

# CARSTEN HÖLLER

## TRIGGERING ALTERED STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

By [Kyle Johnson](#)

Photo by [Carsten Höller Studio](#)

For Carsten Höller, the human experience is one of experiment and perception, constantly questioning the importance of form and space relative to the individual and his sense of personal involvement within it.

As a trained research entomologist who holds a doctorate in agricultural science, with a focus on the olfactory communication strategies of insects, the wonderfully talented contemporary artist from Belgium holds a deep obsession with altering his followers' physical and psychological states. By using an interactive, almost surreal, system of sensory overload, the creative genius who unmasks an overwhelming innervation of emotion in his work brings about hallucinations, anxiety and fugue in what could be called - a personal identity crisis that continues to turn the art-world upside down.

Triggering an altered state of consciousness, his "experimental or influential environments" explore human perception and decision making in a series of interactive exhibitions of perhaps his most famous to date is entitled, "Carsten Höller: Decision." Through a labyrinth of stimuli, a "test site" he calls it, his dangerously progressive theme park with isometric winding slides, disorienting objects, and revolving rooms, sought, in his words, to "induce hallucinations, in the widest sense."

Representing the freedom to travel from one dimension to another without unnecessary constraints, his interactive spaces pull on the shoestrings of public and private space. Slightly unnerving and alchemical in nature, his work evokes an organic analysis of the nature of human emotions. For example, the "Upside Down Mushroom Room" featuring giant mushrooms hanging from the ceiling imposing themselves upon you as you travel through time and space, or his short films using images from multiple perspectives ordered in flip-book fashion to create a sense of motion, or perhaps his "Golden Mirror Carousel" of dreams, a palatial masterpiece of childhood nostalgia. It's with each and every exhibition that he leaves your mouth watering for more, each with their own personality and sense of bewilderment. I mean, he's even made a slide for the offices of Miuccia Prada.

Other notable examples of his work include the "The Revolving Hotel Room," a private suite built for two, as part of an installation piece for the Guggenheim Museum in New York. "Psycho Tank," a sensory deprivation pool where his visitors floated weightlessly on the surface in an out-of-body experience.

Or better yet, the sadistically twisted "Soma," where metaphysical states of questionable nature are explored as the artist invites you to spend the night with 12 castrated reindeer, 24 canaries, eight mice and two flies at the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin. It's almost as if you're suffering from a disorienting neurological condition that endlessly affects your perception. It's a scientific laboratory of human experiments where the viewer becomes the subject. It's an acid trip you can't get rid of.

One thing for sure though, the once in a lifetime experiences are definitely worth it.

It's an unravelling of the senses where his play land of participatory sculptures we call Höllerworld comes to life. It's purely a masterpiece of enlightenment. A journey of emotion, bad or good. Either way, it's most definitely one of memorable proportions.

