

From early books that feature drawings to art that requires the participation of the viewer Erwin Wurm doesn't stop to impress his audience. Aiming to depict the absurd and paradoxical things going on in today's world his projects continue to get bigger – and so does his reputation. Even though

he's a multidisciplinary artist, the body of work that he has been creating over time now evolves around sculpture. But like no other, he keeps pushing beyond the conventional notions of the medium.

We interviewed you already a few years ago, for the 30th issue of METAL. What has changed for you since then (2013/14) on a personal and on a creative level?

Well, I am constantly working, and my work changes. My daughter is getting older and I am getting older as well together with my wife and sons. The world is getting more and more complicated and difficult, and when I look out into the future, it makes me scared. We are losing a lot of things, especially in Europe; the enlightenment is starting to fade. There are several structures – very patriarchal ones – which come back

to Europe, and that's scary and awful.

You once said your work has a lot to do with the zeitgeist and icons of our time and society. How would you describe the zeitgeist, the essence of 2017? And who are its icons?

To my understanding, I would say that one of the worst icons is Mark Zuckerberg because he is the one who invented fucking Facebook. Everyone thinks it is so fantastic and amazing, but I honestly think it is horrible. Everybody loses his or her privacy; everybody gives everything away. I think most people don't even get that.

My other heroes – I mean negative ones – are the banks. International banks and the international currency fund because they slowly take away our cash money. In the future they will control us totally. The banks and states are controlling us totally.

Remember George Orwell, who is a joke compared to what is happening here. And everybody is blank, and looking and smiling. Where are the thousands of people demonstrating against this on the streets? People are busy taking selfies.



Just about Virtues and Vices in General, 2016-2017 - 2017 Mixed Media, caravan, furniture pieces. Photo: Eva Würdinger. Courtesy: Austrian Pavillon, Biennale di Venezia

This year is another successful one for you. You are represented in many international exhibitions, the 21er Haus in Vienna shows your

performative sculptures and together with Brigitte Kowanz you formed the Austrian Pavillon at the Venice Biennale. How do you feel in between all this action?

Well, it's good because I am able to show my work in many different places and occasions, and that's fantastic. The most difficult and exhausting one was indeed the Austrian Pavillon.

It was a pain in the ass, but I received great museum invitations out of this and I got a lot of great press internationally so it was worth it in the end.

At the Venice Biennale one can find your *One Minute Sculptures* again, in which you make the visitors take part in the exhibition and become an ephemeral artwork for sixty seconds. Would you say they are the most visitor or audience friendly of your creations?

Yes. I mean, I have to see it in a different light because I did the *One Minute Sculptures* almost twenty years ago. It was 1997 when I named them like that but I was doing them earlier – in the very beginning I did these ephemeral sculptures but I didn't like the fact that they are so ephemeral. So then we asked people to take polaroids of themselves by doing the One Minute Sculptures, and then I would find the pictures or not. However, it was a lot about the authorship, meaning that I would suggest something and the people would follow the instructions to make a piece. Then they would take a picture themselves and after that I would find an original of mine, so I liked these games.

So it was a very organic process that made them visitor friendly?

Yes, but I wouldn't say 'visitor

friendly'. I have strict instructions and it is only a piece of my work if the visitors follow them exactly. They can do whatever they want, but if they don't do what I ask it is not mine. Very simple. But then the series went on and the thing about taking pictures of themselves came up, everywhere and all the time, and of course the *One Minute Sculptures* were newly discovered again. Suddenly in the shows I have many, many people taking selfies – this interesting tool of showing yourself in any situation anywhere. The work of the *One Minute Sculptures* fits totally into this but what I don't like is that they are often misused for jokes and to make fun and so on. They are neither tools of joke nor of fun. They are reflective, they are psychological, and you have some that are very philosophical; if you mistreat them, of course you will get out a laughter, but you won't get

out a reflection of us and our time,
which is the intention behind them.

**“We are losing a
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**Humour is a word that constantly
accompanies your work. You use
humour as a way to show how
ridiculous some aspects of very
serious topics and discussions can
be. Are you yourself a very humorous
person?**

No, I'm not a very humorous person.
But I think the word humour is quite
often misused in my work. I am very

much interested in the absurd in general. Or in the paradox, this is much more interesting to me. And one small part is humour, but it is really small, actually. For example, when you look at some of our world's issues from a paradoxical perspective, what you see is much more interesting because it questions them in different terms, while humour doesn't address much. It doesn't ask much. It is just about laughter and freeing yourself in a way. So for that reason, the other things I am talking about – like the absurd and absurd theatre or the paradox – are much more intriguing and interesting. Much better to me.

It seems that breaking out of the classical perception of sculpture has always been present to you. You also work and play with the art of performing. What makes a good performance, according to you?

Well, I strongly believe that when you do an artwork you have to do it seriously and concentrated, let's say like in meditation exercises. And also in an isolated and focused way on the inside; then to me it's good. If it is only focused towards the public, towards the audience, then it is wrong to my understanding.

So you say that if a performance is only there to pleasure the audience it is not good?

Absolutely. At least I am not interested in pleasing the audience. I am interested in fulfilling the idea of sculpture I have, and the audience is just a tool for this. In a way, one could say I misuse the audience to create an ephemeral sculpture.



Stand quiet and look out over the Mediterranean Sea, 2016-2017 - 2017 Truck, mixed media. Photo: Eva Würdinger. Courtesy: Austrian Pavillon, Biennale di Venezia

Have you ever had the feeling of not being taken seriously in the art world? And as you are an experienced artist by now, is there any advice you can give to young aspiring artists in an ever quickly changing world?

Of course, in the beginning nobody takes you seriously. You have to insist and you have to do things over and over again. To be strong you have to repeat things and then slowly people

start believing you.

You state that one has to always evolve. Do you think that artists who stick to a single idea or concept throughout their career are lazy or uncreative?

They transfer their inner selves into officials in a way, like workers in an office. I believe that development – of art ideas, for example – is important. There must be some false strings to develop your work and that's okay, then you can go back and correct. I think falsification is also important, as well as doing bad things, because then you learn and see what are you good at and where can you improve. It is again an exercise and experience. Learning by thinking and doing. I believe in that.

What will be the next step for you?

I would like one part of my work to

become ephemeral by speaking. I make works where people say sentences and that's the sculpture, which only exists in your head for a period of time. But this is just one part. I also like other things so I'm always trying different stuff and experimenting in different ways, it's very exciting for me. But yeah, I both enjoy and doubt of myself, which is part of it.



Wortskulpturen, 2017 pedestal, performed by the public. Photo: Niki



Lackner, UMJ Courtesy: Kunsthaus
Graz, Austria.



Untitled, 1990 Staub, Holz, Glas.
Photo: Studio Erwin Wurm

The parallel universe, 2016
Instruction drawing, Hvidt daybed
model FD, pedestal, and realized by
the public 166,4 x 65,5 x 81,3 cm | 65
1/2 x 25 3/4 x 32 in. Photo: Eva
Würdinger. Courtesy: Lehmann
Maupin, New York.



Sitting on Wallstreet, 2016 Bronze,
patiniert. Photo: Johannes Stoll



Stand quiet and look out over the Mediterranean Sea, 2016-2017 - 2017
Truck, mixed media. Photo: Eva Würdinger. Courtesy: Austrian Pavillon,
Biennale di Venezia

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 See comments
