



GILLIAN WEARING
Conceptual artist, 50

OUR WOMAN IN...

London

The Turner Prize-winning British artist was born and raised in Birmingham, but now calls London her home

When I first moved to London I wasn't much of a talker. Now I can articulate myself much more. I only realised when I was 17 that I didn't speak coherently, when working as an office junior on an opportunities scheme in Birmingham. The staff kept asking me to go to the counter and serve people. They would then find it funny when I couldn't string a sentence together. I have somewhat improved over the years, but put me in a room with lots of people all listening to me, and I can revert quite easily to mumbling and inarticulacy. I am a listener, and always have been. I prefer hearing from other people and easily get bored of my own voice. My art has an element of the document, of people talking or writing about themselves. Everyone has a voice but so many people go unheard. As I always considered myself a listener I came to the idea of presenting other people's stories.

I feel that I am a portrait artist. When I left college I really wanted to do filming, particularly documentary. I was interested in people saying things that perhaps weren't represented on television or in the media at the time. The video didn't work out, so I moved on to photography and asked people to write anything they wanted on a piece of paper. That's how the *The Signs*

series came along. And it is now an idea that has been much copied and mediated, because it was a simple idea that worked. Like a talking picture, you can see the person and also get a moment of their thoughts.

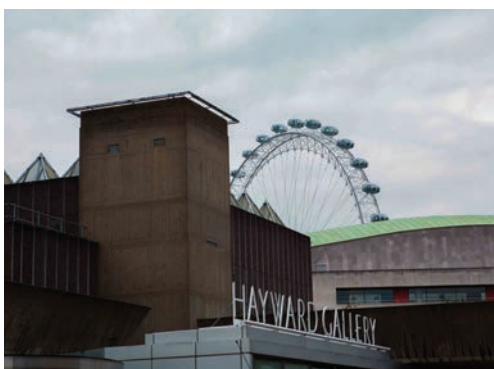
I was at a great point in my career when I received the Turner Prize so, although it was a surprise that I was nominated, I had been recognised quite widely in the art world and had many exhibitions coming up. So the Turner Prize was a seal of approval in a way.

When I came to London from Birmingham, the city felt huge, it was really exciting. I lived everywhere from the West, South to East London. My friends and I stayed in a hostel in South Kensington to start with. I loved the grandeur of the area but I soon discovered that I could only afford living in a hostel there. I think I lived in 15 different places before actually settling for a long period of time in East London. But when you are young and just getting by, London is about improvising and moving around.

You can never truly get a sense of London: it's constantly changing because of redevelopment. If I went back to the places I used to live, things would have moved on – with so many new shops and restaurants. East London in particular has grown until it's almost unrecognisable. This happened after artists moved







LOCAL PUB /
The Golden Heart in Shoreditch is her favourite pub

CONTEMPORARY ART /
Wearing says that Hayward Gallery is one of London's finest for contemporary work

FANCY DINNER /
If Wearing is in the mood for a "sophisticated evening", she books a table at Scott's in London's Mayfair

into warehouses that were no longer habitable for business and then warehouse living became cool. Now a lot of those warehouses are flats or some have reverted back to businesses again.

The great thing about London is that it doesn't feel like a city that judges. It is also a place – because it is so vast – that lets you disappear within it, and gives you the space to concentrate on your work. And, of course, it also has all the amenities that an artist needs. For instance, as I work in film and photography, I can get the best quality developing and printing done right here.

London also offers such an amazing variety of places to go out and enjoy city living. If I want an exclusive and sophisticated evening I love to go to Scott's restaurant in Mayfair, Shoreditch House roof garden, or the Royal China Club, and if I feel like something a little more relaxed, the Golden Heart in Shoreditch is my favourite local pub.

East London has a great history of artists living there. When I moved here with my partner – Michael Landy, also an artist – in the 1990s we totally fell in love with the atmosphere. It is hard to put my finger on what that is, apart from the fact the area feels right for us. There are so many studio spaces available, and we have lot of friends living close by. There is a sense of community here, which makes it feel like a place you can call home.

In the 1990s I could count venues on my hand, now London is one of the best places in the world to view contemporary art. We have the Tate Modern or The National Gallery, which give you a great sense of what's going





on in the art world. Apart from that there are lots of great contemporary galleries such as the Whitechapel, Hayward and The Serpentine, as well as hundreds of public and commercial galleries too.

I struggled to get a job in my hometown, Birmingham, apart from government schemes. I don't know whether it's still true, but I found London to have a lot of opportunities that weren't available elsewhere at the time.

I had been working as a personal assistant in an animation company and felt I wanted to do something creative. So I had to leave a reasonably well-paid job to become a student for five years. I went to art school thinking I would try and specialise in graphic design or animation, but a teacher there told me I had a fine art sensibility, which was a huge compliment.

After three years in London I enrolled on an art course at Chelsea, and then Goldsmiths. I had a fantastic education. [The fine art course] was by far the best course in the UK; it had more mature students than anywhere else. The year above me the average age was 28, and I think this gave the course a slightly more mature outlook. Goldsmiths in particular was probably the most progressive art school in the UK at the time. It didn't have separate departments for sculpture, painting or performance, etc. Everything and anything could be explored as art. And as artists we were encouraged to be experimental. I had friends that were at other art schools who really felt repressed by the definitions of which art department they were in. The course really made us think on our feet and realise that it is hard to be an artist full time, but that it is possible. After art school it took me many years to realise, "Yes, I am an artist."

I'm currently creating a film made from views of people's rooms. The idea is very simple, and that is to film either the curtains, blinds or shutters closed, and then open them to reveal the view from your window. I have received many views from all over the world, and some have recently been shown on Channel 4 in the UK. I'm now working on a long form of this film to show at film festivals and galleries.

The website for the work is yourviewsfilm.com; anyone who sends a view will receive a short film containing their view, and will, of course, be credited. When the advert went out earlier this year, it was amazing how many people, very swiftly, sent their views in, and so many were beautifully shot and well thought out. And that is what inspires me about people: you can never imagine how another person thinks or approaches the world, and it's projects like this that make you think wow – how amazing people are.

EAST SIDE/
Wearing moved to East London in the 1990s. Brick Lane (pictured) is at the heart of the neighbourhood's creative and social life

GALLERY LIFE/
Wearing says that large London galleries, such as Tate Modern (pictured) "give you a great sense of what's going on in the art world"

THAMES VIEW/
London's Tate Modern overlook the River Thames, the longest river in England