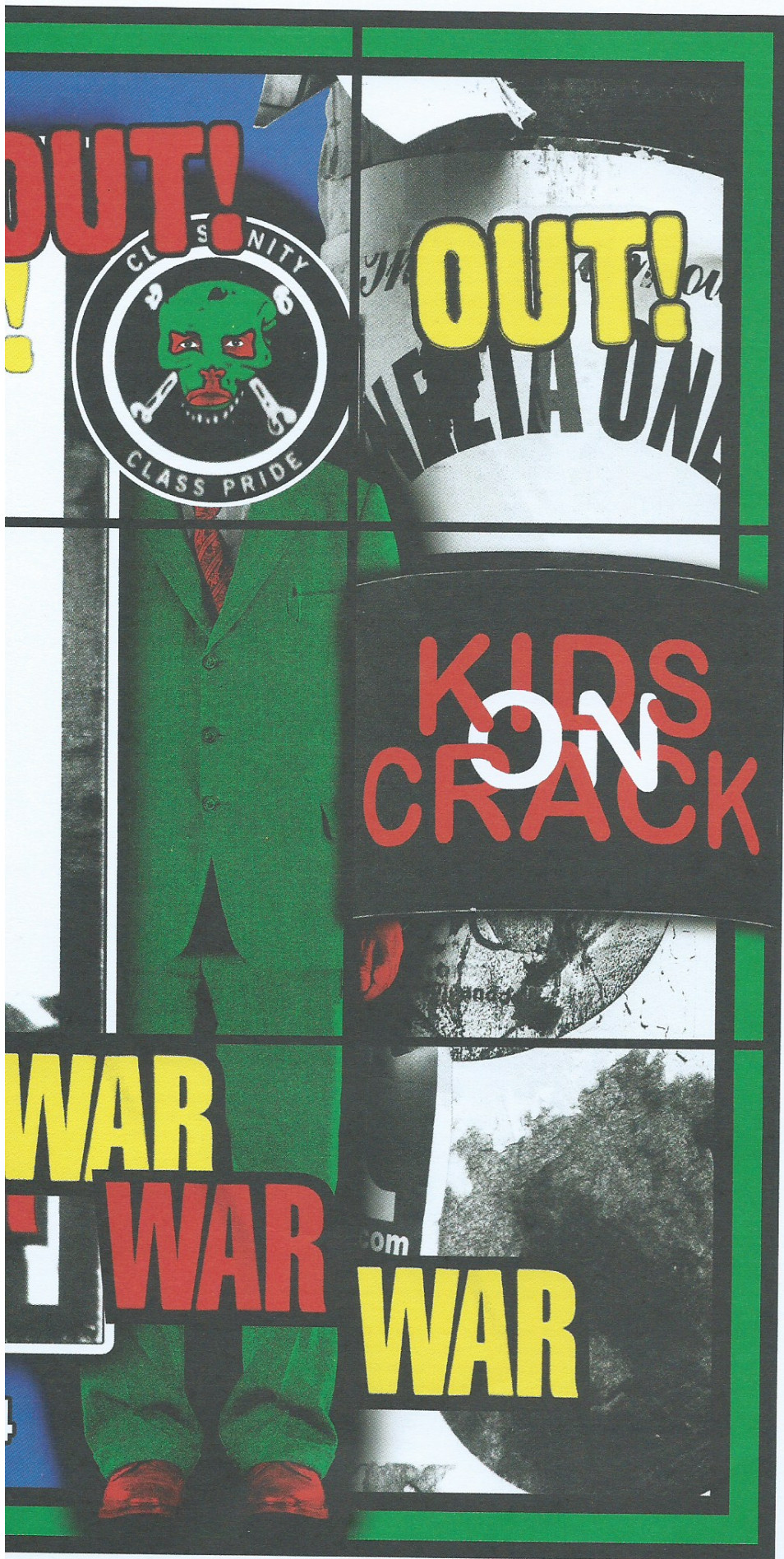


TOFFS OUT!, 2014, 226 x 317cm by Gilbert & George



TWO OF A KIND

*BAZAAR gets a rare
interview with
British artists
Gilbert & George and
an exclusive preview
of their latest work
premiering in Singapore
at Art Stage 2015.*

By Kim Reyes

T

he art world's most famous coupling comes to Singapore this month, and is poised to ruffle quite a few feathers in the process. The controversial Turner Prize-winning British art duo Gilbert & George will premiere *Utopian Pictures*, a new series of large-scale works, in their signature grid style and symmetrical composition, at "Art Stage 2015."

Undoubtedly eccentric, wickedly clever, and wildly fascinating, Gilbert & George are one of a kind in the contemporary art world, not least of all for being a twosome. Before they were Gilbert & George, they were Gilbert, born in 1943, in the mountainous Dolomites in northeast Italy, and George, born in 1942, in Devon, England. They met in 1967 at Saint Martin's School of Art in London, and two years later, they began their artistic collaboration by dubbing themselves "living sculptures," singing along to the music hall classic "Underneath the Arches" by Flanagan and Allen for hours at a time in galleries and museums. They have worked as a perpetual duo ever since—never seen without the other, living and working together for over 45 years in London's East End, which has been a consistent and prominent source of inspiration.

As Gilbert & George, they are one singular artist, whose life and art are intrinsically connected—their artworks often feature the artists themselves, while the pair in their public appearances and daily lives evoke a well-polished act, visiting neighbourhood spots like clockwork, finishing each other's sentences and dropping quotable bon mots like a considered performance piece. Even the way they dress—in matching tweed suits and ties—has become an instantly recognisable uniform, an iconic visual representation of both Gilbert & George, the artist, and Gilbert and George, the men themselves.

It's interesting that Gilbert & George have chosen to debut their latest art series, *Utopian Pictures*, in Singapore—a nation both lauded and criticised for its rules. They are likely, whether deliberately or not, going to cause a mild stir in our little city-state—and Singapore will be all the better for it.

In our exclusive interview, Gilbert & George—answering as one, naturally—reveal more about what we can expect from their latest picture series, the reason they choose to appear in their own artworks, and why they're always dressed in those tweed suits.



**"WE WANT TO CREATE
THE POSSIBILITY
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THE VIEWER'S LIFE."**

So tell us about the new work you will be premiering at Art Stage 2015? How do you hope viewers will react to it?

Our new *Utopian Pictures* were specially created for this exhibition in the historic Gillman Barracks, Singapore. Unlike a lot of art, these pictures are not intended to simply please the eye with nice colours and shapes, or to be a pleasing part of the décor of an apartment. Their purpose is to explore together with the viewers all the thoughts and feelings, hopes and fears that lie within all of us in our dangerous and beautiful modern western world.

We want our art to bring out the bigot from inside the liberal and conversely to bring out the liberal from inside the bigot. We would love to receive Singapore's love, understanding and critical acclaim.

What are you most looking forward to doing while in Singapore?

Singapore has long been for us a great dazzling, glamorous, sexy country which we first experienced in 1973. Never before or since have we seen so many good looking people. We look forward on arrival to settling down at our hotel with a lovely "Singapore Sling." And then perhaps we will have one of the delicious cocktails which have the same name.

You have an iconic signature style—your matching tweed suits have become a "uniform" of sorts. How did you decide on this look?

We have always designed our suits ourselves. People believe a suit is for special occasions to apply for a new job or for a church service or funeral. We believe that every day of the year is an important one—hence our daily suits. They are, as we said in 1970, "The Responsibility Suits of our Art."

Much of your work is connected to London and specifically the East End. What is it about the East End that has attracted and kept you there all these years?

We have always believed that London is the great Western capital of the world and that the East End is the capital of London. We live here in the most typical "Planet Earth" place in the world.

Do you ever get inspired by other parts of the world?

We are inspired every day by all of the parts of the world that come to London—to visit or to settle. We love this whole great cosmological lifetime experience.

How would you describe your work to someone who is unfamiliar with it?

We say that our art is the friendship that may be formed between the viewer and the pictures. We don't create pictures in order to congratulate the viewer on how they are. We want to create the possibility for changes within the viewer's life. We want to help form all of our futures.

Why do you often place yourselves in your artwork?

Each of our pictures is a visual love letter from us to the viewer. We are in our pictures as our signatures and to remind the viewer that we wish to speak with them.

Which artists do you admire? What do you hope your legacy to the art world will be?

We admire all of the artists and writers and thinkers and people who gave of themselves so that we may live our free, privileged, democratic, complex, wonderful Utopian world. We want every day to say thank you to all of them. We want to be part of the future and to be able to speak from the grave.

Your London Pictures series was derived from newspaper headlines and clippings, but now everyone gets their news online. How curious or interested are you in the internet and social media?

We have just opened a new website which has thousands of our pictures and much other information. Social media? We have been in the London Telephone Directory since 1969—no one ever called us!

Do you purposely set out to shock or provoke controversy in your art?

We don't believe that our pictures are shocking—rather we believe them to be de-shocking. The daily television news coverage of murder, meanness, cruelty and corruption we find deeply shocking and offensive.

What is the next subject you want to explore?

There are many subjects we have yet to explore. The world is opening up in front of us every day and we are fascinated by our past, our present and our future. Long live life! Long live art! All is fair in love and art!

LOTS OF LOVE TO SINGAPORE FROM
GILBERT & GEORGE XXX



EIIR, 2014, 226 x 254cm, by Gilbert & George