



ARTS & CULTURE

London Artist Paints Crushed Chewing Gum

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Lying on London's famous Millennium Bridge, British artist Ben Wilson paints on a piece of dried **gum**. It has been crushed flat into the ground.

"The important thing is the gum is below the metal **tread**," said the 60-year-old Wilson. "The beauty of it is they're all different shapes and sizes..." he continued, describing pieces of gum.

Wilson sees possibility in things most people avoid looking at. The flattened gum is a chance to turn a piece of waste into something beautiful.

The artwork also is a way to surprise walkers and get them to take a closer look at the path they are on.

"By painting a picture which is so small, those that see it then discover a hidden world beneath their feet," Wilson said.

Back in his north London art room, Wilson paints on the surface of a small **mosaic tile**. It will be part of a collection that he is creating on the walls of London's Underground train platforms. The images are more personal than the chewing gum works, Wilson says, and represent a kind of "visual **diary**."

"The pictures are a celebration of my life and those that I care dearly about," he said. "They are a process of visual inquiry - trying to make sense of the world," he added.

Wilson was born in London to artist parents. He remembers working with **clay** from the age of three. He had his first art show when he was around 10 or 11 years old.

He began making sculptures and large pieces for display in nature settings. Then his interest turned to waste, also called trash. He has been painting gum and other pieces of trash for 19 years.

The top surface of the dried gum is not subject to local or national laws. As a result, the dried gum surface creates a space where Wilson says he can paint without damaging public property.

"I found this little space where I could create a form of art where I could be **spontaneous** and do something which evolves out of the place in which it's created," Wilson said.

Government officials have removed much of the artist's public street art. But the hundreds of gum paintings on Millennium Bridge remain for all to see.

I'm John Russell.

Lucy Marks reported on this story for Reuters. John Russell adapted it for VOA Learning English.

Words in This Story

gum - *n.* a type of soft candy that you chew on but do not swallow

tread - *n.* the raised surface that people walk on

mosaic - *n.* a decoration made by pressing small pieces of colored glass or stone into a soft material that then hardens

tile - *n.* a usually flat piece of hard clay or other material that is used for covering walls or floors

diary - *n.* a book in which you write down your personal experiences and thoughts each day

clay - *n.* a heavy, sticky material from the earth that is made into different shapes and that becomes hard when it is baked or dried

spontaneous – *adj.* created in a natural and often sudden way
