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Victims of sexual assault in front of the Cologne Cathedral – DW – 08/03/2023

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On this rainy morning, despite the bad weather, tourists scurried around the Cologne Cathedral, as usual, posing for cameras against the backdrop of the world-famous landmark. Hundreds of bright figurines of children on the square in front of the Cologne Cathedral are also of interest to tourists and local residents these days. After people get acquainted with the contents of the information plates for the installation, smiles quickly disappear from their faces.

Victims of sexual abuse in the church

This reaction was sought by the author of the protest installation "Shattered Souls in a Sea of Silence" Dennis Josef Meseg, which takes place in Cologne from 1 to 6 August 2023.

The date of the installation in front of the main attraction of the city was not chosen by chance: it is at this time that the 37th World Meeting of Catholic Youth takes place in Lisbon. The Archdiocese of Cologne is represented in Lisbon by about 450 young people. In total, almost 1.5 million people from among the Catholic youth from all over the world take part in the rally.

According to the artist's idea, "333 children's figurines, standing on the square with their hands turned towards the Cologne Cathedral, symbolically indicate the place where evil is hiding," the author of the installation emphasizes in an interview with DW. Wrapped in white and purple ribbons, these figurines symbolically represent victims of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church. The liturgical colors in which the children's figurines are made were deliberately chosen by the artist: white represents the color of innocence, and purple is the color of confession in the Catholic Church.

Artist Dennis Josef Mezeg has been working on the installation with 20 helpers for the last two weeks in order to be in time for the Catholic Youth meeting in Lisbon. With his installation, the artist wants to condemn and draw the attention of the general public to the problem of sexual violence in the church. "My goal is to draw attention not only to the victims, but also to the criminals who sit or continue their work behind the walls of churches, because they know that nothing threatens them for this," Dennis Josef Mezeg clarifies to DW and adds that he himself as a child he was a victim of non-church sexual abuse, but he knows and understands very well how people feel after that. According to him, as soon as the general public became aware of the crimes in the church on sexual grounds, believers began to leave it. And this process will continue until the church admits its mistakes and takes action against those who committed sexual violence.

Silent protest agreed with police

According to Meseg, the administration of the Cologne Cathedral was against the fact that such an installation was deployed on the square adjacent to it. "But this area is not the property of the Catholic Church, but belongs to the city, so I only had to coordinate the installation with the police department as part of the demonstrations. It was announced and received permission - as a silent protest action without the use of loudspeakers, with the participation of 333 demonstrators in the form of figures plastic children on metal fortifications," the artist explains.

Installation by artist Dennis Josef MezegPhoto: Victor Weitz/DW

The installation, according to the artist, cost 70,000 euros, which he paid for himself. The fact is that before Mezegh became a professional artist, he was an entrepreneur. Today, this gives him the opportunity to finance his projects - without patrons and sponsors.

From Entrepreneurship to Art

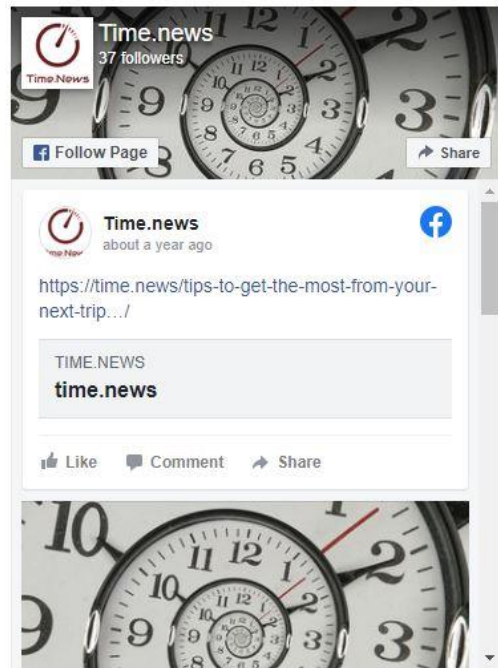
The love of art and the desire for creative freedom made him leave his parental home early. At the age of 23, Dennis Josef Mesegon, as the youngest artist, announced himself at an exhibition at the Galerie du Haut-Pavé in Paris - under the pseudonym John Christoph Dionysos Sommersberg (John Christoph Dionysos Sommersberg). At that time, Dennis was selling his work on the Internet, but this was not enough to finance his life. In the end, with a heavy heart due to financial considerations, he decided to put his art aside for a while and go into business. Later he created his own media agency, which today gives him financial freedom to implement his rather expensive projects.

Information plate for the installation at Cologne CathedralPhoto: Victor Weitz/DW

Only at the age of 40 did he finally manage to fulfill his dream as an artist - in 2019 he entered the Alanus Hochschule in Alfter School of Arts and Social Sciences and began to study sculpture using a variety of materials, including stone, wood, steel or paint. It is sculptural creativity that allows him to discover something new in himself again and again.

In 2021, artist Dennis Josef Meseg was awarded the German Association for Creativity and Innovation Prize in Berlin for his installation dedicated to the coronavirus pandemic "It is like it is".

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The artist hopes that his current installation will attract the attention of the German press and the general public, because the topic of sexual violence in the church will remain relevant until the Catholic Church admits its mistakes and punishes those responsible.

Mobile bunkers for Ukraine

Since May of this year, the artist and sculptor has been participating in the Ukrainian bombing defense project.

SafePlace4UA. Dennis was asked to do the exterior styling of the mobile protective bunkers. The artist not only agreed to do it, but also decided to finance purchase and registration of a mobile bunker for twenty people for the city of Kherson in southern Ukraine.

“The production of the bunker took two months, including its decoration. We called it the “Bunker of Hope for Survival”.

With this action, I wanted to express my solidarity with Ukrainian girls and women who have suffered and are still suffering from sexual violence by the Russian military. If this the action saves at least one life, it was worth all my and my colleagues’ efforts.” Dennis Josef Mezeg emphasized in an interview with DW.

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