

Volkskrant

About: Dutch daily morning [newspaper](#). It was founded in 1919 and it currently has a circulation of approximately 250,000 nationwide.

According to Rutger Pontzen - Column

Every week Bor Beekman, Robert Gijssel, Hein Janssen, Rutger Pontzen or Wieteke Sail formulate a proposition pertaining to the world of film, music, theatre or visual arts.

Proposition: More artists should bend reality to their will.

RUTGER PONTZEN

Houses that are no longer houses, but art houses. Which you wander through as through an abandoned private museum. Like walking through someone's head; the winding corridors are nerve strands, abandoned spaces thought breaks, personal attributes stimuli for the imagination.

It crossed my mind three weeks ago. After my visit to Ai Weiwei's retrospective at the Royal Academy of Arts I had an afternoon to kill in London.

Why not visit the Sir John Soane's Museum, on Lincoln's Inn Fields, a little square park of the sort that only exists in England? The museum itself is a fairy-tale-like house, built over three buildings and furnished by the 18th-century architect. And where, once inside, you completely lose your way.

The Etruscan dining room opens onto the Arabian breakfast room. The crypt with the sarcophagus of Seti I is surrounded by classical busts and reliefs. Paintings by Canaletto and Hogarth sit side to side with drawings and facsimiles by Piranesi and Turner. All connected by narrow hallways and curved staircases. After two hours of navigating between the stage furniture, homely props, artwork and trinkets you come out again, enlightened yet dazed and confused by so much coquetry.

Houses as art treasures - it also crossed my mind, last week in Maastricht, in the arts centre Marres in the Capucijnenstraat. The building looks like an old patrician house and has long been inhabited by the brewer family Marres, hence the name. Now it had been rebuilt by artist Levi van Veluw, so it was said. A good starting point, even if you could – although familiar with van Veluw's obscure work – not imagine what it would look like.

Once inside, the surprise is overwhelming. Van Veluw has remodelled the whole interior to his liking by turning it into a labyrinth of darkened hallways and dark rooms; packed with shelving displaying a rich assortment of geometric objects. It is as if you were entering the home of a mysterious, quixotic mathematician.

Yes, inevitably you think of the lavish museum of Sir John in London. Or the home of cult figure Des Esseintes in *À Rebour*s, minutely described by Joris-Karl Huysmans. The hedonist who turned away from the world and furnished his

hermitage with Moroccan tapestries, exotic furniture, kitschy artefacts and a library of first editions from the 4th and 5th centuries. A completely artificial environment, conceived and constructed to the millimetre, replete with a turtle whose shell is inlaid with gold and precious stones.

Who would not want to wander through such an imaginary environment? Van Veluw's staged haunted house is a nice reflection of it. Although less decadent and gaudy, but equally artificial and isolated from the outside world. How praiseworthy is it not that an art centre like Marres was metamorphosed completely and totally to the will of the artist?

That the institution spared no effort (including crowdfunding) to make this possible. That there is no longer even a trace of the original architecture. But more: that the imagination is given free rein. That art is not an image against a (white) wall. And that the whole environment is adapted to maximize the visual effect? Who's next?