

INTERVIEW

IENA CRUZ


Question: You are a well-known eco- and street artist. How did you get into this particular art form and discover your passion?

Iena Cruz: My journey into the world of street art began with my childhood passion for graffiti. From a young age, it became a way for me to leave my mark on the world. My tendency to scribble my name all over the walls of our family apartment in Milan was a clear indication for that. As I entered my teenage years, my passion for graffiti continued to grow, and I adopted the alias "Cruz." Roaming the streets with spray cans in hand, I would leave my mark on walls, trains, and any available surface.

My artistic journey took a significant turn when I had the opportunity to collaborate with the Bag Art Factory collective in Milan. This collaboration marked a pivotal moment in my career as I began to explore new artistic horizons and work alongside talented painters, sculptors, and set designers. This eight-year project provided me with a solid foundation in the Milan art scene and offered me the chance to experiment with mixed materials, expanding my artistic repertoire. In 2010, I made the decision to move to New York City, seeking to broaden my artistic perspective and delve deeper into the world of street art. During this time, I had the chance to prove myself on bigger surface creating large-scale murals, which further elevated my profile as an artist and exposed my work to a broader audience.



Photo: Emiliano Rubinacci



As an eco-artist, my passion for the environment and my desire to create art with a purpose led me to explore the intersection of art and sustainability. I felt a deep connection to nature and a responsibility to address environmental issues through my artwork. By integrating elements of nature, conservation, and sustainability into my street art, I sought to raise awareness, inspire change, and foster a greater appreciation for the natural world.



Photo: Emiliano Rubinacci

Question: Who or what inspires you when creating your art?

Cruz: Living in Brooklyn has had a significant impact on my art. The rapidly changing environment and diverse community have inspired many of my large-scale, colorful murals. Additionally, my exposure to Mexican artists and filmmakers in Brooklyn deepened my interest in Latin aesthetics, leading to the incorporation of Mexican culture, food, and art in many of my works. Through my art, I aim to raise awareness about the preservation of wildlife and their habitats. Animals are often featured prominently in my murals, acting as symbols of strength, resilience, and the interconnectedness of nature. By highlighting the beauty and fragility of the animal kingdom, I hope to inspire viewers to take action and protect our natural world. Art can be a powerful tool for social commentary and activism. I see art as a way to initiate conversations and promote change, by highlighting the urgent need for action on issues that affect the environment and all living beings.

Question: What is your working process like? How do you go from idea to finished work?

Cruz: I always start from a picture of the wall I plan to paint and its surroundings. Then I do a lot of research on the local natural fauna, flora, and animal wildlife, to then merge my vision with other elements from different environments or other parts of the world. I often include man-made elements in my design to symbolize the impact that humans have had on the planet. Creating a concept design for my mural is definitely a crucial aspect of my process, but it is not until I start painting that I truly express myself through my brushstrokes and the use of colors.



Photo: Courtesy by the artist

Question: Could you tell us a little bit about the creation process of the mural? How big is it, what colors is it made of and what is so special about it?

Cruz: The painting process took 4 weeks, the planning process, however, had already started quite some time earlier when I first started to create a concept design. Here in Dreieich, I started to paint the outlines of the concept at night by using a projector. Then I paint from top to down and from large spaces to small spaces. Animals and details finish my work and creates the soul of it. Including the lateral blue sides, the mural covers an incredible size of 750m² of pollution eating surface. The paint contains minerals that filter the smog from the air nearby. In total, almost 350 liters of paint were used. The painting is able to absorb as much CO₂ from the air as about 100 trees would do in a year. And the effect will last for about 10 years.

Question: What is the meaning of the mural and the individual elements? What does it mean to you personally?

Cruz: My mural, titled “Linfa,” holds a deep personal meaning for me. It embodies the concept of figurative nourishment, breathing new lifeblood into one’s inspiration. The result is a biophilic effect that seeks to represent the interconnected relationship between ourselves, our ecosystem, and the surrounding environment. “Linfa” is designed as a vertical storytelling experience, beginning from the bottom and ascending to the top. It portrays how one ecosystem sustains the life and functionality of another, emphasizing the intricate web of interdependence in nature. At the heart of the mural, a human figure reminiscent of the Greek Goddess of fortune and prosperity takes center stage. She assumes a joyful posture, symbolizing her optimism towards a bright future. However, her vision is partially obscured by a cloudy blindfold. This juxtaposition signifies the challenges and uncertainties that can hinder our perception of the path ahead. The silhouette of the goddess is formed by the waves of the ocean, serving as a metaphorical gateway that transports us into a new dimension. In this realm, the boundaries between the deep sea and our universe blur, shortening the vast distances that separate these two worlds. It represents our quest for deeper understanding and connection with the mysteries of the ocean and the greater universe.

By merging the realm of deep-sea creatures with our known universe, “Linfa” aims to bridge the gap and foster a sense of unity and harmony between these seemingly distinct domains. It speaks to the profound interconnectedness of all life forms and encourages viewers to contemplate our place in the larger cosmic tapestry. This mural encapsulates my reverence for nature, my fascination with the unknown, and my belief in the power of interconnectedness. It serves as a reminder of the importance of preserving and nurturing our environment while encouraging individuals to embark on their own journeys of inspiration and growth.



Photo: Courtesy by the artist

Question: What was it like for you to create a mural of this size and the first carbon neutral street art in Dreieich/Frankfurt?

Cruz: Here in Dreieich, I had the chance to support Biotest's ambition of becoming even more sustainable and ecofriendly. This partnership is a perfect fit for me because we both share a deep care for nature and life. Their philosophy of "From nature for life" resonated with me on a profound level, and I found it incredibly inspiring. Biotest's dedication to connecting donors and patients through their medicines, ultimately improving people's health, aligned perfectly with my own values as an artist. My objective was to find a way to visually communicate Biotest's philosophy and our shared DNA through the mural. I wanted to create a piece of art that not only captured the essence of their mission but also reflected our collective commitment to nature and life. By bringing art and technology together, we can spread ideas for a more sustainable future in a much more emotional way. It is great to see companies, especially pharmaceutical companies like Biotest, taking responsibility and creating impact by not only making promises, but by really taking actions and for example set the goal to become carbon neutral by 2035. I feel proud that our collaboration is a step into bringing this vision to life and make it visible to everyone. I really like the idea of their GoFuture campaign to show that even small steps can make a big difference and we all should have the vision to a more sustainable future.

Question: What messages or emotions are you aiming to convey to the viewers through your mural?



Photo: Emiliano Rubinacci

Cruz: Nowadays we are completely and constantly on the move. With the mural, I want people to take a break. Look at the mural, rest, recognize details and read the mural in their own individual way and think about what sustainability means to them personally.

I want people to really feel the connection we as humans have with nature and how important it is for our future to preserve and protect animals and plant life.

Question: How does the experience of painting our building here compare to your work in Milan and New York? How did you experience your time here in Dreieich?

Cruz: One aspect that stands out is the sense of community and connection that I have encountered here. In small communities like Dreieich, the impact of an artist painting a building is immediately noticed and appreciated by the residents who pass by it every day. This proximity allows for more frequent and meaningful interactions. People were curious, many stopped to watch me do my work. It is great to see people's interest in my art. Most of them saw me every day on their way to work and were able to follow the creation process. I have had the opportunity to engage in conversations with locals, who showed a genuine interest in my work. They asked questions and shared their thoughts on my work here and the topic of sustainability.

Overall, my time here in Dreieich has been enriching and inspiring. The interactions with the community have provided me with valuable insights and a deeper understanding of the local perspectives. The genuine interest and engagement from the people here have fueled my passion for my work and reinforced the importance of art in fostering connections and raising awareness.



Photo: Emiliano Rubinacci



Photo: Emiliano Rubinacci

Question: How do you see the role of art in today's society and what do you think is the most important function of art?

Cruz: From my perspective, the role of art in society is multifaceted and holds great significance. Art serves as a powerful medium for communication, expression, and reflection. It has the remarkable ability to bring people together, facilitating meaningful connections and fostering dialogue. Art plays a significant role in driving sustainability by raising awareness, inspiring action, and fostering a deeper connection to the environment. Through creative expression, artists have the power to convey messages about the importance of sustainable practices and the urgent need for environmental conservation. Thus, art can act as a catalyst for change, inspiring individuals to reconsider their beliefs, values, and actions.