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Opening extract from

The Art Book for Children

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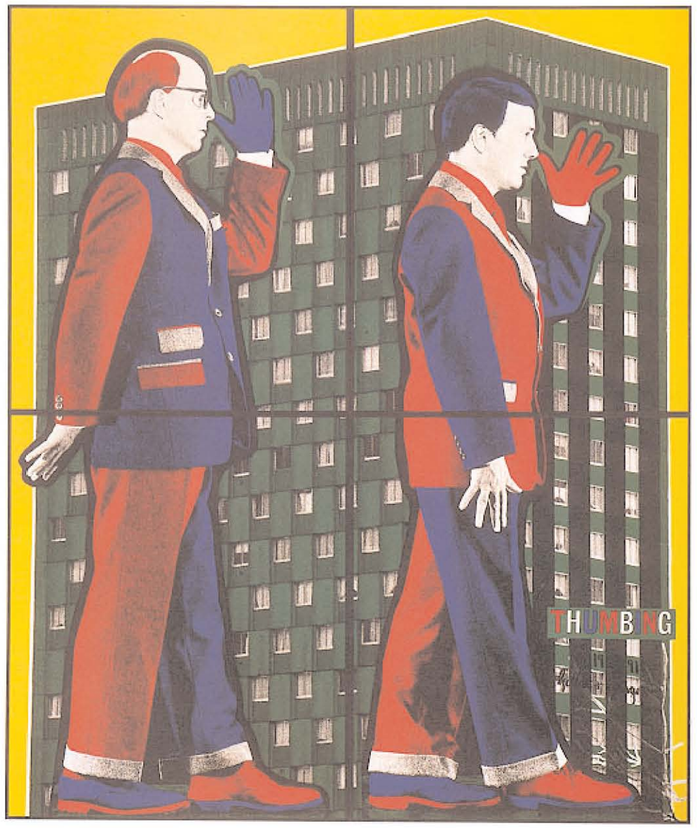
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Living sculpture

Multicoloured suits, odd pairs of shoes, red and blue hair, yellow sky and a green block of flats, all made to look a bit like a stained-glass window. I think it's safe to say that these artists aren't trying to make anything look like it does in real life.
So what are they trying to do?



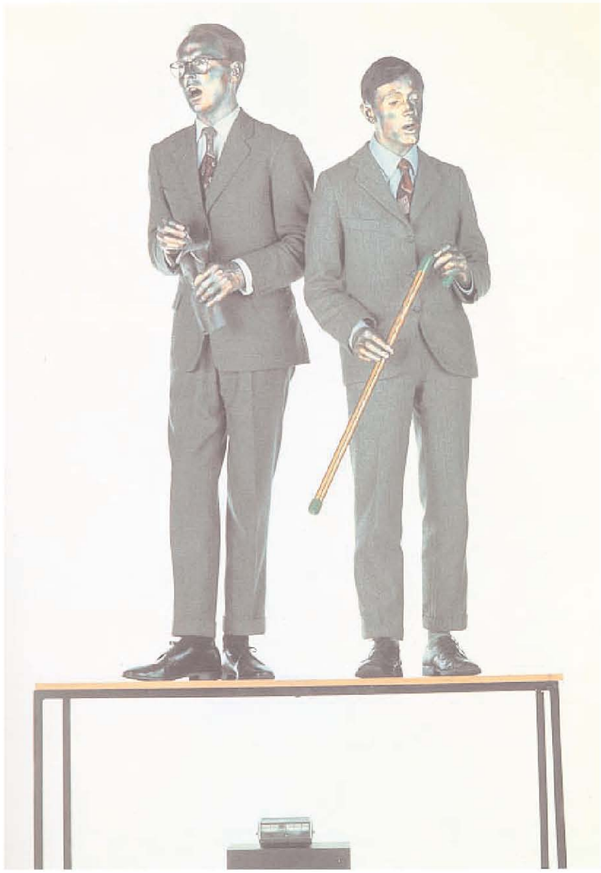
Thumbing

What are Gilbert and George 'thumbing' their noses at, or making fun of, in this picture? Are they making fun of traditional art? Or perhaps they're thumbing their noses at all the serious people who don't realize that art can be fun?

Gilbert and George are two people, but they behave as if they are one. Although not related to one another (Gilbert is Italian and George is English), they dress in the same way and are never seen apart, whether walking to the shop to buy food, or appearing in a museum as a work of art. Gilbert and George are the artists, but they are also the subject of the art that they create.

They call themselves a living sculpture. Once, dressed in smart suits, their hands and faces sprayed with metallic paint, they stood on a table in a gallery and, very seriously, mimed a song all day long, day after day. Can you imagine doing this? **Would you be able to keep a straight face?** They did.

The Singing Sculpture



Gilbert and George are unlike any other artist. They are a living sculpture that creates art. Can you imagine leading a life where everything you do is done with someone else, and everything you do together is seen as art?

A party

Can you hear the noise in this picture? What a racket! Bagpipe music, the clanging of plates and jugs, people chattering. The musician in the red jacket has stopped playing to stare at the food being brought in, and a man grabs a full plate from the tray to pass to other guests at the long table. The food must be delicious. The child wearing a red, floppy cap with a peacock feather is eating every last crumb on his plate with his fingers. Even the small child at the far end of the table looks as if he or she is munching away.

This is a party – a wedding party – that takes place in a barn. The yellow walls are stacks of hay. The bride is not dressed in white but in black, sitting in front of a blue-green cloth. Her eyes are closed, but she seems to be smiling. In those days the bride was not allowed to sit next to her groom at the wedding table. We can only guess who her new husband is. Perhaps he is the man with his eyes wide open, three seats to her right, stuffing a spoon into his mouth.

Do you think it's cold in this room? Remember that it's a barn! Notice how everyone wears something on his or her head. It may be a cap, a scarf or a hood. Can you find a wooden spoon, stuck in someone's hat?



Peasant Wedding Feast



There are so many details in this picture. Look at the large tray that is being used to bring in the plates. It's actually an old door! You can see one of the hinges on the left-hand side.

There's also something strange going on underneath the tray. The man with the red jacket seems to have three feet rather than two! Who does that third foot belong to?

Many of Pieter Bruegel's paintings are full of people, laughter and noise. He was a great storyteller, and, thanks to him, we know something of what life was like over 400 years ago. From this painting we can tell how people dressed, what musical instruments they played, and how they celebrated a country wedding.

A mystery

The *Mona Lisa* is probably the most famous portrait in the world, but not much is known about it. The picture was so important to Leonardo da Vinci that although he painted it for someone else, he refused to give it up, and kept it with him until he died.

Who was Lisa? We are not completely sure who the lady in the picture was, but her name was probably Lisa del Giocondo. *Mona* is a shortened form of *madonna*, which means 'my lady' in Italian. So the title means 'my lady Lisa'.

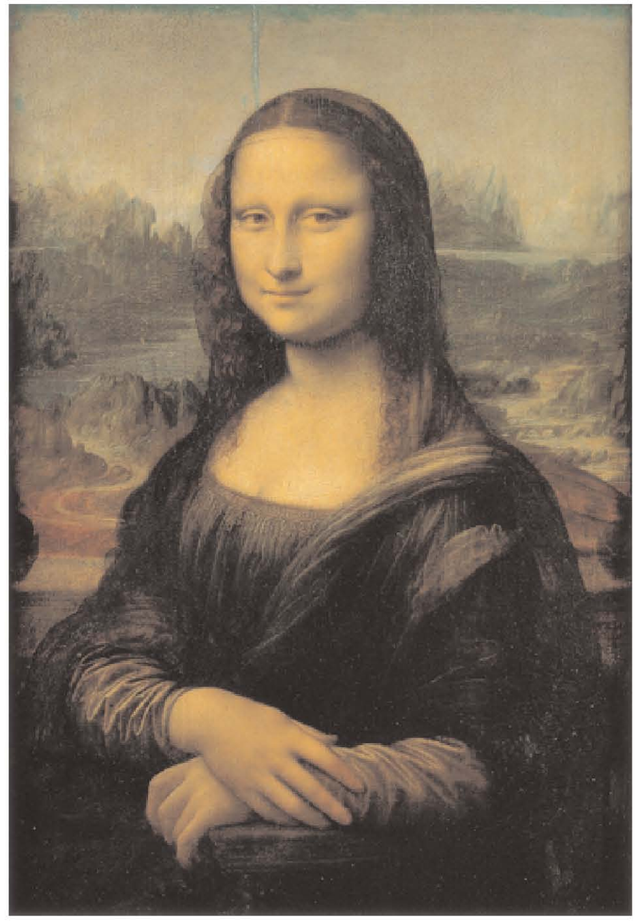
Where is Lisa? Is she standing, or is she sitting on a throne? Look at the scenery behind her. Is she in front of a window? Are the lakes, roads and mountains behind her real, or are they part of a picture hanging on the wall behind her? Perhaps they are just from Leonardo's imagination.



What is she thinking? Look into her eyes and at her mysterious smile. Is she happy? Is she sad? Maybe she's just bored.

The more you look at Mona Lisa, the more you feel that she might suddenly move her gently folded hands and come to life. She might even explain her mysterious secrets!

We don't know, for sure, who she was, where she is, or what she's thinking.
Why do you think this picture was so important to Leonardo?
No one knows the right answer, so your guess is as good as mine!



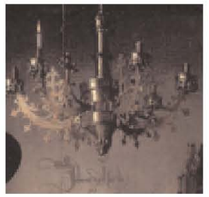
Mona Lisa

Showing off?

This painting celebrates a marriage. Jan van Eyck has chosen to paint the couple inside their house, so that he can tell us more about them.

The man in this painting is Giovanni Arnolfini. We know that Giovanni was an Italian merchant who imported beautifully made cloth from Bruges in Belgium, where he lived, to Italy. To show us Giovanni's interest in fabric, van Eyck has tried to include many different types and textures of cloth, and has painted them in great detail.













Giovanni's large hat is probably made of thick brown velvet, and his robe is trimmed with soft fur. His wife wears a starched white headdress trimmed with Belgian lace, and her heavy green gown, with its pleated bodice, has fancy edges on the sleeves and is also edged with fur. Beneath her green flowing robe, she is wearing a beautiful blue dress that looks as if it is made of satin. She is standing in front of a woven carpet, and the bed behind her is covered in a rich, red bedspread. Everything is painted in great detail – look at the brass chandelier, with the single candle, above their heads. You can almost count the hairs on the little dog at their feet.



The Arnolfini Portrait

I think that van Eyck was showing off a little in this picture. He and his brother, who was also an artist, invented a way of mixing paints and linseed oil that enabled them to paint the tiniest details. I think he used this picture to show how good this technique was. He was so proud that on the back wall of the room he has written, in Latin, *Johannes de eyck fuit hic* (Jan van Eyck was here), to make sure that everyone knew it was he who had painted the picture.