

AN ORDINARY TALK
WITH
ERWIN WURM
MAY 7TH, 2026
VENICE BIENNALE
"DREAMERS"

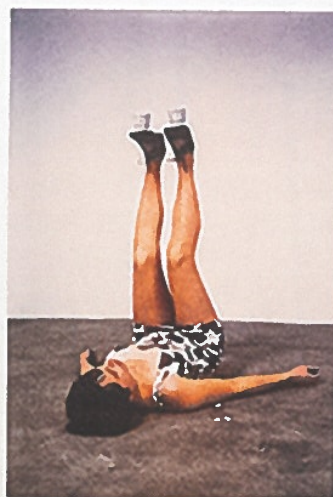
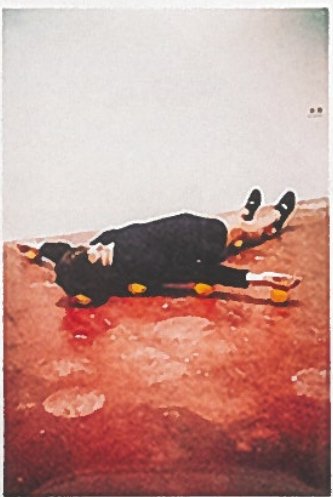
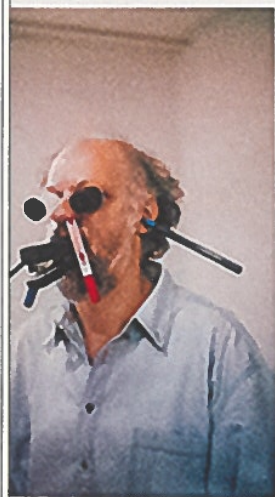
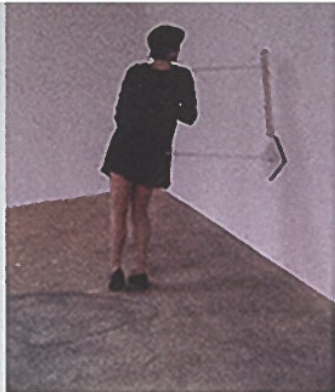
ERWIN WURM
for TIDE



"MY WORK IS BASED ON TWO CENTRAL IDEAS.
THE FIRST IS THE NOTION OF SCULPTURE:
WHAT IS IT, AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN?
THE SECOND CONCERNS SOCIAL ISSUES."







It seems Erwin Wurm no longer needs an introduction. Having reshaped the way we perceive sculpture today, his work exists in a space in between the absurd and the existential, catharsis and embarrassment, the narrow and the inflated, the quiet and the loud, the ephemeral and the timeless.

What makes his artworks so instantly recognisable is undoubtedly a genuinely human approach to art. His work is not created with a fixed purpose in mind; it is meant to be experienced, observed, and ultimately inhabited — until we ourselves become part of it, left wondering: who am I? What am I doing?

We met in person during the 61st Venice Biennale at Museo Fortuny — a 15th century palazzo — where his new exhibition, *Dreamers*, is on display amidst Mariano Fortuny's dresses, draped fabrics, and soulful, crumbling walls.

Interview
Camille Sei

CS It's an honour to meet you today. You were actually one of my very first inspirations as an art student at École Duperré. Perhaps we could begin with a few words about the exhibition. Why the title *Dreamers*?

EW When I received the invitation to create a show here, I started walking around the palazzo. I already knew the house, and I always felt it was somehow like a dreamland. Not reality exactly — or perhaps something outside reality. I liked that very much. I had already made works using pillows and cushions. And, of course, I come from Vienna, so there's a link to Sigmund Freud, psychoanalysis, and dreams. The title came quite naturally, by itself.

CS There is a great dialogue between your work and Mariano Fortuny's. Obviously, there is the presence and absence of the body, and these garments that feel highly sculptural. Fortuny was a very broad-minded, eclectic artist — much like yourself. You do not rely on a single medium or one particular way of expressing yourself.

EW That is true. My work is based on two central ideas. The first is the notion of sculpture: what is it, and what does it mean? The second concerns social issues and social content, because an artist who is cut off from society is nothing. Art must carry a certain meaning within society, and my work engages with issues drawn from our everyday world.



Delphos dress, Mariano Fortuny.

I am not dealing with the great existential questions, such as, "Where do we come from, and where are we going?" Rather, I focus on questions like, "What will I wear tomorrow?" or "What will I eat?" I'm joking, of course, but what truly matters to me is looking at our world through

the lens of the absurd. This perspective allows us to see things differently and to discover something new.

CS There is a very specific tension in your work between the lightness of the absurd and the rigour of conceptual and critical thinking. Where does this balanced tension come from?

EW Well, you know, I'm a human being, as we all are. When we observe our world, we realise many things are wrong, the way we deal with certain things, for example. I mean, we kill each other, we hate each other. Look at how we treat the animals we eat or how we treat nature. We are predators, more so than any other beings on Earth. We are not good for the world, and that makes you think about society and politics. I mean, it's pure madness. Reality is crazier than you can ever imagine. So, reflecting on this and creating a mirror for people using absurdity — and sometimes humour — is quite interesting.

CS The theme of this 8th issue of TIDE is Delusion & Grace. We wanted to address how delusional our world can be, yet how individuals can resist through very gentle, almost invisible, actions.

EW You know, I still believe in humanity. As a mass, as humankind, we are very dangerous, unpredictable and really stupid, yet the single entity of a person still exists. I believe in humility, lightness, and play that make life easy and beautiful. I always reflect on those two aspects.

CS Should we be seeking humanity, or even humour, in the world today?

EW I was never looking for humour. I'm not a joke-teller, but it just so happens that some people find things funny. Take, for example, the works *Narrow House*



School, 2024, Photo Markus Gradwohl.

or *School*. They were never meant to be comical; it's about a claustrophobic situation, in a certain time and in a certain society. Some people may laugh, but it's not meant to be funny at all. So the viewer's reaction is always shaped by personal perception and history.

CS In your work, and especially the *One Minute Sculptures*, there is a kind of "quiet rebellion" that stands against a certain idea of productivity. Do you see these works as an act of resistance?

EW For me, it is about making art that addresses a wide range of psychological and philosophical issues and notions. When you look at the works, they are ridiculous, funny, sexual, terrible, and claustrophobic. There are many variations within these pieces, and everybody responds differently to them — some people like them, others don't like them at all. Sometimes, I invite viewers to create sculptures themselves by following my instructions, and I have found that this changes the situation completely: they move from looking at something to doing it, and being watched.



cs This shift in perception is very interesting and brings me to your concept of the body as sculpture. In your early works, such as *59 Positions* and *Me / Me Fat* or more recent series like *Substitutes* or *Dreamers* — presented here today — the body is always central, whether



59 Positions, 1990.

through its absence or presence. What does the body allow you to express that other materials don't?

EW I think that, as humans, we reflect ourselves through others. Beyond the body, I am interested in the idea of an entity that brings together several parts: the spiritual, the psychological, the physical, and the sexual.

cs The *Dreamers* series addresses the subconscious and dreams. Sometimes the dreams — and the sculptures — are so large that they seem quite unstable. Yet they exist, and you can really sense their fragility and vulnerability.

EW This work is especially about the psychological feelings of fear and perception that we all experience while sleeping. Nighttime is always a psychological battlefield. (Laughs)

cs It is funny how these body parts — a leg or an arm — carry so much of the subconscious. Why did you choose to use only fragments?

EW I've realised that sometimes it's enough to show just one part. You don't need to show the whole person. Sometimes I make pieces which are dressed, but the body is missing. However, I still recognise who they depict — my friends — because I made the sculptures using them as models. The clothes show the personality of an absent person.

cs It's true: in our friendships, for instance, there's this idea of being interested in specific aspects of a person and even exaggerating them in our minds. Roland Barthes explains it well in *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* (*Fragments d'un discours amoureux*). It's interesting to consider how one's mind projects a certain idea of someone.

EW Of course, we all know each other in fragments; very tiny fragments. This is even the case with my wife — I actually only see a fragment of her whole personality. It's the same with every partner or friend. It's like a puzzle: when we get to know the other better, all of a sudden, the pieces come together, and you see something. But maybe it's wrong because we are all constantly changing. We live in a fragmented world and only perceive a certain amount of these fragments, which is beautiful in a way. Seeing the whole thing would probably be frightening!

cs How do you relate to photography and video, and has this relationship evolved over time?



EW I've made many photographs and videos. I used them to keep trace of the *One Minute Sculptures*. For that reason, I defined both my photography and drawing as sculptural work. But all of a sudden, the history of photography came knocking at the door, wanting to get in. I wasn't interested in photography itself, as it addresses different issues, and I was only interested in the sculptural aspect it could have. When I made photographs, they were successful. We exhibited and sold them easily, but I realised they became weak because they are reproductions. So, in the end, I stopped and moved on to other things.



Samoa (Hotel Rooms series), 2001.
Rotorua (Hotel Rooms series), 2001.

I'm good at stopping things. My work changes quite often. Not the subject, but the approach and the materials I use. I find it interesting to discover new ways to work; it's fresher, and you have to fight more for the outcome.

With photography, I knew exactly what I wanted, and it was functioning well. But when you start a new thing, it's very precious because you don't know if it's good or not, you're unsure. That's a very exciting moment. After a while, the first piece of the new series works, so you do another, then you try a different approach, exploring the possibilities for playing it out.

But after 10 or 15 pieces, it's enough for me. I like to move on to the next step. In my opinion, one good idea in the art world is never enough: I constantly want to develop new ideas, enlarge my perspective, and become better. That's it. That's what I'm doing all the time.

CS Likewise, I am the Editorial Director of TIDE, which I founded six years ago, and — perhaps I shouldn't say this — I had never conducted interviews before. Being able to step outside your comfort zone and experiment with something new is very important. In my case, it meant trying to create a different kind of dialogue with an artist.

EW I think you're very good at it, and also well prepared!

CS Thank you! I'm passionate about conceptual art. As soon as there is a distinct idea behind an artwork, it suddenly feels alive. That is what animates me — and I suppose it does the same for you. We spoke about absurdity, vulnerability, and those mirror-like moments of embarrassment. What are you trying to trigger in the viewer through these emotions?

EW Nothing. Rather, I try to trigger myself. I try to create good work for myself. I'm very lucky and very happy that people are interested in my work, but I am my first critic, and I have to satisfy myself. I throw so many pieces away because I'm not satisfied. I can be my own enemy! I don't conceive a show only with the intention of the public getting something out of it. I also share the pieces with people, with the world, because I think they have a certain

relevance. Art was always misused — by the aristocracy, by kingdoms, by religion, by socialists, by fascists, by communists. They all wanted art. Art offers a certain perspective and power. And it is still the case today: some say that art has to be political, that it has to support what we want from the world. Whereas to me, art is about freedom. I do not want to make it "dirty" by reducing it to a political level. I want to create "nonsense." Not stupidity, but nonsense — in opposition to what we are expected to create.

CS Could you tell us about these objects on the floor?

EW This is a *One Minute Sculpture* called *Theory of Love*. It's about love and relationships. Basically, it's a selection of the most ordinary cleaning products. Two people follow the instruction drawing, and create their own ephemeral sculpture, using these objects as "bridges" between them. I liked the simplicity of these little bottles connecting two people, two bodies together. And many relationships are killed because of them! (Laughs)

CS To conclude this wonderful conversation — although I feel I could continue forever — do you think there is something to be discovered or revealed in everything that surrounds us?

EW The small, intimate things — cooking, taking care of yourself, watching a flower bloom, friendship, love — are the precious moments in our lives, the things that truly make us happy. Now that I have reached a certain age, I know that constantly chasing things — "I want to be this," "I want to do that" — doesn't really

make us happy. All the little things around me contain something that attracts me. For instance, I look at these ordinary chairs every day, and I no longer see them because they have become so familiar. But as soon as I do something different with them, they suddenly transform into something else: they acquire a certain meaning, a psychological dimension, or an attraction.



Double Dream, 2026.

And that, for me, is beauty. It is also why I love this palazzo. Look at these walls. Half of the surface is crumbling away. Most people would say, "Oh my God, what is this? It should be painted white!" But that is precisely what is beautiful. I love this city because of its imperfections. It is about allowing things to age gracefully, letting them grow old with grace.







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1. Portrait, Erwin Wurm
Dreamers exhibition
Installation view
Museo Fortuny, Venice, 2026
Photo Julien Boudet



2. Erwin Wurm
Yikes, 2024
Substitutes series
Aluminium, paint
154 × 46 × 54 cm
Photo Markus Gradwohl



3. Erwin Wurm
Compulsion, 2008
Metal, clothes,
polyurethane foam
138 × 70 × 75 cm
Photo Markus Gradwohl



4. Erwin Wurm
Dreamers exhibition
Installation view
Museo Fortuny, Venice, 2026
Photo Julien Boudet



5. Erwin Wurm
Dreamers exhibition
One Minute Sculptures,
Museo Fortuny, Venice, 2026
Photo Julien Boudet



6. Erwin Wurm
Dreamer, One Arm, 2024
Dreamers series
Aluminium, paint
92 × 148 × 93 cm
Photo Markus Gradwohl



7. Erwin Wurm
Fat Car, 2002
Mixed media
130 × 265 × 480 cm
Photo Arthur Evans



8. Erwin Wurm
Renault 25, 1991, 2008
Mixed media
135 × 204 × 475 cm
Photo Lisa Rastl



9. Erwin Wurm
Ghost, 2022
Substitutes series
Aluminium, paint
300 × 87 × 56 cm
Photo Markus Gradwohl



10. Erwin Wurm
Outdoor Sculpture, 2000
Taipei series



11. Erwin Wurm
Mind Bubble Leg Up, 2024
Aluminium
240 × 140 × 160 cm
Photo Julien Boudet



12. Erwin Wurm
Fallen Falls, 2025
Substitutes series
Aluminium, acrylic paint
154 × 180 × 15 cm
Photo Markus Gradwohl



13. Portrait, Erwin Wurm
With Head TV, 2017
One Minute Sculptures series
Cabinet, instruction drawing
Museo Fortuny, Venice, 2026
Photo Julien Boudet