



WARWICK
THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK



Willard Wigan MBE Hon DLitt

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Imagine a piece of sculpture – a human figure perhaps, a galleon or a trumpeting elephant – beautiful, intricate, perfect – but one that fits inside the eye of a needle and cannot be seen with the naked eye.

Impossible, you may think. Yet such astonishing works have been created many times over by the imagination and skill of our honorary graduand this morning: the renowned maker of microscopic art, Willard Wigan.

Willard has been working on a minute scale for some 50 years – as a child, he made an apartment block for the ants in his garden shed (the ants, he says, moved in but didn't pay him any rent!).

He has now constructed some 300 microscopic sculptures. They are typically placed in a needle's eye or on a pin head. A single sculpture can be as small as 0.0005mm; viewing and constructing them requires a microscope that can zoom in at least 400 times.


For work at this molecular level, Willard makes his own tools, sharpening the end of a needle into a blade, crushing a diamond to use the tiny shards on the end of a syringe to chisel away material, using his pulse as a jack hammer. He has used the hair of an aphid or a fine eyelash from the corner of his eye to make a paintbrush. This is painstaking, difficult work, often done at night as even the vibrations from passing traffic can be fatal in work on this scale. In the process of creation, he enters a meditative state, slowing his heartbeat to reduce hand tremors.



Willard holds the record for the world's smallest sculpture – a motorbike carved from specks of gold inside a hollowed out human hair. His work has been exhibited around the world, to international acclaim. In 2007, he was awarded the MBE for services to art. He was the key speaker at the 2009 Technology, Entertainment and Design (TED) world conference, winning a TED Achievement Award. In 2012, he was privately commissioned to replicate the Coronation Crown in celebration of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee: the resulting sculpture is now at Buckingham Palace. Collectors of his work include the Prince of Wales and many public figures.

The significance of Willard Wigan's achievements lies not only in his creative imagination and skill but in his courage and resilience. Born near Wolverhampton in 1957, his dyslexia and mild autism made him an object of ridicule in his primary school. His microscopic creations were a way of proving his abilities to himself and to others: often made to feel like nothing himself, he wanted to show the world through these creations invisible to the human eye that, in his own words, 'there is no such thing as nothing'. We are all made up of microscopic particles and all achievements start with something tiny.

His own life experiences have made him determined to help today's young people fulfil their potential. Exhibition proceeds have been donated to the Prince's Trust and Willard is a Patron of the Library of Birmingham Trust, supporting its community programmes that work to inspire children to overcome adversity and to have confidence and self-belief.



He remains true to his West Midlands roots, acknowledging the support he has received throughout his career from the craftsmen in Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter. He lives in Birmingham and often exhibits in the region, most recently in the Jewellery Quarter and the Birmingham City Library.

Willard Wigan, the boy once labelled 'nothing', is an artist of exceptional creativity, whose artworks delight and amaze us and who inspires us to use our own creativity to imagine ways to make the impossible possible and to open doors so that others may also fulfil their real potential.

Vice-Chancellor, in the name of the Senate, I present to you for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*, Willard Wigan.