The Event of Art

Marc Lafia, Mathieu Borysevicz, Daniel Coffeen

Published by Punctum Books

Marc Lafia, et al.
The Event of Art.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/80764

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=2762903
11

Being

Art
When I travel, I always want to see architecture, gardens, paintings, fountains, sculptures, galleries, plazas, churches, temples, museums, monasteries, fairs, biennales, installations, boulevards, small streets, happenings, and of course the cinema, theatre, food, and more. But I don’t just want to see. I want in some way to experience and converse with this art. I want to touch and interact with it with all my senses. Over time, traveling with my family took on a special and playful pleasure, as we all came to enjoy being with art, being together in the experience of it. I will admit carrying forth at times with much exuberant discourse about what this incredible thing we were experiencing was, now, right in front of us, and that it connected, if you remember group, to what we had seen last year and that brings us to this other work and style, and certain continuities and discontinuities in style and on and on. That pleasure of reading something across time, style and culture has always excited me. But here in these pictures that follow, you can sense another kind of reading and being with art, one that goes with the work immediately, sensually, senses it, converses with it, caresses it and confronts it, saying I’ll go with you, I feel you. Over time this mode of performative interaction became a way for us, together, to go with the work of art and to not only share and communicate with each other our pleasure of it, but by going with the work, to create a new kind of pleasure, an assemblage of pleasure, that is the work and us.

I am beauty, history, present, being,
emerging already,
here, always here, already. I see, her,
venus, seeing me, me seeing the cameras
seeing me. My glasses, her shell,
my shield, stand, see her, you, seeing
her, seeing me, as she sees us, i see you.
I am image, to be imaged, covering
myself like her.
Boticelli, Birth of Venus
Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy
Gilbert and George SCAPEGOATING PICTURES

“...Not a style, but a Principle.”

A.W.N. Pugin (1841)

“Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth.”

Oscar Wilde (1891)

For nearly five decades the art of Gilbert & George has created a visceral and epic depiction of modern urban existence. At its centre are always the artists themselves, who have dedicated their adult lives to their calling as ‘Living Sculptures’ – witness participants within the moral and vividly atmospheric world of their vision, as it is revealed in their art.

The SCAPEGOATING PICTURES unflinchingly describe the volatile, tense, accelerated and mysterious reality of our increasingly technological, multi-faith and multi-cultural world. It is a world in which paranoia, fundamentalism, surveillance, religion, accusation and victimhood become moral shades of the city’s temper. Gilbert & George take their place in these SCAPEGOATING PICTURES as shattered and spirit-like forms – at times masked, at times as grotesquely capering skeletons, at times dead-eyed and impassive. These SCAPEGOATING PICTURES consolidate and advance the art of Gilbert & George as a view of modern humanity that is at once libertarian and free-thinking, opposed to bigotry of all forms and dedicated to secular realism.

Dominating the SCAPEGOATING PICTURES, becoming almost the imagistic signature of this vast group of pictures, are images of the sinister bomb-shaped canisters used to contain nitrous oxide, also known as “whippets” and “hippy crack”. Intentionally inhaled to induce euphoria, hallucinations and uncontrollable laughter. Gilbert and George, on their early morning walks from the side streets and back alleys that surround their home, the presence of these canisters, mimicking that of “bombs” pervades the SCAPEGOATING PICTURES to infer terrorism, warfare and a stark industrial reality.

Echoing the maxim of the great Victorian architect, A.W.N. Pugin, “Not a Style, but a Principle”, the vision of the SCAPEGOATING PICTURES becomes more potent and intensifies the historically iconic art of Gilbert & George, in its tireless and profound engagement with the viewer and the modern world.

Michael Bracewell 2014
Niki de Saint Phalle
Côte d'Azur, France