

Not Alone

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[To my twins, Amnon and Nadav]

One plus One is more than Two*

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In the 1960s and 1970s artist pairs who worked together on a permanent basis, under a joint signature, began to emerge, introducing art in first person plural. Today we are faced with a real phenomenon: scores of artist duos who work and exhibit together; the majority of them have never exhibited individually, and their artistic identity has never been formulated outside the pair.

Of the countless phenomena unique to contemporary art, this is one of the most curious and fascinating. The called for quandary arises as part of the attempt to fathom what

made possible the emergence of two artists who work and exhibit together in a manner previously nonexistent in the plastic arts. The initial, immediate answer is usually pulled from the realms of technique: since a large part of artistic practice in recent decades involves the production of complex works, and since making (contemporary) art often means producing a project, one can see that artmaking offers an extensive scope. It is easy to imagine how two work together on a video piece or a complicated installation. It is harder to understand how two work on a single painting.

But answers from the technical

* A paraphrase of a quote by Andrew Renton about the work of two British artists, **Ruth Blue & Aura Satz**, at the Bezalel Gallery in Tel Aviv, 2001.

department are never satisfactory, and it is a fact that some of the artist duos also create paintings, and by their own testimony, they certainly work together on a single canvas, even on a single paper.

Something more profound and rudimentary motivates them. Something more fundamental in the characterization of contemporary art enables, even encourages, the emergence of two where traditionally there was only one, licensing the undermining of one of art's most resounding myths: the myth of the lone artist standing at the easel.

The perception of the individual artist goes back to the Renaissance. While the work method in the Renaissance was indeed based on teamwork, it was entirely non-egalitarian: the (outstanding, genius, singular) grand master headed a small artmaking factory, with assistants and apprentices. Many

hands were involved in the creation of magnificent frescoes, but the hierarchy was clear-cut: one master, a single signature. The figures of artists such as Michelangelo or Leonardo reinforced the myth of the exceptional individual artist.

In the 18th century, with the introduction of the ideas of Romanticism, an aura of genius formed around the artist. Much has been written about the creative artist, the genius individual (Kant, Goethe), but only in retrospect was attention drawn to another characteristic of his, so obvious that it was unnecessary to mention it: the artist was of one sex; the artist was a man.

It follows that the very decision of two artists to work together rocks basic components in the traditional perception of the modern artist: his identity as an individual, his male identity, his heroic, monolithic perception, the artistic act as a romanticized clandestine, private

act. By virtue of the very work in tandem, under a single signature, each artist duo gradually erodes the myth of the romantic artist, effectuating a gendered subversion of his identity which is no longer self-evident. The emphasized fact that we are concerned with two artists causes, in itself, an additional jolt: the gaze is shifted from the work of art to matters which in the past were considered negligible and redundant when approaching art: sex, biography, behind-the-scenes of artmaking.

The artist pairs reject the heroism and romance tied with the artist's name and the artistic practice, preferring to adopt qualities previously considered disturbing, disconcerting, and repugnant: otherness and anomaly, artificiality, self-ridicule. Contemporary art makes it possible; at any event it is in a state of constant flux as far as definitions, boundaries and identities – of the artwork and the artist's figure – are concerned.

The First of the Others:

All Their Sons

Among the first, most distinctive and best-known artist pairs was a German couple, a husband and wife, **Bernd & Hilla Becher**,^{pg. 7} and in the opposite corner – a couple of homosexual Englishmen, **Gilbert & George**.^{pg. 8} Both couples still operate; both engage in photography; both couples have had vast influence on generations of artists, in terms of content as well as the approach to the photographic medium. Looking back on some three decades of artist duos, one realizes that these two artist couples introduce two major – albeit contradictory – aspects of the work in tandem: **Bernd & Hilla Becher** are photographers whose black-and-white photographs, in meticulous prints, address contents ostensibly outside the couple-oriented interest; **Gilbert & George** are conceptual performance and body artists for whom couplehood, duplication and their shared life

form key concerns in their work.

The "ostensible" qualification attached to the Bechers is akin to a gun in the first act, and we shall return to it. At face value, **Bernd & Hilla Becher's** photographs engage in systematic classification of industrial structures throughout Europe and the US: water towers, factories, granaries, furnaces. Since they started working together in 1957, soon after they met at the Düsseldorf Kunstakademie, the couple laid a discipline of practical rules pertaining to the objects of photography as well as their joint work. They photograph series of various building types, without human presence; frontal, symmetrical, austere photographs. These cumulate into a visual catalogue of industrial architecture, where each architectural motif is presented separately, at the center, frontally. They photograph in the early morning, in transitional seasons, when the sky is slightly overcast. No cloud is supposed to

overshadow the total objectivity of the depicted items.

Simultaneously, the Bechers have enforced upon themselves, from the outset, rules of full partnership without role division: both are involved in the selection of locations, the negotiations with the authorities or building owners, the camera's positioning, and the printing process. In other words, there is no division between the production side and the artistic side. When Hilla (née Wobeser) and Bernd Becher met, each of them already had an artistic path (albeit short) of his/her own. Hilla worked for an advertising agency, specializing in technical photography; Bernd photographed industrial structures, but perceived them as mere raw material for paintings. When they began their artistic collaboration, they made Bernd's photographic field the theme of their joint work, but in a new manner and with a different, clearly defined goal.

Observing the current map of photography in and outside Germany, and certainly in Israel as well, it is clearly visible that a large part of contemporary photographers have adopted the Bechers' typological, catalogue-like, quasi-documentary way of thinking. Many are their "sons". With all their publicity, influence and superstardom in the art world, the "Bechers" themselves have remained quite anonymous. The anonymity of their objects seems to have clung to them.

Indeed, what do **Bernd & Hilla Becher** look like? This is a superfluous question when it comes to **Gilbert & George**, probably the quintessential and most fundamental artist duo in contemporary art. **Gilbert & George** were from the very outset of their joint artistic career, a couple whose duplicated-private persona was at the core of their practice. They are present in all their works, dressed in suits and ties; George is tall and

bespectacled, Gilbert is shorter, of rounded face.

Like the Bechers and like many artist pairs to come, they met in art school. In their case, it was St. Martin's School of Art in London, 1967. Shortly after they met, they exhibited their first joint work – *Singing Sculpture*. They painted their faces bronze, stood on a table dressed in suits, with walking sticks in their hands, and sang karaoke to a record accompaniment. It was the song of two tramps who seek a little happiness in their lives. In that first project the attributes that would accompany their work in the future were cast: the robotic gestures and frozen expressions, the doubled identity of the British gentleman, alongside a radicalization of anomaly and identification with outsiders, with people on the social margins.

Their artistic persona represents an archetype of a "normal" man.

Gilbert & George have never been seen in public dressed in anything but suits. A documentary film about them created in 1997 (*The Fundamental Gilbert and George*) presents them, even in the studio, during work, still in suits, and only when they are required to actually use paint, do they take them off, remaining in white shirts whose sleeves are slightly rolled up, with immaculate trousers and shoes. Furthermore, they have never been seen in public separately either.

The idea of looking normal while creating provocative art was stirring. "The conservative look was radical," as one critic wrote about them. The compulsive observance of normalcy obviously exposed a radical eccentricity. In the first years of their collaborative practice they could be seen walking the streets of London, their faces covered in metallic paint, like robots devoid of expression, in the most conventional suits. The exact duplication and

the engineering of a homogenous appearance cumulated to form a double self-portrait underlain by a pair of artists working as an autonomous unit, which is, in fact, a brand-name. They became an object, living sculptures; they became celebrities.

The externalization of the twofold, hermetic artistic unit was a dramatic proposal to the art world. **Gilbert & George**, artists and homosexuals, externalized the artist's otherness, difference and anomaly in their work and appearance, qualities which have been fostered from a different direction by the Van Gogh myth; the artist as the "other" of society, possibly a genius, but certainly anomalous, eliciting admiration, but also fear and recoil. By their very transformation into a living sculpture, **Gilbert & George** agreed to be a spectacle, an object of wonderment, curiosity, attraction and perplexity. As they became stars quite rapidly, to their

surprise, the two used their stardom status to gain the opposite results of exposure; they became their own paparazzi, documenting not only their glorious moments, but also the dark side of their life. They photographed urine, feces, blood, and semen; they portrayed themselves naked and drunk; they sought to shock, primarily, themselves ("We have to terrify ourselves") and only afterwards the viewer, by way of total self-humiliation ("We went deeper and deeper inside of ourselves in preparation for being able to go out to the viewer more later on... We felt that we have to completely destroy ourselves in some way to find out worse worse things about ourselves."). In their self-exposure **Gilbert & George** created yet another pattern explored by many artist pairs, each from its own place: couplehood is accentuated as a type of anomaly; the anomaly is accompanied by a desire for exposure, a type of exhibitionism.

The artist duo **Pierre et Gilles**,^{pg. 12} who began operating in France in the late 1970s, also emphasized their homosexual identity, not through self-exposure, but rather through intentional use of an aesthetic identified with homosexuality: saccharine-sweet beauty, inspiration derived from popular visual realms, Las Vegas as an allegory. Their works display deliberately poor taste and an embarrassing resemblance to commercial art, kitsch, and pornography.

Pierre et Gilles came to Paris (separately) in 1973, they met in 1976, and two years later started to collaborate. They photograph actors, musicians, porn stars, handsome male and female models. They make them pose in the roles of sacred figures, inter alia (*Adam and Eve, St. Sebastian, the Madonna*). The photographs are hand-retouched with an airbrush, and the result is reminiscent of advertising posters. In interviews they say that the television in

their home is constantly on; they are enchanted by Indian movies, and generally aspire "to show things that are gentle and pretty". Accordingly, their photographs are retouched, manipulated, clearly unnatural, appearing like frames from a telenovela. They avoid using digital means, and to this day continue to perform all the work manually, in a unique method of their own development.

Unlike most of the artist pairs who claim that they have no definite work division, **Pierre et Gilles** volunteer different information: Pierre is the photographer – in black-and-white and in color, Gilles is the painter who touches up the photographs with pastels and airbrush. Both, however, do everything without outside help; they mount the sets for the shooting, fix the lighting, select models. In this respect they resemble other artist pairs (**Effi & Amir**,^{pg. 10} **MariaMaria**^{pg. 21}) who consider themselves a closed, autarchic, self-sufficient unit. One

and one, as aforesaid, is much more than two.

In the summer of 2005 **Gilbert & George** exhibited in the British Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. Their selection was perceived as an almost conservative move of the British art world. Today, **Gilbert & George** are the establishment. Over the years they have been accused of fascism: the identical suits were perceived as a uniform – the uniform of conformism, and their robot-like walking recalled marching soldiers. Their statements about the enigmatism and non-communicative nature of contemporary art led to their identification as conservative and right wing. In fact, the artists and their art are enigmatic and elusive, consistently transpiring in a route of point and counterpoint. In their winding, yet highly systematic path, they continue to produce images that possess a very specific inner logic. Their series

of "Ginkgo Pictures" featured at the Venice Biennale was centered on recurring leaves of the ginkgo tree which, beyond their unique medical qualities, also introduce a symmetrical structure that unfolds like Rorschach inkblots. **Gilbert & George's** compulsive duplication, of themselves and of any person or object stumbling into their works, transforms their cumulative oeuvre into a constant subversion of the single-singular image.

The Hybrid, Perverse, Grotesque,
and Unnatural Essence of the Two

Bernd & Hilla Becher, Gilbert & George, and **Pierre et Gilles** are considered, in contemporary art terms, the classics of the current. Scores of artist duos who emerged in the 1980s and especially in the 1990s, owe a debt, whether consciously or unconsciously, to the first pairs who paved the way to challenging the perception of the sole artist. In 1994 the young British artist

duo, **Tim Noble & Sue Webster**, glued photographs of their faces onto **Gilbert & George's** famous body photographs, with the suits and ties. In the 1990s, **Gilbert & George** were considered the great forefathers of the British art scene and pioneering celebrity-artists (like Andy Warhol in America), outstanding among the artists who have turned their figure into the focus of their work and used it as an object exposed to all possible types of abuse. The young couple, **Noble & Webster**, have christened themselves into the art world via homage to the artist pair which by then had already become a classic.

Gil & Moti^{pg. 13, 19} are an artist couple who, in different ways, continue the tradition of **Gilbert & George** and **Pierre et Gilles**, pushing it further. Like the two elder pairs, they are also a couple in life and art. They met in 1994 as art students at the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, Jerusalem, and fell in love; they moved into a joint

studio, but continued to create separate works under separate signatures. Both staged separate solo exhibitions before becoming a couple in art: Gil Nader was involved in intricate projects which materialized as installations, video works, and conceptual art; Moti Porat created figurative paintings in oil on canvas. Both engaged, from totally different directions, with their personal-sexual identity on biographical grounds. In 1998 they moved to Holland and converted their Rotterdam home into a gallery. It was only then that they decided to collaborate and operate as multi-disciplinary artists. Ever since they make sure to always be seen in public together, in uniform clothes and hair style. Unlike **Gilbert & George** who adopted the decent, conservative look (which at the time, as aforesaid, was revolutionary) **Gil & Moti** adopted a sportive youthful look. As far as they are concerned, there is no gap between art and life (or,

at least, the life they are willing to expose to the public): their wedding ceremony in Rotterdam was an artistic project per se. Like **Gilbert & George**, **Gil & Moti** also invented themselves as an autonomous unit, a brand, a walking spectacle, a living sculpture. When they go into the street, the street becomes their exhibition space.

It seems that homosexual artist pairs, like duos of woman artists, clearly illustrate that every work in tandem implies a gender-based defiance. Both pair types externalize an artistic-sexual identity which until two or three decades ago was outside the standard of art. The artistic persona took into consideration an individual, unique, ingenious, original man.

The very work in tandem thus involves an undermining of the artist's uniqueness and the work's originality, thus echoing post-modern theories about the death

of the author, the waning of the artwork's aura, and the shattering of the ethos of heroism underlying modern art.

For **Effi & Amir**, an artist pair highly conscious of the totality of implications of two artists working together, this is "a type of counter-reaction to the perception of the hero-artist." They met as students at the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design and started working together in 1998 when they became a couple in real life. Effi says that each reached a dead-end in his own art, and thus they found themselves, in the last year of their studies, making art together. The first work they created as a couple was *The Torch Lighting Ceremony* (1999).

In this short video they are seen standing upright, dressed identically (in tight-fitting azure leotards with white margins), holding in their hands burning torches, lighting each other's head; festive, serene, aware of the significance of the ceremony.

"This ritual act is a declaration of independence, through which we create an autonomous system with all its intricacy (a self-operating, self-consuming system)", they explain.

Like many first works of artists, in their case it is also amazing to see how this first work unknowingly laid down patterns that would characterize their work in the future: they are not only the main but the only actors in their performances and video works; they are dressed identically; their Israeliness is emphasized (they are dressed in the colors of the national flag, inspired by Independence and Memorial Day ceremonies); their faces are frozen and their look – robot-like and futuristic.

The fact that a large part of **Effi & Amir's** works is based on performances which they carry out (some before an audience, others while adopting the characteristics of a performance) is linked to their perception of the

artist in the context of freak show, a prevalent phenomenon in the 19th and early 20th centuries: performances of midgets, giants, Siamese twins, hermaphrodites, bearded women, and various other human beings deformed by nature who became a spectacle, to the horror and amazement of an excited audience. Today, in the era of political correctness, the freak show is deemed a reprehensible inhuman phenomenon. **Effi & Amir** maintain that the freaks were in fact filled with pride and a sense of uniqueness, and did not feel humiliated at all.

As artists operating in duo, dressed identically, performing uniform gestures, adopting a body language which seems extracted from science fiction movies, and as Israelis living abroad – they regard themselves as fundamentally anomalous, antiheroes, foreign and exotic, a spectacle to an enchanted audience. In a long and fascinating essay

("Alive and Freaking by Effi and Amir") they link the freak show and freakdom phenomenon to the performance *When We Were Kings* that they held in May 2004 as part of an alternative art event in Amsterdam.

The main structure in *When We Were Kings* was a fair stand in which **Effi & Amir** stood dressed in blue Lycra suits, with half a falafel ball stuck to their foreheads. Attached to the stand was a pair of bicycles, and the audience was invited to pick a card with the name of a song (a Hebrew song whose name was transcribed in English), to sit on the bicycle and pedal. Once the pedaling commenced, **Effi & Amir** started singing at the pace dictated by the pedaling rhythm of the random spectator. A mesmerized audience stood around, laughing and enjoying the sight. **Effi & Amir** turned themselves into a freak show of artists in an Amsterdam park.

Following the performance in the park they photographed themselves riding a bicycle built-for-two, Effi sitting in front, Amir in back. Ostensibly a pleasant ride on a tandem (the photograph is entitled *Recreation*), Effi, however, has no legs, and Amir – no hands. The photograph is, in fact, a quotation of a famous photograph from the freak show world – British brothers who were indeed born one without legs and the other without arms, who used to perform as comedians. The photograph's shock value lies not only in the symmetrical deformities, but in the harmonious perfection created between the two: they truly become a closed unit that can only exist in two.

In *All My Sons*, an installation and video work, **Effi & Amir** imagine themselves as a futuristic couple, both sporting pregnancy bellies. On the computer they created forty possible crosses between their facial features, forty virtual variations on

the coupling between them. Of the forty children who applied to come into the world, eight were selected, and they are embodied as digital black-and-white portraits reminiscent of identikits: figures devoid of an identity, similar yet separate. It is not by chance that the aesthetic selected to characterize the artists' children is associated with suspicion and crime. The modern artist is always perceived, in some vague manner, as dubious.

The pair of Dutch artists, **MariaMaria**, always operates within staged situations of a performance without an audience. They have worked together since 1995, producing photographic images, in all of which they are depicted in open landscapes, rooms, or near swimming pools. Some of the photographs are presented in series of two entitled *Two Take*: the two photographs are similar, but not identical. In each *Two Take* the same location and the same shooting angle are

repeated, but each time a different Maria takes the photograph, and the other models. Although each in her turn observes with different eyes, the results are almost identical. The viewing experience simulates observation of twins, almost identical, but not quite.

They photograph and are photographed in various landscapes that are hard to characterize precisely, semi-touristy and semi-nondescript. Besides them, there is no one there. Similarly, the houses in which they photograph and model evade characterization or definition. But the accumulation of all the photographic images, another one and another two, with the duplicated figures of **MariaMaria**, at times at the edge of the frame, at others in extreme close-up, creates an elusive, imaginary world, highly unique, melancholic, refined, and introverted, captivating in its suggestive quality. No one else is involved in the act of photography.

Like other artist pairs, **MariaMaria** also perceive themselves as an autarchic, self-sufficient, exclusive unit.

It is precisely from **MariaMaria**'s pairs of photographs that we can now go back to **Bernd & Hilla Becher**. Their long standing body of work, the result of journeys, studies, and acts of classification, increasingly establishes itself as an undermining of the "one": an architectural motif, an image. Each water tower is at once identical and non-identical to dozens of other towers of the same kind; each structure is reminiscent and non-reminiscent of scores like it. They are all twins, but different; all duplications of the same type, the same image, but not the same. Like the identikits of **Effi & Amir**'s forty children, who are similar and different, the similarity is the result of genetic mutation. Each type of industrial structure is presented by the Bechers separately, but the discrete image is part of a display configuration that stressed rather

the multiplicity and difference. Since the mid-1960s **Bernd & Hilla Becher** began presenting the photographs in a grid structure, sixteen models of the same water tower or silo, hung side by side, without hierarchy, making it possible to see the subtle variations between them. Absolute twinness is nonexistent.

Force Two

Alona Friedberg & Limor Orenstein^{pg. 15} called their first exhibition *Force Two*. The title seems to encapsulate the essence of female collaborative work in art – consciousness of women's (traditionally) weak, lacking place in art, hence the recognition of couplehood as a possible source of power. Distorted in terms of Hebrew grammar, the title declares distortion as an essence, a point of departure, even a source of pride.

Alona & Limor star in all the videos and almost all the photographic images they produce. They met at

the Midrasha Art College, hooked together, and started helping each other with their individual works. When they decided to photograph themselves, they concluded that they must create external semblance: both cut their hair short and dyed it blond. In all the works they appear in identical apparel. The artificial twinness they have enforced upon themselves emphasizes the fact that they offer a different female model, antithetical to the representations of women which art (and cinema) glorify and exalt. In *Moving Image*, one of their first videos, the two sit in a typical pose of men-in-front-of-the-TV, each has a different foot in a cast, and they swallow food from bowls at tremendous speed. In the meantime, cinematic images cross the screen, especially images of women: famous movie stars, scenes presenting archetypal women. In the same year (2000) they also created the film *The Metamorphosis*, where they try to roll and push a red Volkswagen

"Beetle". This time images of men taken from "The Strongest Men in the World" competitions appear on screen. In all their works, **Alona & Limor** scrutinize stereotypes of womanhood, motherhood and masculinity, softness versus force, natural versus artificial.

The very duplication of any image creates alertness. Alertness increases when two women are concerned, for the "naturalness" ascribed to women is undermined: there is something very unnatural, highly mechanized and engineered, in two women who look and move in the same manner. Their unusual appearance in close-cropped blond hair, at once masculine and feminine – and repeated twice – challenges every traditional female image. Recently they gave up the haircut that had become their trademark. Their attire is still identical, but it seems that they are allowing themselves to gradually part with the radical artificial doubling. It seems that "force two",

the double force, enables them to grow hair and present quintessential (defiant) images of male singularity: Narcissus, a rooster. The rooster, for example, is printed in very small dimensions and framed in a carved wooden frame, nevertheless defiantly declaring its unique, virile being, aristocratic and boastful, purely cocksure.

Noga Elhassid & Halit Mandelblit^{pg. 16} have been friends since the age of seven. In this sense, they are the closest version to sibling-artists who work together (the Starn Twins and Wilson Sisters, also twins). They studied in the same primary school and the same high school; they served in the army together and studied together at the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design. The first public work they presented as artists (at the Kav 16 Gallery, Tel Aviv) was a large-scale installation centered on the sculpture of a two-headed monster that came out of a great big puddle. Its body

consisted of furniture parts, and its two heads were the sculpted heads of **Noga and Halit**, contorted in anger. It was an amusing version of a split, double-headed self; a creature the likes of which are found in comics or in computer games; a colorful, ridiculed personification of female rage. Like **Alona & Limor**, they too chose for their first exhibition a militant, aggressive title – *Ninjitsu*. Under the auspices of a male martial art they entered the Israeli art world with fury, a gnashing of teeth, and great laughter, two against the world, masquerading as Ninjas, showing boyish muscles, making fun of male brawn.

Since then **Noga & Halit** have exhibited various large-scale and highly imaginative installations, but they have never returned to address the theme of couplehood directly. Recently they also began painting together. They paint, each in her turn, on the same paper, giving each other instructions, scanning

the paintings into the computer and coloring them. In fact, these are digital prints, but the artists like calling them "aquarelles," a word that smacks of old, intimate, refined art. Like the father of the bride at his daughter's wedding, they say about their joint work: "We don't give up our ego; we gain another ego."

Maya Zack & Raya Bruckenthal^{pg. 23} signify another facet on the scale of artistic duos. They have worked together since their studies at the Bezalel Academy, but at the same time they also work and exhibit separately. Their first joint project was executed when they were students: a video piece in which they presented themselves as an art talk cliché: two artists talking about art, feminism, and ancient myths of femininity. "Intellectual, female, prim speech," as they define the parody. Their joint artistic initiation involved a blatant ridicule of the way they might be perceived.

Subsequently they worked on joint paintings, but exhibited their graduation projects separately. Two years after graduation they staged an impressive joint exhibition at the Tel Aviv Artists' Studios, *Baron E.T. von Home*. The entire gallery – floor, walls, and columns – was covered with plywood. In one of the corners stood the figure of the alien E.T., sculpted in wood as a panhandler, an aristocrat who lost his money and now sits in the street corner, a beggar. His moving figure was distinctively a unique image. The sculpting in wood surrendered patient handiwork; not only a singular image, but also a traditional technique.

Their collaboration and the work in tandem is not the content of their work, but a possibility for facilitation, a way of sharing responsibility between a "thinking head" and a "performing body", as they define it. In the past two years they have worked on a

monumental 3-part video piece, *Concrete and Cement*.

The main issue in the work in tandem, it appears from the artistic couples' reports, is the sense of relief. Not to be alone in the demanding, often tormenting and terrifying process of artistic practice, to share the responsibility and be charged with the energies of another person, to draw strength from the shared effort.

A New Artistic Agenda

A sub-phenomenon of the collaborative artist duos are married artist couples, consisting of a husband who is a reputable artist, who, at some stage, is joined by his wife in his work. Three such outstanding couples are **Claes Oldenburg & Coosje van Brugen**, **Ilya & Emilia Kabakov**, and **Christo & Jeanne-Claude**.^{pg. 31} The very flow chart of their couplehood (in the beginning was the man, and the woman joined

in later) indicates the fundamental difference between them and all the artist pairs mentioned thus far, pairs that tend to externalize equality to the point of compulsiveness.

Claes Oldenburg left his imprint on 1960s American Pop Art. In the 1970s, Coosje van Brugen joined him in his large-scale public works, first as a theoretician accompanying his work, and later as his wife and a full partner in his practice, sharing his credit. Ilya Kabakov started his artistic career in the 1950s as an illustrator of children's books. In the 1960s and 1970s he was a central figure in the avant-garde group which operated in Moscow. In 1987 he moved to the west and started producing "total installations", grand productions of environments, often constructed around fictive characters in broad historical and cultural contexts. During that time he met Emilia, and since 1989 they are co-signed on the works, all of them monumental productions.

But the strangest and most significant instance to our discussion is the case of **Christo & Jeanne-Claude**. They have been married since the early 1960s. Christo has made a glorious career as an environmental artist who wraps architectural structures and sections of landscape: he wrapped Pont Neuf in Paris, fountains and gates in Italy, he surrounded islands in Florida with pink plastic, erected white canvas that ran like a fence along ranches in California, etc. In 1994 the couple issued a public declaration stating that all of Christo's works since the 1960s are co-works of Christo and his wife, Jeanne-Claude. Publications of the past decade set out to rewrite Christo's history, and the new story is told from the point of view of a creative couple. It appears that Jeanne-Claude has been an active partner in Christo's art since 1961, in fact from the stage when his work shifted to grand, architectural, urban and environmental scale.

Why did they not become an artistic couple back then? Why did they wait more than thirty years to announce the transition from one to two? One possibility is that **Christo and Jeanne-Claude** were captive to the classical perception of "the artist's wife". The presence of creative/inspiring/assisting/nursing women by the side of great men is so deeply-rooted in the history of art that even a dominant and opinionated woman like Jeanne-Claude, late into the 20th century, still assimilated into her husband's work. On the other hand, when grand undertakings are concerned, it is hard to tell where the line passes between the artistic concept and the prolonged process of its actual realization. Thus, the aforementioned heterosexual married couples rather than serving as a transitory link between the lone-heroic-male artist to artist pairs, perpetuate precisely the traditional order: in the beginning was the male artist; next to him emerged the woman as a model, a

muse, his helpmate, sheltered under his aura. Her name had no separate existence without her partner's.

Opposite them, the new artist pairs propose an entirely different agenda: by their very coupled essence they generate a gender disconcert. By the very fact of their twoness (two men, two women, a man and a woman), they interfere with the exclusiveness of the individual, male artist; outflanking the single ego doubly. They effectuate a silencing of art's private voice, interrupting the heroic, monolithic, singular and romantic perception of the artist. Spitefully, defiantly and insolently, they offer their radicalized couplehood as another option, and most of them embrace the possibility of self-ridicule, of transforming themselves into a grotesque or a parody, big time. To quote **Effi & Amir**: they offer themselves as "something" rather than "someone".

Vis-à-vis the humanist spirit which spawned the individual, the artist pairs propose mechanized automatism. Vis-à-vis the myth of Narcissus's reflection in the water, which stands at the foundation of western art, they propose twinness that does not require external reflection, but is rather self-contained.