

WAS an artist ever since I was five years old," says David Gerstein. The Jerusalem-born artist, now 70 years old, more than ever prefers strong, vibrant tones for almost all his works. His proclivity for the uninhibited in art spills over to other things as well, more closer to home. "I also like spicy food! The taste is not veiled. It is straightforward. So, my colours too are straightforward."

Most recently seen at the India Art Fair 2014, where he put on show his pioneering 3D sculptural metal installations, Gerstein is gearing up for his first ever solo exhibition in India titled *Poetic Mirror*. Israel-based Bruno Art Group is organising the show which is on at New Delhi's Visual Arts Gallery, India Habitat Centre from 6-15 May and is curated by Dr Alka Pande.

The artworks were still being put up at the time of writing this article. But Gerstein's excitement was already palpable as he exclaimed, "Tomorrow it shall all come alive." And one could have no doubts about that. With bold strokes and colours against a pearl-white gallery wall, the sculptures that were already up demanded minute attention. Gerstein explains how the preference for such bright colours is something intrinsic that he shares with India. "I think no other country has the courage to use such strong, straight colours like India. That's what I do too in my works. I use fresh colours, something which a lot of artists are afraid of."

Gerstein's years as a student were spent in Jerusalem, Paris, New York and London. When asked he says, he looked up to Pablo Picasso as

On a colour diet

The chasm between urban life and nature forms the crux of David Gerstein's metal art. **ASAD ALI** on the artist's upcoming exhibition



● **Bold strokes** Gerstein's love for vibrant colours makes for striking imagery

a hero. Other artists whose works he closely followed later include Roy Lichtenstein, Jasper Johns and David Hockney. All icons in their own right, associated with the Pop art movement. Gerstein garnered a lot of acclaim for his outdoor installations — his work *Momentum* is Singapore's tallest public sculpture — but in most of his work one notices the indelible traces of his fixation with popular culture, and how it relates to present society. Explains Gerstein, "The use of colours and themes from our daily lives is something I definitely share with the Pop art ethos." First generation pop art revolved a lot around international celebrities he recalls, and adds: "My interests lay somewhere close by. In things that aren't

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considered art in our daily urban life but become art somehow." He gives the example of supermarkets which have become part of the landscape for urban dwellers now. "The lines of products in the aisles have become our horizon. So I draw my themes, my colours from such scenarios. But I'm a second generation pop artist and I can't deny it," he says.

Other sculptures that are being displayed, also draw a lot from the dilemma of the urban psyche. Gerstein's

metal installation *5th Avenue* shows the street in three tiers where people rush past each other. Nobody has the time to stop. *Endless Walk* shows another crowd of people walking along a route that forms the infinity symbol. "Well I have a very urban background and even for my education I went to major cities so that's a natural gravitation. But I also try to balance it out in my work. Because on one hand we live a dense, city life. But at the same time we have a dream to go back to nature. I try to translate those dreams into my works as well as using elements such as butterflies or birds. This tension between two opposite worlds can be very strong."

Gerstein does manage to bring out this tension exceedingly well. His sculpture *Happy Hours* shows two bikers surrounded by butterflies. *Elegance* is another wall sculpture that resembles a knee-length boot completely made out of butterflies. Both depict urgent urban movement, except they seem wrapped around with the dream of nature.

Does all this propensity to represent urban life influence the kind of material he works with? Urban equals metal? Gerstein doesn't agree and says the material is only to support the choice of colours which is more important to him. "Other material, wood for example, may convey softness. Metal on the other hand has a very industrial look which I prefer for this kind of work. In any case, when you look at the work you don't just see metal, right? You see the colours, that's more important."

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