



British art duo Gilbert and George launch exhibition at MONA

By Fiona Blackwood

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PHOTO: British art duo Gilbert and George say a visit to MONA persuaded them to exhibit there. (ABC News: Drew Hill)

They are two people but one artist. Gilbert and George, like Madonna, have no need for surnames - the couple are rock stars of the modern art world.

MAP: Hobart 7000

The British duo have been working together since they met at art school in London in 1967.

But they have never exhibited in Australia, until now.

They were asked to put on a show at the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) in Hobart and George said their initial reaction was to decline.

"We were invited to show here and we thought it was too far away and would take far too much trouble," he said.

"So we came out from Singapore, where we were by chance, to say, 'No, thank you', and the moment we arrived we changed our minds."

Gilbert said MONA's underground gallery space was the clincher.

"It felt like going down into Tutankhamun's tomb," he said.

"You have to take a lift down and it is very good for us because we never like museums that have windows."

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George



PHOTO: British art duo Gilbert and George's MONA Exhibition will be open until March 2016. (ABC News: Fiona Blackwood)

The exhibition is mostly retrospective, with works dating back to the 1970s. The pictures have controversial takes on universal themes like death, hope, fear, sex, money and religion.

"'Ban religion' is our motto, 'burn their book', 'decriminalise sex' - we have all the slogans for the modern world," Gilbert said.

The artists use maps, flowers, litter, newspaper headlines and other objects collected from the streets of London.

"Whatever is around us, whatever is within us, we can use," George said.

"We feel we never need to go somewhere to be exotic.

"If there is a matchstick on the pavement or a vomit from a take-away curry or an Indian take-away and then the pigeon is breakfasting on that - we think the whole of the life is there.

"We're fascinated by the fabric of our world."

The two artists feature heavily in the work, mostly dressed in their distinctive tweed suits. But sometimes they appear nude.

"We want to remind everyone that it is us speaking to the viewer, it's always our views to them, it's a friendship between us and the viewer," George said.

MONA curator Olivier Varenne said there were nearly 100 works in the exhibition, many of them large-scale pieces.

"It's retracing all their career, from the early drawings to the early videos to the performance - it's going through all their life in a non-linear sequence," he said.

Mr Varenne said the exhibition was a confronting yet pleasant experience.

"It's almost a punch in the face, this exhibition," he said.

"It's, in a way, very easy to understand and colourful and pleasant, but then the subjects are very strong in the emotions."

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George

Reflecting on their long and successful career, Gilbert and George could not pin down how they had managed to stay on the same artistic page as a couple for so long.

"Don't ask questions," they said together. "It's a great mystery to us as well."

The exhibition opens from November 28 through to March 28, 2016.

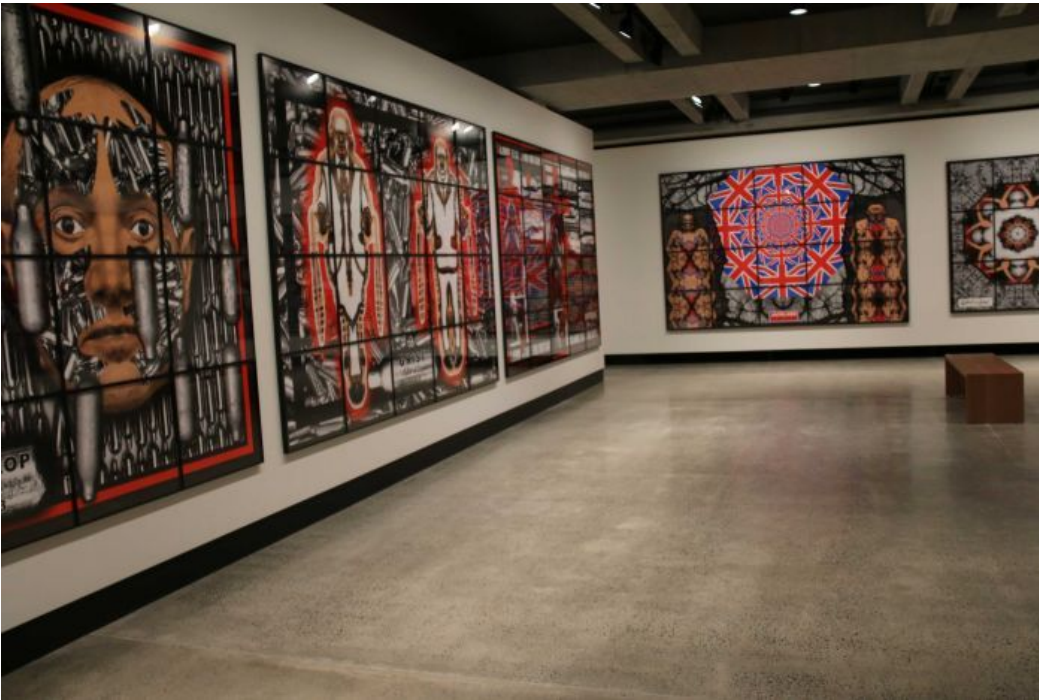


PHOTO: Gilbert and George works on display at MONA. (ABC News: Fiona Blackwood)

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