

Interview with Thorsten Brinkmann

"In this way, things that have been there mix with things that have been added to form something new." Artist Thorsten Brinkmann in an interview with Caroline Schilling (Int. Presse, Hatje Cantz) about his house installation La Hütte Royal and the wild desire to combine things that do not belong together.

La Hütte Royal is the largest installation you have worked on so far and at the same time a transformation that playfully and sometimes bizarrely juggles with the variables of time, space, and reality. How did this gesamtkunstwerk come about between 2011 and 2013?

My collector Evan Mirapaul asked me in mid-2011 if I would be interested in realizing a house installation. He now already had several works of mine and would like to give them a proper home. Since the real estate market had completely collapsed in Pittsburgh, there was an opportunity to buy houses tremendously cheap and also make them available to artists. I listened to his offer and immediately signaled that I would be very interested. Two months later he called me to tell me that he had now acquired a house for me, and if I wanted I could come and see it. That was in October 2011. I myself saw the house then for the first time in November 2011. In the house were still all things of the previous owners, they had made off in a night and fog action, leaving everything behind. The house was mostly in good condition, nevertheless the first impression was extreme, since it was still squatted for two to three years by some unknown people and was therefore completely littered. Not wanting to simply erase the complete history of the house, I picked up everything that was still usable and deposited it in the garden. Two more visits followed, each for a few days in the spring of 2012, to see what I could come up with for the house or to advise what could or had to be prepared on the house so that I could get started. I started working on the house for the first time in September 2012. Since I was still working on other exhibitions, there were breaks from time to time. But in September it really started, then again in October and finally in December. Each time for a few weeks, mostly two to three weeks. Due to restrictions on my visa there was then again a longer break until April 2013, from then until October I was actually only commuting between Hamburg and Pittsburgh, because the house should be ready in October for the Carnegie International.

From the beginning, I wanted to treat the house differently than a museum show. Because there, you usually have to plan everything very carefully in advance, because there's usually not that much time for construction and everything has to be shipped on time. I wanted the work to develop on the spot and not have everything planned in advance. I deliberately took my time there, that one room at a time would develop processually and fit into the whole. I wasn't interested in building a kind of "clean" Brinkmann museum. I was more interested in what happens in the house when I spend a lot of time there, what kind of spaces might develop out of the things I found. For example, there are only three rooms in the house that I have built before in a similar way; all the other twelve only emerged on site while I was working. I took a very playful approach and always worked on several rooms at the same time. For example, there are the "Record Rooms" on the first floor. Since I found quite a few records in the house and one of the previous residents was a DJ, I simply let that flow into it. I wanted to revive a part of the

history there, but without making a history exhibition. Also the fans on the record columns are from the house, they were all still working. So the idea grew to use them together with the panels in the first two rooms. Of course, records should then be played, but it should not be a specific song, because concrete music would have given too much right at the beginning. So now four record players are running there, all at the end of the record, and spread a sound carpet that changes constantly, since there are nevertheless small speed differences. One also sounds like it's breathing heavily and deeply, it almost sounds like the house is breathing. So almost every room has evolved in process. Even the hallways or the entrance situation.

One day I saw a huge wooden bell standing at an old parts dealer. I was immediately attracted to this object, and after a few phone calls because of the sizes of the windows in the house, because it went through the door in any case not, it was clear: the thing must go. Now it hangs right in the entrance area. I can't plan something like that, I know, you only encounter such "foundlings" with a certain amount of time. And the longer I stayed in Pittsburgh now, the more extraordinary finds there were. In the end, it means that this house grew and developed piece by piece over a period of two years. There were also no concrete drawings, just a few very loose collections of ideas, where it was clear that these were only clues. There is also an area that you can crawl into, which under certain circumstances can remind you of Alice in Wonderland. There are five rooms in one, also the entire architecture has grown step by step on site, without specifying anything beforehand. Except that you climb into the fireplace, only to come out one floor up at some point in the movie theater. Along the way, you climb, crawl and climb through five hidden rooms, and the further in you go, the more isolated you are from the outside world, since you have no view of the outside. There is also a golf room, this too came about as I found a complete set of ancient golf equipment in the house. For this I then designed a wallpaper, laid turf, a basketball hoop serves as a golf hole and an old truck hubcap has become the ramp. In this way, existing things are mixed with added things to create something new. The found old things also create a leap back in time to the era from which the things originate. There are also rooms where I've only added a small thing or where I've only set new lights, so these are found places that mix with the other productions. Now you don't know if these are also staged and so the staging mixes with the "house reality." I also deliberately left architectural elements untreated, the stairs for example, the floor or the door frames, in order to create a connection to the lived history of the house, to soften the boundary between reality and staging, and to allow different time levels to coexist.

After all, exhibitions are usually accompanied by a catalog and thus also documented. You decided to do something special and created 222 unique copies. Strictly speaking, your unusual artist's book is a record with a booklet. How did the idea come about?

Actually, there is also supposed to be a comprehensive book about the house. But since this was impossible to realize for the opening, but I wanted to have something that interested people could take home as a souvenir, I gave it some thought. It had to go fast, so it had to be small, but still top-notch. But also different from a book that is still to come, otherwise no one would want it ... During this musing, I was sitting in the plate room, surrounded by hundreds of plates. I would say that the records just got in my way and wanted it that way, I was actually just their

henchman. I took one in my hand and looked at it closely, and yes, then it was clear: original record, cover with text and booklet with pictures, great! That my dog Ernie, who had written about my work anyway, would also appear on the cover was then the next stroke of luck.

Your work is created in the tradition of readymades. Which objects appeal to you, are there selection criteria?

There are different qualities of the objects that interest me. Sometimes it's just the shape or even the color. But there are also things that are so ugly that I simply have to have them. What I then use them for often only emerges later. But bizarre objects whose function is not obvious at first glance are also interesting. Then there are also a lot of extremely "normal" objects, without a special design, to make something out of them is also very appealing, because their other existence is quite unspectacular. Extremely worn things have great advantages, because they tell a lot, and their surfaces at the same time show informal traces of painting, or indicate their duration of use.

Art critics repeatedly refer to Kurt Schwitters in your work. What significance does he have for your art?

I like to mention Kurt Schwitters again and again myself, because his Merzbau was quite groundbreaking in terms of installations. For years, he worked on this building again and again and let the space grow. His sculptural work has occupied the space over time, appropriated the space. An installation that grew out of itself, or rather proliferated. A procedure that is very close to me. His collage-like work as well, finding new meanings by combining things that don't belong together. I also like his clever humor.

The motif of your Collector's Edition arouses curiosity. Is there a story to it?

Yes, the things are also all original finds from the house like the plates for the "artist's book." I also found quite a few bowling trophies and bowling balls in the house, so I believe that in addition to golf, a lot of bowling was played by the house residents. The title Never Die came about by itself because of the figure that is in the picture. I thought it was very fitting, since life-saving measures were carried out on the house, so to speak, and quite a few things were saved from the dump.

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