For the past 20 years, the Austrian artist Mr Erwin Wurm has been creating what he calls “One Minute Sculptures” – temporary artworks created by members of the public by following a series of instructions within a gallery setting, using everyday objects that they find to hand. (“Sit on the pedestal... and think of Manzoni”; “Put the pedestal on your toes and be submissive for one minute”). This practice grew out of economic necessity. In the late 1980s, Mr Wurm worked with whatever materials he could find and, seeing as his studio was next to a secondhand clothes shop, developed a fascination with clothing: how it could be worn, stretched, folded and deformed; how it could be manipulated, according to a set of instructions. Combining this
interest in everyday materials with a questioning of boundaries of sculpture, influenced by the likes of Mr Marcel Duchamp, Mr Joseph Beuys and Ms Marina Abramović, Mr Wurm hit upon the idea of “One Minute Sculptures” in 1997, and has continually returned to the format in the ensuing years, despite his initial doubts. “At the time I really doubted it and thought it was all nothing,” he tells super-curator Mr Hans-Ulrich Obrist in new book Erwin Wurm: One Minute Sculptures 1997–2017. “No one would like it, and no one would find it interesting.”

In 2017, the contrary is true. In fact, Mr Wurm’s “One Minute Sculptures”, which are documented in more than 350 photographs in this trendily pink-hued tome from German publisher Hatje Cantz, have never felt more relevant. The strange contortions enacted by the participants in these works can be read in several ways: as an investigation of sculpture; as a physical expression of psychological anxieties; even just as simple visual gags. (There’s something undeniably hilarious about seeing a woman balancing on an array of tennis balls, or a man with his head stuck in a fridge.) In the introduction to the book, Ms Christa Steinle remarks that Mr Wurm’s work has the effect of “introducing a dysfunctional element that evokes psychological reactions ranging from indignation to laughter”.
But there’s a further resonance here that won’t be lost on fans of Mr Demna Gvasalia’s work at Vetements and Balenciaga. The themes in Mr Wurm’s work – contortions of the everyday, a focus on physical awkwardness, a practice that disrupts the mundane by coopting the mundane – is very much part of the current fashion agenda. It’s clear to see Mr Wurm’s influence in everything from this season’s Balenciaga campaign (in which a model holds a giant floral bag across her chest, obscuring her face) to the stylised, artificial and slightly wrong-feeling poses encouraged by the photographers Mr Jamie Hawkesworth (who currently shoots many of the big brands’ campaigns, and whose latest editorial for British Vogue features Ms Raquel Zimmerman interacting with her environment in ways that could also be called “One Minute Sculptures”). Of course, Mr Wurm is not averse to the odd fashion collaboration – in 2012 he collaborated with pioneering Belgian designer Walter Van Beirendonck to create one minute sculptures for a story in Dazed.
But with the launch of this book – published to coincide with the artist’s representation of Austria at the 2017 Venice Biennale – as well as the rise and rise of those creatives who are clearly following in his footsteps, it almost seems like his work might be – dare we say it – On Trend. You can pick up the book now, and decide for your self.

**Erwin Wurm: One Minute Sculptures 1997-2017**

*(Hatje Cantz)*, is out now