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The Making Of | A 19th-Century Victorian House in London, Built With Mirrors

By ELIAS REDSTONE JUNE 25, 2013



Gar Powell-Evans, courtesy of Barbican Art Gallery

In the latest off-site commission of the [Barbican Gallery](#) in London, the Argentine artist Leandro Erlich has created a surreal new artwork in the Borough of Hackney. Located on an empty lot on Ashwin Street near Dalston Junction station, Dalston House is the latest in a series of projects by Erlich that seem to defy the laws of physics, challenging audiences' sense of reality. Visitors will be able to hang out the windows and scale the walls of Erlich's replica of a late-19th-century Victorian terraced house. Although these death-defying activities might appear to break all health and safety regulations for a public art project, they're perfectly safe: it's all an illusion, created with mirrors. Here, the artist explains how he realized his vision.

1. Be instinctive.

“I immediately jumped at the idea of a facade. I have created similar projects relating to local architecture in many other countries, but this time the motivation was not just the city of London but also the chance of building the project out in the street, in full public view. With Dalston House, the dialogue between the project and the urban landscape is full of potential.”

2. Make the most of mirrors.

“The installation is composed by the reproduction of a building facade lying flat on the ground and a large mirror placed in a 45-degree angle. The reflection creates the illusion of seeing the facade vertically. The public is invited to step on the facade, giving the impression of defying gravity.”

3. Embrace illusion.

“Perception is the inherited tool we are all born with and we use to understand the world and to achieve knowledge. I think illusion here acts as a trigger, seducing the viewer to participate in the experience while questioning their understanding of reality. The question is not just opposing the illusionary and the real, [it's also] understanding that what we call real is part of a construction.”

4. Work with the best possible people, no matter where they are.

“The project involved my studio in Buenos Aires, the Barbican curators Lydia Yee and Alona Pardo, a team from Belgium dealing with the large mirrors, a British team that fabricated the facade and a technical supervisor from the Barbican Gallery.”

5. Do your research.

“I visited the local archives of the neighborhood to find out more about its history. Nevertheless, the final design is a combination of things that were inspired by the long walks I took around the area.”

6. Don't take your work too seriously.

“I think humor is always somehow present.”

Dalston House is open to the public from June 26 to Aug. 4 as part of the [London Festival of Architecture](#). 1-7 Ashwin Street, Dalston, E8 3DL. Admission is free.