

TEMPLON

II

PIERRE ET GILLES

SCHÖN MAGAZINE (UK), June 2014

face to face with... pierre et gilles

As traditional painting meets photography, fashion is married to the very best of kitsch to create a unique niche in art. Schön! catches up with French artists Pierre Commoy and Gilles Blanchard.



Entering Pierre et Gilles' home in Le Pré-Saint-Gervais is like stepping into one of their artworks. Plastic vines wrap around windows, framing the life-sized green Buddha kneeling in the middle of the living room and the Batman statue, idly placed on the side. A Hello Kitty® clock waves hello with her paw. The walls are covered with portraits of the artist duo, going back to the period when they first met at the opening of a Kenzo boutique in 1976.

Renowned for their extremely stylised, hand-painted photographs, Pierre et Gilles discuss the humour and gravity in their work, and why two is better than one.

TEMLON

II

PIERRE ET GILLES

SCHÖN MAGAZINE (UK), June 2014

What was the deciding factor that made you two work together?

Gilles: It first started as a love story. Pierre was a photographer and I was a painter. We met, we really got along and, within six months, we naturally started working together. We found something important within each other. It felt right.

Were your styles different before meeting each other?

Pierre: There were already many things that linked us. We were living the same life around '72. Our two individual styles were mixed to form the style that is Pierre et Gilles.

G: We [both] bring something to the table. Pierre was more in fashion and portraiture. I was always attracted to the beautiful pictures of fashion, but didn't know anything about it. At *Les Beaux Arts*, I didn't study that side at all. I had a side that was more *provocateur*, more fine arts. Pierre had a sense of glamour. He brought a lot, in regards to fashion and lighting.

Is your work a response to your education?

P: Certainly. The question is where we are from, also. I come from La Rochelle-sur-Yon, a city that I didn't like. There was nothing to do, so I had to dream...

G: I come from Le Havre, a city that I like a lot. There was a lot of cinema, the sea, and a very pretty side to it. I come from a very classic family and I needed to do something more *provocateur* to break the rules. I needed to go to Paris and enter a world that eventually bothered my family.

How is your approach different when addressing clients or working with models?

P: It's the same, except clients may generate ideas that we maybe wouldn't have thought about before. It's a bit of a challenge, but we do it with as much love if we feel it in the subject.

G: We accept the assignment if we have a frame of freedom that permits us to totally express ourselves. It has to be a work of art that totally belongs to us, even if it's an assignment.

You each take charge of different steps of the project. Is there any crossing over?

P: We are always on each other's side, but it's true that at a certain moment, we like to be alone to work.

G: We watch what we do, we take Polaroids together, we correct. I give my advice on some things. When I paint, Pierre is thankfully not behind me because it takes so long, the poor guy. Pierre gives me his advice too, saying, "The eyes are too shiny," or "you painted the sky quite dark. I prefer it more luminous." I adore people's advice.

How does Pierre inspire Gilles and Gilles inspire Pierre?

G: I think that Pierre has his taste that is not exactly the same as mine. He has his own universe that has something darker. I have a more colourful side. I like provocation more than Pierre.

Your work in the '90s was darker than it is today. What changed?

G: We were in the world of rock and punk in the '80s. We loved going to concerts with our friends.

P: Pretty early, we covered subjects that were quite dark. After AIDS, we couldn't talk about things in the same way.

G: In the first three or four years that we were working, we did not touch [upon] hard subjects like death or sickness. Perhaps we touched them, but not consciously. They were hidden. We don't like our work to be so clear and obvious. What you live changes things.

G: The series just before *Heroes*, called *Wonderful Town*, was the darkest. We wanted to change. Pierre et Gilles was always the sky painted blue and rose with little birds. We wanted to show our inspiration from something industrial because I come from an industrial city. It's a universe that I like. It was something more cinematographic. There is always something related to cinema in our work. We can't do just dark work or just joyful things. It's just like life; we have fun with the two.

How did you feel when your *Vive La France* artwork was censored?

G: It was the poster of the *Nackte Männer* exhibition in Vienna. We knew it could pose problems. I know that the Austrians are tolerant about nudity, but I wasn't so sure about the mixture of races. If it was a blonde naked man in front of a blue sky, it could have passed, but not "black, blanc, beur" [black, white, Arab]. Our image bothered them, so they put a bar in front. It made a big buzz; it was the plan of the museum. As soon as there is a scandal, the audience increases.

Another one of our works, *Le Petit Jardinier*, was exhibited in Munich. They made the invitation with this image. The museum sent it to everyone in Munich and they received a lot of complaints because children were opening the envelopes. There was a huge scandal in the national press. At the same time, it was a very influential event.

Who is your audience?

G: There are a lot of women who like our work. We're really happy about that. There are men, a lot of whom are gay of course. We brought a positive image to them. We never wanted to make gay art or focus on a community. We wanted to make an exchange and to make things understood.

Could you imagine working individually now?

P: We work entirely together. We will always work together.

G: We are complementary. We need each other, and it is good this way. We don't want to work separately. It's not in our minds.

What are your future plans?

P: We work like an adventure. We want to try new things, but we don't exactly know what we're going to do yet.

G: We are image-makers, and the most important thing is to create those images. For example, we are going to take a photo of Stromae. We're going to do the Silver Surfer too, the superhero. I guess after our *Heroes* exhibition we're going to do superheroes.

Interview / Sheri Chiu
Artwork / "Les cosmonautes", Models / Pierre et Gilles, photographie peinte, 1991, unique