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ARTIST FOCUS: GILBERT & GEORGE

## Stealing Headlines for Art's Sake

THE LONDON-BASED art duo known as Gilbert & George first rose to fame in the late 1960s by donning dapper suits and treating themselves like living sculptures. It turns out that they're also petty thieves.

About seven years ago, the pair began stealing the sandwich-board-style posters that London's newspapers often

use to hail their latest headlines, typically tabloid fare like "Man Dies in Human Fireball Horror." On Thursday, the artists opened a new show of their work at New York's Lehmann Maupin and Sonnabend galleries featuring headlines from all 3,712 posters they amassed. Unlike the actual newspapers, these black-and-white posters aren't for

sale, but "the images and stories they conjure are amazing," said one of the artists, Gilbert Proesch.

The pair said that they would usually wait until dinnertime before canvassing the newsstands in their East London neighborhood. Then one of the artists would try to distract the shopkeeper by buying a candy bar or chewing gum while the other slipped the poster out of its wire casing. A few times they would have to wait until the owner "went to the lavatory," said George Passmore. "Then we'd tuck the poster into our coats and try to walk away, looking normal."

To transform the posters into art, the artists grouped headlines by common terms—say, murder—and arranged them into grids that sit atop eerie photographs of brick walls, tilted windows and alleyways. The artist's faces also pop up throughout the images, Big Brother-style. The portrait of society that emerges from the posters is accordingly grim. "We found very few happy terms," Mr. Proesch said. "That's the invisible part of our lives, the happy part."

"Gilbert & George: London Pictures" will be on view at the galleries through June 23.

—Kelly Crow



Lehmann Maupin Gallery, New York

GILBERT & George's 'Dead' (2001) is at New York's Lehmann Maupin gallery.