

## GAGOSIAN GALLERY

### Bugs, Whooshing, Circular Sleep Stimulate Artist Carsten Holler

Interview by Martin Gayford



Feb. 23 (Bloomberg) -- Carsten Holler has had an unusual career path, even for an artist.

He began his professional life as a scientist, an agricultural entomologist. Since then, he has become one of the most intriguing figures in the international avant-garde.

Born German, but in Belgium, and now resident in Stockholm, Holler is a hard figure to categorize. His aim is to do things that have never been done before, notwithstanding the efforts of art revolutionaries over the past century. For one thing, Holler is tempted to dispense with the art gallery itself.

“What you can do between those white walls is basically what has already been done,” he says. “There’s little room for innovation. Nobody expects a new artistic trend to come along in the next few years as it did in the past.”

Holler, nonetheless, has been doing novel things, including opening a night club and an aesthetically way-out hotel room.

The artist's own appearance is neatly precise and subtly disconcerting. At our meeting over tea at Claridge's in London, he was wearing a black shirt and brilliantly white trousers. After awhile I noticed that the frames of his glasses, instead of being conventionally horizontal, ran uphill above each eyebrow.

## Life Experiments

Some of his ideas have a scientific air.

"I'm interested in the idea of the self-experiment, including the project of life as an experiment on one's self," he said. In a way, he has moved from studying the communication between insects by scent -- his former specialty -- to observing the reactions of the public, and himself, to his own extraordinary projects.

One such event was Holler's transformation of the Turbine Hall of Tate Modern, three years ago, into a sort of cutting-edge playground, where visitors young and old whooshed down his slides. This work was entitled, with a technological touch, "Test Site." He reached intriguing conclusions from it, too.

"There's a common response to the slide, which is almost unavoidable," Holler, who was born in 1961, says. "Everybody has a smile. Even if you say to someone, I'll give you 100 pounds (\$144) if you aren't smiling when you come out at the bottom, they won't be able to do it."

Holler's "Revolving Hotel Room" was installed at the Guggenheim Museum in New York from Oct. 24, 2008, to Jan. 7. It consists of three revolving discs carrying a bed, a desk and a dressing table. Holler was the first to spend the night in this mutable setting, and says he found it surprisingly comfortable.

## Collage Club

"I thought it was going to be an awful experience, I would feel uncomfortable because it was changing all the time," Holler said. "But I slept fantastically. Maybe it's a more

natural condition than lying in one bed with everything fixed.” So he has made another unexpected finding.

Holler is a global artist. He opened an exhibition last month at the Gagosian Gallery in Beverly Hills; now he’s back in London, drawn by his avant-garde artwork-cum-disco, bar and restaurant. “The Double Club,” 7 Torrens St, London EC1, is sponsored by the Fondazione Prada, and opened on Nov. 21, 2008.

It’s certainly trendy, and may even be the beginning of a new type of sculptural installation with food, drinks and customers. The club’s a sort of collage in real time and space. Everything -- decor, food, drinks, music, furniture -- is divided half and half into parts typical of Euro-American styles, and others characteristically Congolese.

#### Jagger Revels

The club is a take on globalization, geometrically -- there are lines of demarcation on the floor, which is split into African and non-African segments -- physically and socially.

As a venue, it’s a success. Since New Year, it has been packed. The night before we spoke, Holler had spotted Mick Jagger among the revelers at a private after-BAFTA party.

Holler is spending as much time as possible in London because he finds the club so enjoyable. At present, it’s scheduled to run six months until May, open from Tuesday to Saturday, but that may be extended. It might also be entertaining, Holler speculates, to dismantle the whole caboodle and reopen in Kinshasa.

(Martin Gayford is chief art critic for Bloomberg News. The opinions expressed are his own.)

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