Erwin Wurm in Venice

"You get the feeling here that reality is quite different"



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Erwin Wurm "Dreamers", 2026, zu sehen im Museo Fortuny, Venedig

Text
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Datum
04.05.2026

Kunst

Erwin Wurm on his exhibition at Museo Fortuny and the question of how he intends to make his mark amid the collection's overwhelming bounty

How are things in Venice, Mr. Wurm?

Sunny, pleasantly warm—had a good lunch, and everything is going perfectly at Museo Fortuny. It could be worse.

You're exhibiting in the studio building of polymath artist Mariano Fortuny. It hasn't changed since the 19th century. What are your plans?

The house is chock-full of an incredible collection. There are tapestries, theater sets, sculptures, and paintings. It's a portrait of a specific era, mindset, and a very particular artistic sensibility. Exuberant, sprawling. I won't alter this overabundance, won't clear anything out, but I intend to hold my own within it. This surfeit of material registers as background noise. Yet its aesthetic contradicts that of my work. Nevertheless, we converge in terms of content, which makes the whole thing exciting for me. For instance, there's my sculptural interest in skin, the shell, and clothing, and how their social impact is formed by fashion. Some of my series refer to this explicitly. I also want to contrast the static, passive scenario of wandering through and looking at a museum with the active aspect of my performative sculptures, my "One Minute Sculptures". Here, visitors are invited to bring sculptures to life by following my instructions. I'll also exhibit large-format Polaroids, a medium extremely wellsuited for ephemeral sculptures, which I've used to create very specific new "One Minute Sculptures".

You have a special relationship to houses. Your Fat House dates from 2003, with the Narrow House added later. What interests you about them?

Houses are always reflections of their society, our conception of the world, and how we want to present ourselves. I, too, grew up in a small house like that, in this kind of architecture-less architecture.

A replica of the building where you went to school was recently displayed in Paris, covered with old racist school materials. Why did you reproduce them?

The school is always adapted to the culture where I'm exhibiting it—in this case, to postwar French education. I included a text in the exhibition stating that the content displayed in the school does not reflect my worldview: rather, I'm referring to the context in which I grew up. I was born in 1954, part of the postwar generation, if you will. Very specific social norms and ideas such as body shaming and rigid language were the order of the day, as was corporal punishment. Many Nazis had found their way into political parties, government offices, and even schools. My aim is to highlight the fact that a society's knowledge is subject to radical changes depending on the era and generation. Political views, claims, ideas, and their relationship to power or truth utterly transform over a few generations. For me, this necessitates a critical and detached approach to the knowledge and behavioral consensus of a given society. My point is: the knowledge and conception of the world presented and conveyed to us today may be turned on its head in 50, 60, or 70 years' time.

Your exhibition at the Biennale is titled "Dreamers". How does that relate to Venice?

Every two years, Venice becomes the center of the art world, but there's more than just new art here. There's old art, too. I appreciate that very much. For me, it really is like a dreamland. You have the sense here that reality itself is different somehow. sh

Erwin Wurm "Dreamers", Museo Fortuny, May 6 until November 22



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