

Artist brings sinister installation to East End

Maev Kennedy, arts and heritage correspondent
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Unnerving: Gregor Schneider in one of the houses in Die Familie Schneider. Photo: Linda Nylind

As a succession of strangers arrived clutching front-door keys, the builders on the site opposite became intensely curious about what lay behind the newly painted brown doors of the identical neighbouring houses in the East End of London.

Their wildest imagining would miss the mark. The artist Gregor Schneider would undoubtedly tell them that that's the point: you can never guess the inner life of a house from the respectably dull face it turns to the outside world.

Inside, visitors confront alone an unnerving parallel universe, peopled by pairs of identical twins, with hints that something appalling has happened somewhere between the child gate barring the attic door and the bare mattress in the hidden cellar.

Die Familie Schneider is the first creation in Britain by a man with few challengers as the creepiest artist working today.

For 20 years Schneider has been dismantling and rebuilding his parents' former home in Germany - the house of his own childhood - as a sinister warren of false rooms, tunnels, pits and dead ends. When he recreated the house at the Venice Biennale he won the Golden Lion for sculpture, and when Artangel invited him to make a piece in Britain he agreed.

It was left to Artangel, which specialises in large-scale public art commissions, to work out the practicalities: all they needed were two identical houses that could be gutted and rebuilt inside, and six sets of identical twins to inhabit them in relays.

"It was surprisingly easy to find the identical twins, but the list narrowed itself rapidly when they realised what they would have to do - particularly the men," James Lingwood, a director of Artangel said. "The twins in the bedroom are extremely good at meditation."

He added: "There are some art projects which steer us towards a brighter future, and some which turn in towards a very dark present - and it's pretty clear which of the two Gregor Schneider is interested in."

Admission is by appointment only - 07981 578754; www.artangel.org.uk