News

# An artist is leaving faceless, mannequin-like sculptures in cities around the world and passersby are shocked, tickled, and sometimes scared

By Darcy Schild



Mark Jenkins

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In an era where swarms of people walk down the street wearing headphones and looking down at their phones, American artist Mark Jenkins is creating urban art pieces he hopes will get people to notice and question their surroundings.

Jenkins told INSIDER he is a self-taught artist and created a technique of building lifelike sculptures out of packing tape in 2003.

"Over time, I kept improving the technique, and eventually, I had the idea to put clothes on them and create these hyper-realistic sculptures," Jenkins said. He calls his collection of human-like sculptures "urban theater."

"It's like the Shakespeare quote: 'All the world's a stage,'" he said. "I get to turn the world into a stage for this art, and the sculptures act as an object that convert regular space into this weird, hyper-real space."

Keep reading to see a selection of Jenkins' work and explore the meanings behind his thought-provoking art installations.

## Artist Mark Jenkins said it takes him about a week to build one of his sculptures.



**Fuerteventura, Canary Islands.** Mark Jenkins

Jenkins' building process can be found on his website, TapeSculpture.org, where he gives step-by-step instructions on how to create his sculptures out of plastic wrap and packing tape.

## One of the biggest challenges, Jenkins said, is placing the finished sculpture in a public area.



**Besançon, France.** Mark Jenkins

"With all these rules that govern public spaces — don't sit here, don't walk here — my art is kind of a pushback on that," Jenkins said.

## But placing his finished works on city streets and buildings in Europe and the US is part of the process, Jenkins said.



**Washington, DC.** Mark Jenkins

Jenkins said he wants his pieces to "distort the city fabric" in hopes of getting people to question what's around them.

## Jenkins said sometimes people call the police or fire department because of his sculptures.



**Dublin, Ireland.** Mark Jenkins

"People have sometimes called police if they see one of my sculptures on the roof," Jenkins said. "A lot of people say it's not responsible of me to be making that kind of work, but my intention is never to cause that kind of reaction."

One of his most controversial installations was this sculpture, which looked like a figure drowning in a river in Sweden.



**Malmö, Sweden.** Mark Jenkins

Jenkins said he created this piece as part of an arts education program for teenagers at an arts-focused public high school in Sweden called Glokala Folkhögskolan, or Global Folk High School.

"At the program, I created sculptures together with the students," Jenkins said. "Like all my sculptures in 'urban theater,' I created this piece to get the public to question what's around them. I never want to evoke a specific reaction, I just want people to challenge their surroundings."

"The main goal was for the students to learn how my work takes graffiti off the wall and into 3D space," he said.

Jenkins recalled bystanders being shocked at the balloon-holding figure, and he said some people called a fire rescue squad shortly after he placed the structure in the river.

"My intention is never to scare people," Jenkins said. "This was a great learning experience for me and the students. It reminded me [that] as an artist, you have ideas you want to pursue, but it's easy to step over boundaries. In the end, I was invited back to the school to do another project."

## Some of Jenkins' art is created with a cause in mind, like this installation, which he crafted as part of a London suicide prevention awareness campaign called Project 84.



**A behind-the-scenes view of the sculptures Mark Jenkins built for the Project 84 campaign in London.** Mark Jenkins

Jenkins said being part of the Project 84 campaign shows how his art is multi-faceted and can evoke a range of emotions and reactions from the public.

## Jenkins arranged 84 of the figures on top of a building in London to represent the number of men who lose their lives to suicide each week in the UK.



**The final Project 84 installation on top of a building in London.** Mark Jenkins

The Project 84 campaign and Jenkins' work is illustrated in this video.

## He said some of his projects are supposed to be ironic, like this sculpture made with pieces of trash photographed in front of a trash pickup area.



**Rome, Italy.** Mark Jenkins

Jenkins said one of the most exciting things about his street art is seeing how people react differently to each sculpture.

"Some people might just walk by without stopping, and some people will take pictures or point," he said.

## But no matter the purpose of each sculpture, Jenkins' hope is that people stop what they're doing and become part of his urban art pieces.



**Montreal, Quebec, Canada.** Mark Jenkins

"Some of my works come from a poetic narrative, but really, I just want to make things that distort the city fabric," Jenkins said.

Jenkins said not all of his projects have a deep meaning, but he hopes his sculptures remind people to look up and be aware of their surroundings.



**Łódź, Poland.** Mark Jenkins

"People should see street art as a counterbalance to all the advertisements in public spaces," he said. "I see my art as my way of giving something back to the city and adding something personal."

Find more of Mark Jenkins' work on his website and Instagram account.

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