

La Hütte Royal: artist Thorsten Brinkmann's radical transformation of an ordinary Pittsburgh house

German artist Thorsten Brinkmann has transformed a dilapidated, abandoned family home – and a particularly unattractive take on the suburban vernacular style at that – in the Troy Hill area of Pittsburgh into a (still slightly dilapidated) permanent art work.

The house, built in 1912, was bought from the city by local art collector Evan Mirapaul in 2011. Inspired by the Art House Project on Naoshimi Island in Japan, where artists have had their creative way with abandoned houses, Mirapaul invited Hamburg-based Brinkmann to come and see the house and think about what he might do with it. Multiple long-hauls later and every room in the three-storey (four storeys if you include the basement where Brinkmann has installed a boxing ring) has been wildly re-imagined.

Visitors to the house, newly christened La Hütte Royal, are welcomed by a huge bell, a prop from a long-since cancelled children's shows. Brinkmann has also added new walls, playing with scale to create narrow corridors and unsettling nooks and crannies. An exercise in creative (and creepy) re-use, Brinkmann has incorporated all manner of found objects – many found in the house itself –including old vinyl lps. A home theatre in the attic features vintage beauty parlour hairdryer stations, arranged in neat rows.

'Visitors to the house will have no clue what waits for them in the house from seeing the exterior,' Mirapaul says. 'Pittsburgh is filled with houses that look like this from the outside. I hope that La Hütte Royal will unlock our imaginations about the elaborate lives that can be found inside. Since Thorsten has used so much material that he found in the house and in the neighbourhood, I find the transformation he created especially personal and poignant.'

'La Hütte Royal is the biggest single private art piece I have worked on,' says Brinkmann. 'In my career, I have already created many installations including rooms, photographs, sculptures and videos. This installation was a chance to combine all I was working on the last few years and develop new pieces. It became a *gesamtkunstwerk*, where life and art melt into one.'

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