



An Austrian artist has
been using people —
squeezed in tiny spaces
— to foster debates
on urban cosmos



CURVES IN CREVICES

crevices beneath concrete buildings — spaces that are visibly invisible; spaces that people have forgotten or are ignorant about; spaces that people usually don't like to go to.

For close to a decade, Cie William Dorner, an Austrian artist, seeks out such places in various parts of Europe to create his art installations — made up of human beings. His body sculptures — made of breathing, sweating people clad in colourful hoodies, sneakers or heels — invite people to think about their cities. "And also irritate them," says Dorner to Bangalore Mirror. Most of them are performers, handpicked by Dorner, but sometimes even passers-by become a part of this art known as Bodies in Urban Space (BIUS).

BIUS began as a photo-project when Dorner was invited to Vienna

for a residency program. "I lived in a residential building," he recalls. Dorner "was interested in the dimensions of apartments and had discovered the idea of Modular by Le Corbusier (an anthropomorphic system of measurement bridging imperial & metric). I was interested in space, on its different dimensions, e.g. its political, economic, social, but also phenomenological aspects," he says. And the only way he could express these ideas was through "visual representations".

In 2006 when Dorner was invited as a guest choreographer at the Summer Dance Festival in the University of Barcelona, he worked with 12 dancers to transfer the idea of BIUS to the public space. "The 20-minute performance was a big

success," he says. He was later invited to Paris where the official premiere of BIUS took place in July 2007. He performed BIUS on the streets of Paris in the morning, noon and evening. By the end of the day, he had 500 people following his body sculpture. Since then, BIUS has been showcased in various parts of Europe.

Dorner has been relentless in his pursuit of people to think about their "urban surroundings" through BIUS. "Living in urban spaces is our future," he affirms. "Our cities will get crowded. So it is imperative that we discuss now, how we can live together since we will be spending our lifetime in big cities."

Dorner has been inspired by dif-

ferent art forms from the time he was in school. His inspirations are varied — "scientists, filmmakers, architects, fine arts". But he was especially influenced by his "painting teacher" who also taught dance. "Dance movements inspired me," he says. His art installations are a reflection of his love for dance movements.

Before bringing BIUS to a city, Dorner always asks two important questions to the organisers/host country: Which places do people not like to go to in town? Which are the places that are undergoing change? The answer plays a major role in Dorner deciding where his art work will be installed. Usually, it would comprise neighbourhoods that are "architecturally interesting"; buildings that are newly built; decaying and dangerous buildings... He also "loves" walking the lesser known by-lanes of a city. Dorner says that bodies in BIUS help people to see their city again — "contemplate the environment they live in."

Springing a surprise on the unsuspecting public and making them "think" about their urban space is what Dorner likes the most about BIUS. "People on the road, on their way to work, they do not know about the project — then they encounter BIUS — their reactions are honest and that is sometimes really funny," he says.

The ever-mobile body sculptures raise people's curiosity and in most cases inspire them to follow the body sculpture. "I want to take the residents on a walk in their own city," says Dorner about BIUS. "Discover the changes that are always happening in a city. And want to make them think about their city's architecture."

Will he ever stage BIUS in India? "Well, I had a performer in Brussels and in Antwerp that is from India (I am still in touch with him.) He always said: 'Can you imagine performing this work in India' and then he smiled enigmatically. I can imagine that this will be a special challenge and to be honest I don't know, if we can present BIUS in your country. It's really a good question that I have to leave open. ...till he finds a way to discover appropriate empty spaces in a country filled with a billion people."

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It is an art installation. Temporary. Sometimes with a life span of just five minutes. It is usually wedged in architectural spaces — under awnings, tiny spaces between two walls, atop a fire hydrant, in the gap between a wall and two pillars, in the narrow

