

EAST LONDON BOYS

*Artist Maryam Eisler has photographed the greatest creative characters of London's most artistic zone, the East End, for her new book, *Voices East London*. She talks here about her encounters with artists Gilbert and George, below*



It's always been a pleasure to meet up with Gilbert & George as I have done over the past few years during my global journeys in the art world. Photographing them for my book *Voices East London* this time was even more fun, given that I was training my lens on two of the contemporary art world's most innovative, and lens-focused creatives. We met on the site of their upcoming Heneage Street not-for-profit gallery and foundation in the heart of Spitalfields in east London and once the home of artist and polymath Polly Hope.

Not much has changed in their daily routines over the years, always keeping to a very tight schedule whilst remaining true to themselves and to their neighbourhood. I recall asking them if they ever went on holidays? To which they replied: "Why would we ever want to go anywhere but the East End, when the world continuously comes to us at our very own doorstep?" That doorstep is a home they've shared for at least four decades on Fournier Street, with Christ Church at one end and the Brick Lane Jamme Masjid mosque on the other.

Why did they choose to live in the East End to begin with, I ask? "We found that all of life was around us. A colourful, noisy cosmology of striving, struggling, living humanity." They also shared how long it took for them to be accepted by their environment - "very slowly".

"We loved it then, we love it now and we love the way in which it is changing by the day. It encapsulates all that we love of the past, present and future eternal life," as they write so poetically in their introductory contribution to *Voices East London*.

They do, however, recognise the turmoil and racial chaos facing the contemporary world. Yet, it is their belief that change goes hand in hand with progress: "We are at the dawn of something new," is how they put it politely.

In our varied conversations, I also found out that they are great fans of my origins - of Persian culture, poetry and architecture, and most importantly of Persian rice!

Long live multicultural intermingling. Long live the East End!

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