

VANDANA KALRA

STANDING at a whopping 18 metre, the vibrant installation, with silhouettes spiralling their way to the top, is a distinctive feature of Singapore's Business District. Hundreds of visitors pass by the hand-painted figurines identified as David Gerstein's *Momentum*. It is one of the several installations by the Israeli artist that dot cities the world over, from Seoul to Germany and across Israel. "I recently completed three sculptures at the athletic stadium in Hsinchu, Taiwan," says the Israeli artist, scrolling his camera phone to show a photograph of his work. It is trademark Gerstein; the 14-metre long *Big Peloton Wave* has cyclists zipping past with their hair blowing in the wind.

In his first outing in India, the scale of work is smaller when compared to his mammoth public installations, but Gerstein suspends them on the walls at Visual Arts Gallery with equal passion, for the solo exhibition titled "Poetic Mirror". Brought to the country by Bruno Art Group, the collection curated by Alka Pande is a true representation of his oeuvre — the 3D metal cutouts in bright colours have a kinetic energy rather than being inert. If *5th Avenue* depicts a busy street scene inspired by his stay in New York, *Happy Hours* has two bikers surrounded by a cloud of butterflies. *Endless Walk* represents a crowd walking in lines and *The Burning Lips* captures a playful kiss. "Art should be simple and basic, to be enjoyed," says Gerstein.

Gerstein's work arrived in India before he did, showcased at the India Art Fair in 2013 and 2014. One of Israel's most famous artists, the market is

flooded with copies of his work. "Earlier I used to feel angry. It took years to develop this style and now people are making money copying it. But now I think this is the biggest compliment I can get. It proves that my work is appreciated," chuckles the 69-year-old.

Gerstein has always moved against the tide. When the world was inclining towards conceptual art back in the '70s, Gerstein was experimenting with figurative painting. The turn towards painting in the '80s had him practise painted wood-cuts instead. To battle the flatness of plywood, the surface was covered with glue and

On the Move

After touring the world, Israeli artist David Gerstein makes his debut solo in India with the now-famous kinetic 3D metal cutouts



sand and painted with acrylic for a rough texture. Acceptance took time, but the artist was persistent. "I knew I was on the right track. I enjoyed it. Perhaps it also came naturally. My father used to cut leather in a factory, so maybe it was just an inherent talent," he says. The breakthrough came years later, with an exhibition at Israel Museum in Jerusalem in 1987 and thereafter in the US and Canada, among others.

Less than a decade later, however, Gerstein was on to another experiment. Laser cutting brought in metal cuts, industrial paint replaced acrylic and improved tech-

(Top) David Gerstein's work includes a figurine of his mother who learnt cycling in her 20s; 5th Avenue

nique gave rise to strong figuration and bolder, brighter colours. The themes though remained the same. After all, they were rooted in his childhood. "Most artists tend to draw from their own experiences," he says, recalling how the vase that he often paints is a recollection of a painting that occupied a prime position in his home as a child.

Among the cyclists zipping past is his mother, whom he saw learning how to ride a bike as a young immigrant who had just moved to Israel. "I was amazed how she was learning to cycle in her 20s. I had to wait for my first bike till I was 12. There used to be a long wait," he says. Picking up the brush came naturally to him at the age of five. Paper cuts acted as toys for him and his twin, Jonathan. Played to profession; after completion of his military service, he applied to the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, Jerusalem, followed by the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris and the Art Students League in New York. "That provided exposure to some of the greatest artists such as Van Gogh and Pablo Picasso," he says.

The desire to be close to his roots, however, brought him back to Israel. Dividing his time between his studio and the Bezalel classroom, he began teaching. "I never sought financial assistance from my parents," says Gerstein. More than 50 solos later, he is more than comfortably placed. He has two exhibitions in Belgium in the coming week, and a public installation in Kazakhstan. India will have to wait — his visit is only a two-day halt.

The exhibition at Visual Arts Gallery, India Habitat Centre, is on till May 15.
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