

THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Michael Landy and Gillian Wearing ***Art Lovers***

Private view: Saturday 1 February, 12–6pm
Exhibition dates: 4 February–12 April 2025

Thomas Dane Gallery
Via Francesco Crispi, 69
Napoli

Thomas Dane Gallery in Naples is pleased to present *Art Lovers*, a collaborative exhibition by Michael Landy and Gillian Wearing. The exhibition will present new work by the artists responding to Naples and its history, alongside a selection of works spanning the last three decades of the artists' careers, reflecting their ongoing personal and artistic relationship. *Art Lovers* will be Landy and Wearing's first exhibition conceived together in over 20 years.

Landy and Wearing both came to prominence in the 1990s after studying at Goldsmiths in London, where they first met, in the late 1980s. Landy's early work from this period presented a satirical view on the political and social climate of neoliberal Britain, producing works and installations in various media that interrogated issues of labour, consumerism and value. These concerns led to the landmark work *Break Down* (2001), in which Landy and a group of assistants systematically destroyed each and every one of the artist's 7,227 possessions over the course of two weeks, in an audacious performative act staged in a former C&A department store building on Oxford Street, London. In the aftermath of *Break Down*, a tabula rasa in a creative and personal sense, the first works Landy produced were delicate etchings of common weeds found around London – an apposite subject matter symbolic of survival and renewal – which became the *Nourishment* series (2002–ongoing). For this exhibition Landy presents a group of new etchings of weeds encountered in the derelict nooks and on the roadsides of Naples, made during several visits to the city in 2024. The meticulously intricate renderings honour the overlooked and celebrate resilience, in a poetic ode to the city itself.

In conversation with the etchings are works on paper from Landy's recent *Future Ruins* series, depicting existing landmarks – including the grand Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana in Rome – in imaginary states of decay. Referencing the long Western tradition of artists captivated by ruins both real and imagined, including the eighteenth-century cultural craze for rediscovering and even recreating 'decorative' ruins in England and France, Landy's future ruins plumb the political and emotional registers of the motif, with its embedded notions of value, history, loss and nostalgia.

In 2010 Landy was selected for a residency at the National Gallery in London, where he served as Associate Artist until 2012. He spent the first year of the residency looking at the gallery's collection of over 2,300 works nearly every day. After an intense period of drawing, Landy began to make collages using hundreds of printouts of the paintings of old masters which he cut up, rearranged and stuck back together. These collages in turn led to the creation of ambitious large-scale, interactive kinetic sculptures designed to be activated by visitors, in the spirit of the playfulness of Jean Tinguely's madcap, animated sculptural machines. This exhibition revisits *Multi-Saint* (2013), one of six sculptures from the residency, which references paintings by Carlo Crivelli, Ambrogio Bergognone, and Hans Memling, incorporating the attributes of Saint Michael, Saint Lawrence, Saint Catherine, Saint Peter and Saint Lucy. For *Art Lovers* Landy has made a new kinetic sculpture modelled after the patron saint of Naples, San Gennaro, as depicted in an eighteenth-century painting by Italian painter Girolamo Pesce. Larger than life in more than one sense, Landy's *San Gennaro* (2024) centres on the aura and spectacle of the martyr's famed relic - his blood - held at the Naples Cathedral in a glass vial.

Wearing graduated from Goldsmiths in 1990 and held her first solo exhibition in 1993 at City Racing in South London. The exhibition presented work from her ground-breaking series *Signs that say what you want them to say and not Signs that say what someone else wants you to say* (1992–95), for which she

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approached people on the streets in London and asked them to write a personal phrase on a piece of paper, and then photographed them displaying their thoughts. Drawing the subjects into a relationship with the artist and artwork as both participant and collaborator, these portraits plumbed the connection between self-expression, the confessional, private life and social belonging, themes that gain fresh poignancy in today's world of simultaneously ever-intensified social connectivity and alienation. In 1994, Wearing visited Naples as it hosted the G7 summit, where she photographed locals in the same fashion with the aid of an interpreter. Thirty years on, Wearing returned to this archive and presents a selection shown for the first time in this exhibition, the hand-written messages now speaking across time and finding new resonance.

Expanding on the themes of her early work, Wearing's practice has since explored questions around public personas and private selves through a diversity of media, often drawing from disparate cultural history and techniques, including theatre and television. Her ongoing *Spiritual Family* series, begun in 2008, explores the notion of influence and lineage in the construction of identity in photographic self-portraits of the artist in the guise of artistic forebears that have impacted her practice. For Naples, Wearing has created five new portraits inhabiting the likeness of icons of Italian film: Monica Vitti, Anna Magnani, Federico Fellini and Pier Paolo Pasolini. These works use masterfully rendered silicon masks, custom wigs, and precise lighting to realise powerfully arresting, uncanny portraits, playing with identity as embodied performance while examining the art historical tradition of self-portraiture as a technique of self-representation, expression and promotion.

Wearing's work in sculpture is represented by a group of bronze maquettes for her large-scale public monuments of families. Among them is the first sculpture in this body of work, begun in 2007 in Trento, Italy, on the occasion of the artist's exhibition at the Galleria Civica di Arte Contemporanea. In an effort to examine both the continued psychic dominance and the alleged social decline of the nuclear family, submissions were invited via newspaper adverts, from which one 'typical' family was selected by a panel comprising a priest, a sociologist, some educators and the exhibition curators, and cast in bronze at a monumental size. Subsequently in the works that followed in the series, *A Real Birmingham Family* (2015) and *A Real Danish Family* (2017), Wearing explored expanded notions of the 'family', capturing its wide spectrum and the nuances of local context.

Themes of representation, performance, embodiment and self-perception recur in three new paintings (all 2024). Wearing embarked on a concentrated period of painting during the COVID-19 lockdowns, when a pause on project commitments, social distancing and seemingly infinite free time opened up an introspective space for revisiting her early love of painting as a young art student. The moment particularly lent itself to self-portraits, and in these new paintings we find reflections and refractions of the self in a variety of expanded forms. At once layered portals as well as opaque surfaces, these precisely composed pictures distil the interconnectedness of perception, identity, and image-making.

Michael Landy was born in London, UK in 1963, where he lives and works. He attended Goldsmiths College, London, in 1988. Landy was elected as a Royal Academician in May 2008 and received a CBE (Commander of the Order of the British Empire) in 2021. Selected solo and group shows include: *Welcome to Essex*, Firstsite, Colchester, England (2021); *Scaled-Down*, Thomas Dane Gallery, London, England (2018); *Open for Business* at the first Riga International Biennial of Contemporary Art (2018); *DEMONSTRATION*, The Power Plant, Toronto, Canada (2017-18); *Breaking News*, Sperone Westwater, New York NY (2017); *Breaking News – Athens*, Neon/Diplarios School, Athens, Greece (2017); *Out of Order*, Museum Tinguely, Basel, Switzerland (2016); *Saints Alive*, National Gallery, London, England (2013); *Michael Landy: Four Walls*, Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, England (2013); *Art World Portraits*, National Portrait Gallery, London, England (2011); *Art Bin*, South London Gallery, London, England (2010). Selected public collections include: Tate Collection, London; the Arts Council England; Centre Pompidou, Paris, France; Museum of Modern Art, New York NY; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia; Royal Academy, London; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis MN.

Born in 1963 in Birmingham, UK, Gillian Wearing lives and works in London. Wearing won the Turner Prize in 1997 and was awarded an OBE in 2011 and a CBE in 2019 for contribution to the arts. A major survey exhibition *Gillian Wearing: Wearing Masks* was held at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New

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York, USA in November 2021. In 2018, she was commissioned by the Mayor of London to create a statue of Suffragist leader Millicent Fawcett in Parliament Square. Recent solo exhibitions include *reflections*, Regen Projects, Los Angeles CA (2023); *Gillian Wearing: Editing Life*, PHOTO 2022: International Festival of Photography, ACMI, Melbourne, Australia (2022); *Gillian Wearing: Wearing Masks*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York NY (2021); *Gillian Wearing: Rock 'n' Roll 70*, Central Gallery, Moody Center for The Arts, Rice University, Houston TX (2019); *Life: Gillian Wearing*, Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati OH (2018); *Behind the mask, another mask: Gillian Wearing and Claude Cahun*, National Portrait Gallery, London, England (2017); *Family Stories*, The National Gallery of Denmark, Copenhagen, Denmark (2017); Sandra and Gerald Fineberg Art Wall, ICA Boston, Boston MA (2016); Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno, Valencia, Spain (2015); *A Real Birmingham Family*, Centenary Square, Library of Birmingham, Birmingham, England and *We Are Here*, The New Art Gallery Walsall, Walsall, England (2014); Whitechapel Gallery, London, England, toured to K20, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Dusseldorf, Germany and Pinakothek der Moderne, Museum Brandhorst, Munich, Germany (2012); *A Real Birmingham Family*, Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, England (2011); *Confessions: Portraits, vidéos*, Musée Rodin, Paris, France (2009); *Living Proof*, ACCA, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, Australia (2006); *Album*, Maureen Paley, London, England (2005).

Gillian Wearing is represented by Maureen Paley, London; Tanya Bonakdar, New York and Regen Projects, Los Angeles.

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Gallery Hours: Tuesday to Friday 10am–6pm, Saturday 12pm–6pm, or by appointment

Admission: Free

Nearest station: Piazza Amedeo

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