

ART

# INSIDE THE HOUSE OF HORROR



COMMISSIONED AND PRODUCED BY ARTANGEL, 2004. GHE GOR SCHNEIDER/THERRY BAL

It is the feeling of not knowing what to expect that makes it all so disconcerting as I shut the front door behind me and stare at the dark corridor and stairwell ahead. I haven't done my research, having taken someone else's appointment at Die Familie Schneider, an artistic intervention in London's Whitechapel, at the last minute. All I was told is that I had to pick up the keys from ArtAngel, and that I mustn't be late. So keys in hand I was sent along the road with directions to let myself in to number 14, and then number 16. I am clearly on my own from here, and my only instructions are to make sure I look in 'every nook and cranny'.

The corridor is dark and musty. A typical working-class, East London terrace. I shout 'hello', and the silence reverberates back. I know it's art, so despite being more than a little uneasy about the idea of snooping round someone else's home – every nook and cranny – I smile knowingly to myself that this will be the point. I will explore emotions of nosiness, curiosity and trespassing while exploring an abandoned house on my own. I'm certainly not expecting to emerge

from that front door, perhaps eight minutes later, traumatised to the point of shaking, and mildly hysterical.

There is a door to my right, slightly open. I walk into the kitchen, and am shocked because there's a woman at the sink. She can see me, I know, but she ignores me, repeatedly washing a plate as she stares fixedly ahead, caught in a 10-second time loop. She is harsh looking, with scraped-back hair; miserable, and composed entirely of shades of brown and grey, like everything else in the room. I'm reluctant to go further, because for all I know it might be part of the 'art' for her to pick up a carving knife and chase me around the house – and she looks, to be fair, like the type who might.

But I push on, every part of me wanting to leave the place, through a beaded curtain into a living room. There's an ashtray with three butts in it, and a brown sofa. I don't pause for too long, and passing the woman on the way out, mount the stairs. I'm excruciatingly aware of her presence the entire time I'm in the house. The next room I enter is a bedroom, with fitted mirrored wardrobes and little else besides a

bed. There is a large plastic bag between the bed and the wall. The bag is moving. I'm not going anywhere near it.

Next up, the bathroom. I can hear running water so I know there will be someone in there. I hold my breath and try the door. It opens and I walk in on a middle-aged man having a shower. He's not just having a shower. Like the woman, he ignores me completely and continues masturbating feverishly, stooped over, naked and moaning. It's horrible but amusingly I feel compelled, this being art, to hide the fact that I am totally shocked, so I stay in the room and poke around in the cupboards (slimming pills, some other stuff). Finally, I leave, and shut the door behind me.

There's more: there's an attic, a cellar, and a baby crying. There's some upsetting and unforgettable scenes that I see through keyholes of locked doors, and everywhere an unshakable repression, fear and sadness. It is a house of secrets, of violence, of dead lives, and living death. I leave with every moment, every second of Die Familie Schneider burned into my memory forever. *HT*

ART

## RETURN TO THE HOUSE OF HORROR



COMMISSIONED AND PRODUCED BY ARTANGEL. 2004. GREGOR SCHNEIDER/THERY BAL

It is the feeling of not knowing what to expect that makes it all so disconcerting as I shut the front door behind me and stare at the dark corridor and stairwell ahead. Although I've just come from number 14, next door, I don't know whether to expect more of the same – room after room of human surprises and repression, in which case I don't want to be here – or whether in this house there will be something else entirely. So far, it's all too familiar. Far too familiar; I actually think I've somehow come back into the same house accidentally. The light and every detail is identical. The same wallpaper, even the nails protruding from the walls, and the same open door to the right.

The corridor is dark and musty. I know it's art, so despite being more than a little uneasy about the idea of going through this all again, I smile knowingly to myself that this will be the point. I will explore emotions of familiarity, *deja vu*, displacement, memory, and so on, while exploring an abandoned house on my own. I'm certainly not expecting to emerge from that front door again, perhaps four minutes later, laughing

maniacally on my mobile as I make my way back to the office, trying to explain that I am a bit shaken up, having just seen two men masturbating in a shower, for my eyes only, in a East End street, in the name of art – and all before lunch.

There is a door to my right, slightly open. I walk into the kitchen, and am shocked, again, because there's a woman at the sink. She is exactly the same as the woman in the house before. I am sure I'm just in the same house again. But I'm also sure that I'm not. I find out later that she and her doppelganger are identical twins, actors who will be playing the parts Schneider has set them until January. I hope they are being paid well – illusion or not, this house is still providing some sort of reality, and it's a hideous one to be any part of.

Every fibre in my body wanting to leave the place already, I push on through a beaded curtain into a living room. There's an ashtray with three butts in it, and a brown sofa. I don't pause for too long, and passing the woman on the way out, mount the stairs. The next room I enter is a bedroom, with fitted mirrored wardrobes, and little else besides a

bed. There is a large plastic bag between the bed and the wall. It's moving. I'm not going anywhere near it. I don't know why I am still determined to avoid it – I guess I know I'm not going to like what I find.

Next up, the bathroom. I can hear running water so I know there will be someone there. And I am pretty sure I know who. But I have to enter – I don't know why I am so compelled – so I try the door. It opens and I walk in on a middle-aged man, slightly more stooped than before, and I leave again.

I know there's more, I know there's an attic, I know there's a cellar, a baby crying and nasty scenes through keyholes of locked doors. I know, and I know I don't want to see any more, so I leave. Everywhere there is the unshakable repression, fear and sadness. And it's happening next door too. It is a house of secrets, of violence, of dead lives, and living death. I leave with every moment, every second of *Die Familie Schneider* burned into my memory forever. Twice. *HT*

*Die Familie Schneider runs until Christmas. Viewings by appointment. [www.artangel.org.uk](http://www.artangel.org.uk)*