



Gillian Wearing
'Dancing in Peckham', 1994
colour video for monitor with sound
25 minutes
© Gillian Wearing courtesy Maureen Paley, London

ArtSpark

ignite ideas and imagine

Discover '**Dancing in Peckham**' a video from 1994 by the British artist Gillian Wearing.

This is one of 14,000+ works of art from the Government Art Collection which are displayed in UK Government buildings in over 130 countries; that is nearly every capital city around the world!

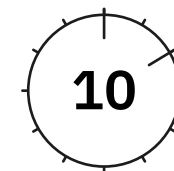


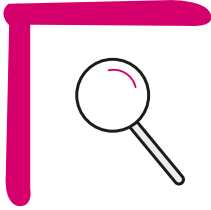
Ready to find out more?

Read online, download or 'pick and mix' any activities that you like. Try them at home, at school or with friends.

You don't have to do them all in one go!

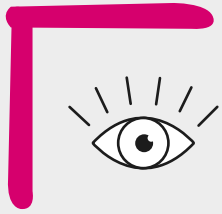
Look out for this icon for 10-minute quick and easy activities...





10 facts about... Gillian Wearing

- * Gillian Wearing was born in Birmingham in 1963. She exhibits her work internationally, and in 1997 she won the Turner Prize.
- * Wearing graduated from Goldsmiths College, London. She was one of a group of artists in the 1990s, including Damien Hirst and Sarah Lucas, who became known as the 'Young British Artists' or 'YBAs'.
- * Much of Wearing's work uses photography and performance to explore themes of identity, self-portraiture and gender.
- * Wearing's work often plays with the spaces between public/private; how we appear/how we are, and what is and is not considered acceptable behaviour.
- * The idea for 'Dancing in Peckham' came to Wearing when she saw a woman dancing wildly at the Royal Festival Hall in London, unaware that other people were laughing at her.
- * Wearing did not initially immediately consider a career in art. At 21 she lived in London, and worked as a secretary in an animation studio.
- * On her use of masks, Wearing said in 2014: 'It's like Oscar Wilde says, "Give someone a mask and they will tell the truth." When we talk with our faces, we are very aware how people are perceiving us. Masks protect you quite a lot actually. They give you a little bit of empowerment.'
- * 'Dancing in Peckham' was made in 1994, a decade before mobile phones came into popular use.
- * The soundtrack Wearing plays in her head in 'Dancing in Peckham' is by the rock band Nirvana and soul singer Gloria Gaynor. In 1994, Nirvana broke up after the death of lead singer Kurt Cobain, while Gaynor had already enjoyed a 20-year career. Her anthem, 'I Will Survive', featured in two major films that year - 'The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert' and 'Four Weddings and a Funeral'.
- * Wearing's bronze statue of suffragist leader Millicent Fawcett, 'Courage Calls to Courage Everywhere' is the first-ever monument of a woman, and the first created by a woman, for Parliament Square. It was unveiled in 2018 to coincide with the centenary celebrations of women's suffrage in the UK. Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, said: 'Finally, Parliament Square is no longer a male-only zone for statues... [This statue] will stand near Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela - two other heroic leaders who campaigned for change and equality.'
- * A maquette for the sculpture, along with artist's proofs, are in the Collection:



Starter questions to help explore the artwork



Here are some questions to encourage you to look closely for clues.

There are no right and wrong answers: say what you see!

Watch the film

- Describe the shopping centre: what sort of place is it? (consider the shops, signs, etc)
- The film was made in 1994: what clues tell us it was made then and not now?
- What can you say about the dancer? -
- How do you think she feels?
- Is she enjoying herself, or not? How can you tell?
- Why do you think she is dancing?
- Does the dancer know she's being filmed? (Any clues?)
- Imagine you are one of the passersby: how would you describe to friends what you saw?

Gillian Wearing

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25 minutes

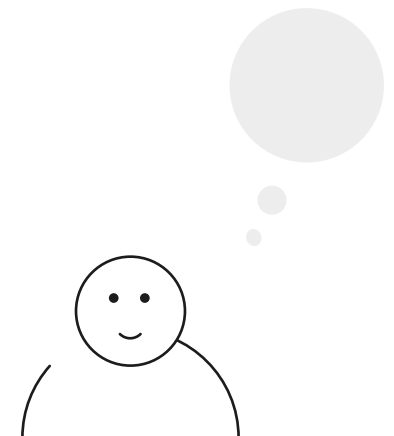
© Gillian Wearing courtesy Maureen Paley, London

Take a look at the six photographs taken from the film (called 'stills') on the left of this page.

- What does the film give us that the stills do not?
- What do the stills reveal that you don't get from watching the film?

Your turn: make a graphic novel

- Print the film stills onto a sheet of A4 and cut them into individual frames, or if you like, draw them.
- Stick the stills onto a larger piece of paper.
- Write 'thought bubbles' for what you imagine Wearing and the passersby are thinking.



Enter the world of Wearing



'Dancing in Peckham' is a 'production still', a photograph taken while the film was being made.

R-type photograph

1994-97

Your turn: restage the moment

- Can you and your friends recreate the photo, including all the background characters?
- Where will you set it? (If you can't find a similar location, can you recreate the scene somewhere else?)
- Can you develop a performance from here, with each person in the group taking on the role of one person in the photo?
- 'Improvisation' is doing something without pre-planning. Try it. What happened a few minutes before, and what will happen next in this photo?
- Instead of acting the scene out, write about it from one person's viewpoint: who will you choose to tell the story?

Gillian Wearing

'Dancing in Peckham' 1994-97

R-type photograph

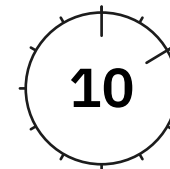
© Gillian Wearing courtesy Maureen Paley, London

Freeze!

Wearing made a recording of her Peckham dance - first by filming it, and then creating stills. Without the film, it would be difficult now to get a sense of the dance.

Dance 'notation' is a way of describing movement through marks, symbols and signs written on paper.

- Find out more about how to write dance



Your turn: capture the movement

- Draw Wearing while watching the film of her dancing.
- Using a large sheet of paper and a soft pencil, without looking at the paper, allow your hand to make marks as you watch the dance.
- In pairs, draw each other dancing (you can do this online, if you like).
- Keep it loose! Hold your pen or pencil lightly, and respond to the movement.

Dance like nobody's watching

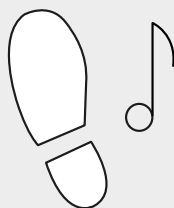


'Artificial Things'

Contemporary dance film by Stopgap Dance Company (inclusive dance)

Commissioned in 2019 by The Space.

Winner of dancescreen 2019 award in the category of screen choreography - over 15 mins



Wearing used a remembered soundtrack to give her confidence.

- What would work for you? How does different music affect the way you feel?

'Artificial Things'

Choreography is the act of designing dance. Take time out to enjoy this 25 min film by the award-winning Stopgap Dance Company, and consider these questions as you watch.

- How does the choreographer celebrate the different abilities of the performers?
- How has she used the space and the camera?
- This film is described as 'exploring human interdependence, strength and vulnerability' - what do these qualities mean to you?
- Compare Wearing's film, 'Dancing in Peckham' and this film: Is Wearing's film choreographed? What differences are there in how the performances are filmed?

Your turn: make some moves

- **At home** - create a sequence of movements in response to each of the different rooms: what sort of shapes work in the kitchen? How about by the front door?
- Invent a short dance move and film it on your phone. Work with a song's lyrics: what moves tell the song's story?
- Think about the edges of the camera frame to help shape your move.
- Show or send it to a friend and ask them to give it a name.

Take it further

- Find a public space eg. a shopping centre, or park.
- Working in small groups, with one as choreographer and two or more performers, create a sequence of movements that use the qualities of the place.
- If you want to, you can develop this into a film.

Your turn: silent disco

Explore different playlists on headphones while out somewhere public (or at home). Have a dance!

What's your sign?



Gillian Wearing

'EVERYTHING IS CONNECTED IN LIFE
THE POINT IS TO KNOW IT AND TO
UNDERSTAND IT' 1992-93

C-type photographic print

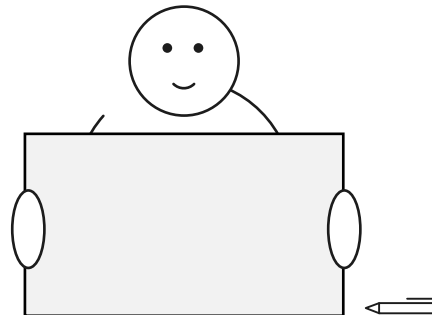
© Gillian Wearing courtesy Maureen Paley, London

Among Wearing's most famous works is 'Signs that say what you want them to say and not Signs that say what someone else wants you to say' (1992-93). Stopping hundreds of people on London streets, she invited them to write whatever they wished on a white card, then photographed them.

'I'm desperate' 1992-93

Your turn: make a sign of your own

- Think of a sign that says what someone else wants you to say.
- Think of a sign that says what you want to say.
- Make it: create a self portrait of you holding a sign saying what you believe/feel/want.
- Things to talk about: is there a difference between how we present ourselves to the world, and how we feel inside?



Your turn: question appearances

- Gather a selection of photos of people in newspapers, magazines, postcards, etc.
- Taking inspiration from Wearing's photos, write a caption for each picture that challenges what you can see.
- Using the sets of photos and statements, work in pairs and try to match photos with statements.



For inspiration, watch artist Martin Parr introducing 'Love Cube', a work he made in 1972 about pairing people into couples.

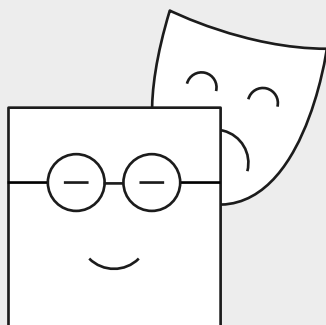
Play, protect and empower



USA. Untitled. (from the Mask Series with Saul Steinberg), 1962.

Photograph by Inge Morath/MAGNUM PHOTOS.

Mask by Saul Steinberg © The Saul Steinberg Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY/DACS, London 2020



Wearing uses masks in many different ways: Go to '10 Facts' and read what Wearing said about Oscar Wilde and masks.

Your turn: explore making two very different masks

Do you have an old cardboard box handy? Transform it into a mask. For inspiration, [look at these photos](#) featuring masks made by Inge Morath & Saul Steinberg:

- Draw a face on the front of the cardboard box. It doesn't have to be realistic.
- Working in pairs, try photographing each other posing and wearing your cardboard box masks, but keep everything else about the photo absolutely normal!

Look through your own photos of friends and family, and choose one to print to fit as a mask to wear on your own face. Follow the guidelines in [Andy Weiner's film](#), which includes an introduction to his project, 'Visitation Scenes', and a practical demonstration of how he uses photographic masks:

- Working with a partner, stage a scene wearing this mask.
- Where will you set it?
- What other props do you need?

Who said that?

Another way Wearing plays with disguise is by switching around the speaker's voice. [Watch](#) one of a series of films she made where the performer's voices are swapped -

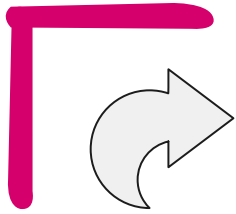
Talk about this

What's the effect of seeing someone mouth the words of someone else (this is called 'lip syncing')?

Your turn: swap voices

(This is tricky and may take a few attempts to perfect - but persevere!)

- Find two people each with a phone (especially if they are different in age/gender/interests). Name them A and B.
- Using one phone's dictator function, A records themselves saying something.
- Write out this short speech for B to learn/read. (Rehearse...)
- Using the camera on the second phone, film B lip syncing to A's recording. (Repeat with opposite roles)
- Edit the two together, and share.
- What effect have you achieved?
- Was it funny? Disturbing? Revealing? Why?



What next?

More to explore

Masks can be used for a whole range of things, including disguise and protection, to celebrate and to play.

Discover other Collection artworks featuring masks. How have artists used masks in each of them?

[Mask 1](#)

[Mask 2](#)

[Mask 3](#)

[Mask 4](#)

- Watch a clip of ['Rehearsing for Peckham'](#) by Gillian Wearing (NOWNESS)

Places to visit/online

- Your own local shopping centre, or any other interesting public spaces near to you, where you might re-stage Wearing's dance (or create one of your own).
- [Tate Britain online](#)
- [Parliament Square, London](#)
- ['Art is where the home is'](#)
Firstsite's free artist-created activity packs (contributions from UK artists, including Gillian Wearing: 'create your own monument for a key worker', and 'design your own sign').
- Stopgap: Artificial Things.
Stopgap Dance Company are experts of inclusive choreography with extensive experience of nurturing disabled and non-disabled artists for making collaborative works. Read Stopgap Artistic Director [Lucy Bennett's interview](#) from The Guardian, 8 April 2014.

The Government Art Collection is the most dispersed collection of British art in the world. On show in UK Government buildings in nearly every capital city, the Collection promotes British art and supports British cultural diplomacy, culture and values.

/ One national collection

/ Over 14,000 artworks

/ On show in over 130 countries

www.artcollection.culture.gov.uk

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