

Stoppap DANCE COMPANY

# Artificial Things

## Q&A



**Stage, 2014**

**Artistic direction & choreography: Lucy Bennett**

**Guest choreographer for scene 1: Yoshifumi Inao**

**Danced and devised by: Amy Butler, Laura Jones, Chris Pavia, Dave Toole and David Willdrige**

**Composers: Movement one – Christopher Benstead, Movement two – Jim Pinchen, Movement three – Andy Higgs**

**Theatre and costume design: Anna Jones from Curious Space**

**Scene three of Artificial Things is one of six works of compulsory study for GCSE Dance**



**Artificial Things was also reimaged into a short film in collaboration with the film director Sophie Fiennes.**

**It's available on YouTube here: [bit.ly/AwardWinningFilm](https://bit.ly/AwardWinningFilm)**

**With Audio Description here: [bit.ly/ATfilmAD](https://bit.ly/ATfilmAD)**

**You can find more resources at this web address:**

**[bit.ly/ArtificialThingsResources](https://bit.ly/ArtificialThingsResources)**





# Artificial Things

## **Lucy gives context for Artificial Things - the story so far**

So, Artificial Things is set in an artificial world. There is a display cabinet and a headless mannequin. And there is a frame that skirts the outside of a grey dance floor, and it is made to look like a display cabinet. So there is a display cabinet within a display cabinet.

It is an artificial world in which five characters are within a bubble. There is nobody else they are allowed to be in contact with.

The story so far; the first scene is all about first impressions, preconceptions and misjudgements, not listening to one another. It's a cold experiment where dancers come forward, they do a solo, they are aware they are being watched. And they're not watching each other, they're not listening to each other, they're not tuned into each other. Laura's character becomes frustrated and she shows this to the audience.

In the second scene, Laura calls upon Dave, who's been still inside the display cabinet. She awakens him and together they start a revolution, they try to change things. They encourage brawling, fighting, they show off and they dance to a big rock and roll track. They also play dress up, so some characters have big ears, or they have big collars. And the character of Chris, who is not in the scene you're studying, is dressed up as a ridiculous dictator. He tries to control things but the others, they won't listen. They tease, they push him and eventually, to show them how powerful he is, he takes his own life with a gun. He does this in the display cabinet, he slumps over and the display cabinet fills with snow. This is where the scene finishes, there is an interval and the audience leaves. When they come back it is the extract you study.

## **Lucy talks about the choreographic intentions behind Artificial Things:**

When the audience returned, we wanted them to think that something calamitous had happened. That time had moved forward, and nothing had been resolved. Laura is segregated from Amy and David, something is broken, it's not Laura, it's togetherness, it's communication. They've forgotten how to touch. This scene is all about listening to one another, tuning in to one another, and learning from each other, so that they can find an alternative harmony. One that supports them to move forward as a group. This takes humility from everyone. Although they are in a bubble they can still move forward together. At the end there is a sense of nostalgia, they remember the past, they're haunted by it, they know that they need to learn from their mistakes and not let history keep repeating itself. We end with hope.

## **Lucy talks about how the concept of a snow globe influenced Artificial Things (we are all feeling the frustration of living in a bubble)**

So the snow globe was one of the original concepts for Artificial Things. When I thought of a snow globe I often think of something very pretty, and nostalgic and sweet. And I started to think well what if when you shook the snow globe, you began to see something more sinister, or surreal. If you were really stuck in that snow globe would it be that blissful? So scene one, which you don't study, is the first impression, the moment before you shake the snow globe. Scene two is the rock and roll scene, and that's the snow storm when you shake the snow globe, and it's risky and dangerous and chaotic, and confusing. Scene three, Artificial Things, the part that you study is when the snow settles, and you begin to look a little bit deeper. And you begin to understand what the characters are searching for and how they need to find an authentic togetherness as opposed to an artificial togetherness.



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## Questions from our open Q&A

### What do the costumes represent?

The costumes are run down or washed out versions of the first two scenes. They oppose the dress up and colour drenched costumes from the previous scene - which is full of noise, brawl and freedom. They represent a ghostly feel as if time has faded the figures in the snow globe. They almost merge into the backdrop as if they are a memory on the edge of our consciousness...

Lucy Bennett

The costumes are an eclectic mix between late 50's and 80's in cut to achieve a largely timeless feel. All of the costumes are heavily painted into so that they really feel part of this large painted canvas that we have created. Costume changes are also important to the evolution of the look of the show, taking us from mundane to rock and roll through to snowscape!

Anna Jones, Designer

### How long did it take to develop the material for the work?

For the full production of Artificial Things we worked on and off for a year - including the research period with outside choreographers, meetings with the design team and composers.

For the extract that is studied for GCSE Dance we were in the studio for about 6 weeks.

You can find the creation diary for Artificial Things here:

[bit.ly/ATCreationDiary](http://bit.ly/ATCreationDiary)

**A concept image for the work**







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## **What are key points for me to remember about the work?**

It is an Artificial world, the characters are in a bubble and they have forgotten how to touch! The characters are limited by the gaze of others - this can be referenced to Goran Djurovic.

There is segregation at the start (separated duets). A small conversation starts and the group begin to find a harmony through listening and tuning into each other's movement. The standing dancers develop motifs from Wheelchair dancer Laura Jones and not the other way around.

Look out for different levels throughout the extract, think about different perspectives and the power being higher than the other characters gives a particular dancer. David and Amy stay lower than Laura when sensitively manoeuvring her wheelchair.

## **How do you want the work to be taught?**

We would want the production to be analysed as an artistic work. We are also interested in the extract being an opportunity for teachers to discuss positively and directly with young people about disabled performers engaging with choreography and characters that are not solely about the experience of disability. If teachers are anxious about language they can watch our Artificial Things Film with audio description turned on or access Shape Arts for the latest language guidance.

## **How was it choreographing for a wheelchair user?**

Laura and I have collaborated for many years. Artificial Things was devised by all the dancers with myself as an outside eye or director. Laura's different physical language which is initiated by her using a wheelchair is a source of creativity for us all and enables the standing dancers to explore new dance languages. With all the professional dancers in the company I begin a dialogue with them and the dance is very much created with them - I do not impose set or traditional movements - together we look for the new stuff!

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## Why was Goran Djurovic's work a stimulus?

One artist's voice struck at the heart of what I was searching for: Goran Djurovic's Unknown Secrets was full of images that danced to life when I looked at them, I could see my cast of dancers within his paintings and wanted to bring his world to life.

I immediately connected with the paintings as they are quite theatrical and similar to designs for stage. I loved the arrangement of figures on different levels relating to power play. I liked the way the artist explored group dynamics often showing us one person their own versus a bigger group.

Djurovic often reveals the idea of observing others or being watched and this lends itself to being in an artificial world or bubble where people can watch you and unfortunately limit you with their judgement of who you are.



Lucy Bennett

