SESSION 13 · UNIT 2 — LIGHT & PERSON · Dec 15, 2026

Duane Michals & Gilbert & George

Michals b. 1932 · American — Gilbert b. 1943 & George b. 1942 · British

Inventing a person, then photographing them



This Photograph Is My Proof · Duane Michals, 1967

"We want Our Art to speak across the barriers of knowledge directly to People about their Life and not about their knowledge of art."

— Gilbert & George, "What Our Art Means," Studio International, 1970

KEY WORKS

- Chance Meeting, 1970 — a six-frame sequence built like a short story (Michals)
- This Photograph Is My Proof, 1967 — a single image captioned in his own handwriting (Michals)
- The Singing Sculpture, 1969–70 — performing as living, moving art for hours at a time (Gilbert & George)
- Are You Angry or Are You Boring? (Dirty Words Pictures), 1977 — grid works built from street graffiti and photographs (Gilbert & George)

CONTEXT

Duane Michals and Gilbert & George both reject photography's default job of recording something that was already there. Michals stages small, invented, often uncanny narratives — sequences and single frames captioned in his own looping handwriting, admitting outright that the image is a constructed fiction rather than evidence. Gilbert & George take the opposite route to a related idea: instead of directing someone else into a fictional scene, they made themselves the subject and the artwork at once, appearing as identically suited "living sculptures" in nearly everything they have produced since the late 1960s. One invents a person in front of the camera and writes underneath it that it isn't true; the other two simply became the image, full-time.

WHY THIS PHOTOGRAPHER

Character creation portrait asks you to invent a person and then photograph them as if they were real. Michals invents through narrative — a small fiction staged across one or several frames, admitted as fiction in his own handwriting. Gilbert & George invent by becoming the character full-time, in nearly every photograph either of them has released since 1969. Both are useful models for today: a constructed persona can live in the story around the image, or it can live in the performance in front of the lens.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Michals admits his photographs are staged fiction, right there in the handwriting under the image. Gilbert & George never break character at all. Which is more honest — art that announces itself as invented, or art that insists the invention is real?
2. You're about to invent a character and photograph your partner as that person. What has to stay true about who they actually are for the invented character to be believable?

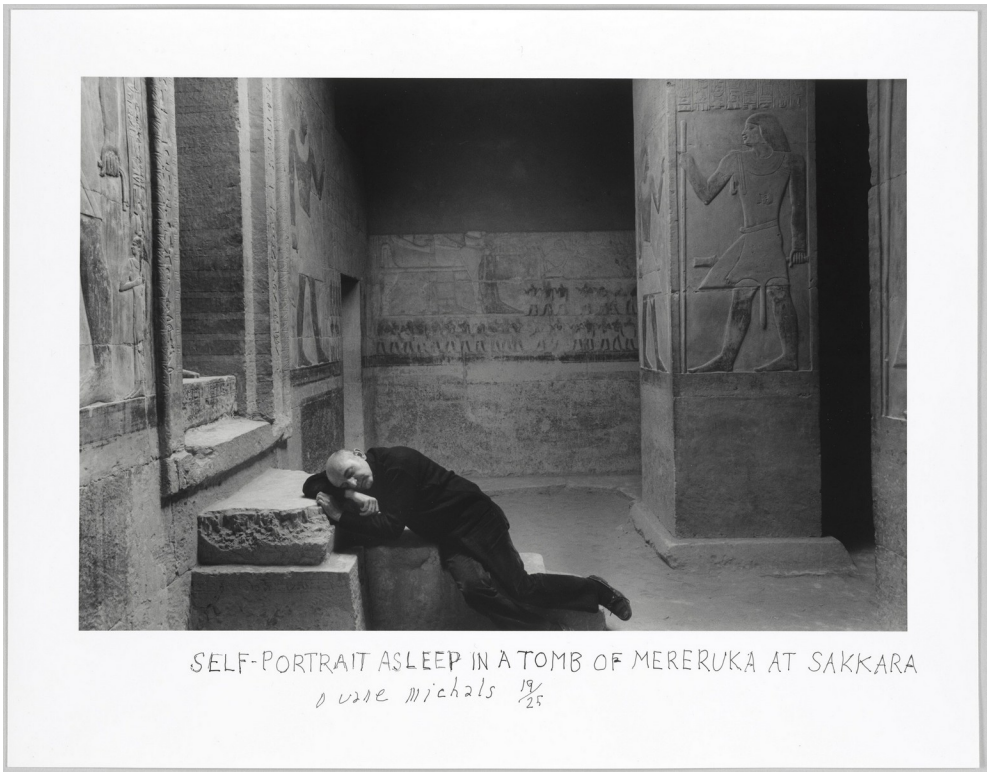
MORE IMAGES



Chance Meeting · Duane Michals, 1970



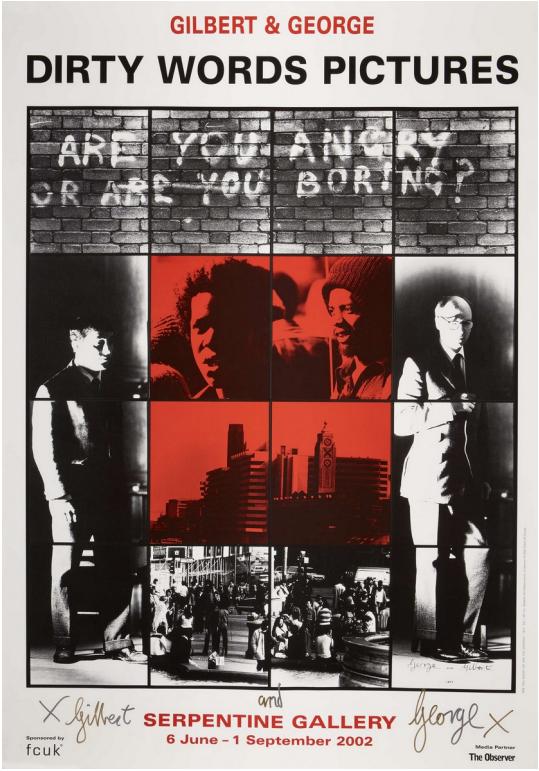
The Spirit Leaves the Body · Duane Michals, 1968



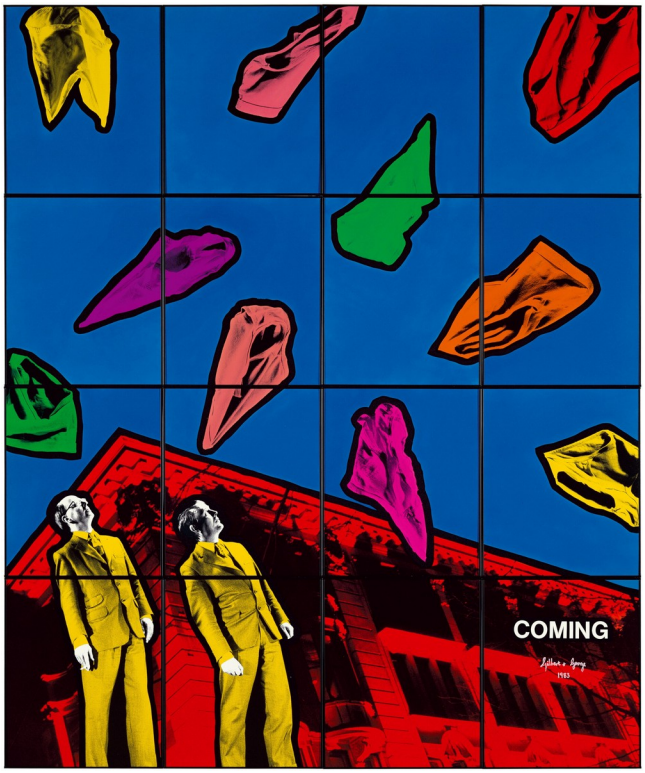
Self-Portrait Asleep in a Tomb of Mereruka at Sakkara · Duane Michals



Documentation of The Singing Sculpture · Gilbert & George, 1969–70



Are You Angry or Are You Boring? (Dirty Words Pictures) · Gilbert & George, 1977



Coming · Gilbert & George, 1983