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MATTHIAS KORB: A GERMAN ARTIST PACKS ALL OF THE WORLD — AND MORE — INTO AN OLD, REIMAGINED FARMHOUSE

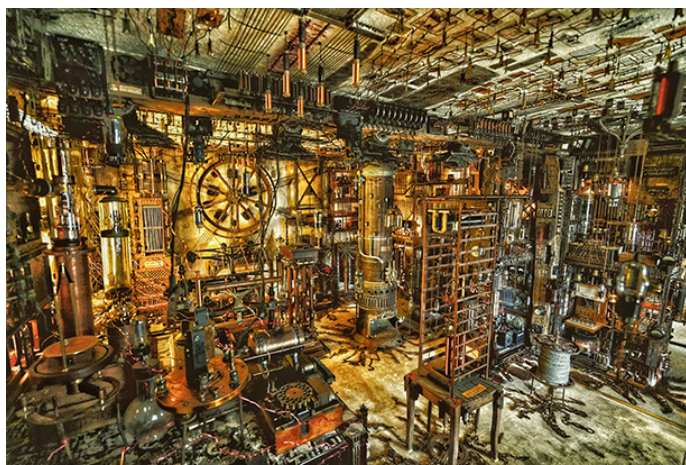
IN A SMALL TOWN NEAR FRANKFURT, “INITIUM ET FINIS” IS A MULTI-PART, EVER-EVOLVING ART ENVIRONMENT BORN OF BOUNDLESS IMAGINATION AND ENDLESS CREATIVE AMBITION

by Jo Farb Hernández, with Matthias Korb

Since 2008, the German artist Matthias Korb has been transforming an old farmhouse in the small town of Lohrheim, which is located about 58 miles (93 kilometers) northwest of Frankfurt am Main, Korb's birthplace (1969). He has given this Gesamtkunstwerk of an art environment the Latin name “INITIUM ET FINIS” (“Beginning and End”; Instagram: @initium.et.finis).

This extraordinary art space overwhelms a visitor with its large, varied collection of found objects and fabricated artworks. Korb has covered all of the farmhouse's interior walls, from floor to ceiling, with dense layers of paintings, collages, and mixed-media assemblages. Huge objects and sculptures hang from the ceilings, while cabinets, filled with assorted objects, resemble columns that seemingly rise up out of the floor.

Some 20 rooms are filled with countless objects that the artist has collected over the years, including masks, dolls, taxidermy




Above: A view of the interior of one room in Matthias Korb's farmhouse, which he has transformed into an art environment.

Below: Matthias Korb
Photos courtesy of the artist



Jo Farb Hernández is professor and gallery director emerita in the department of art and art history at San José State University, in northern California, and the director and chief curator emerita of SPACES (Saving and Preserving Arts and Cultural Environments), a U.S.A.-based nonprofit archive. Her recently authored books include *Singular Spaces: From the Eccentric to the Extraordinary in Spanish Art Environments* (2013) and *Singular Spaces II* (2023).



specimens, measuring instruments, tools, old radios, books, magazines, yellowed photographs, lamps, crucifixes, old furniture, Victorian fabrics, relics, an old prison door, and other curiosities.

Great numbers of rusted-metal objects provide consistency in his color palette; these discards and recyclables include metal bars and fences, heavy chains, nails, metal sheets, and various kinds of wire, especially barbed wire. The heavy aura of the industrial, manufactured objects is tempered by the presence of such natural materials as skulls, bones, scraps of wood, tree branches, pieces of bark, dried plants, patches of moss, and seeds.

Words that Korb has inscribed on the floor, along with poems he has written on the ceilings, and aphorisms he has jotted down on the artworks themselves reference the subject matter of this vast interior art environment. "INITIUM ET FINIS" addresses weighty themes: humanity and nature, life and death, faith and spirituality, and the mystery of time. Towers of handwritten books filled with the artist's thoughts are balanced throughout the house, complemented by piles of pictures and collages that cannot fit on the walls of the house's many rooms due to space constraints.

It is impossible to take in everything there is to see in this sprawling, site-specific art environment. Although 10,000 works of art and more than 100,000 found objects are on display, nothing was chosen at random. Nor were the objects on view randomly installed. In fact, Korb has meticulously placed each object within the enormous environment's overall composition, with to-the-millimeter precision.

Some visitors attempt to examine, read, and comprehend the works of art one at a time, an exercise that quickly becomes impractical due to their sheer numbers; alternatively, others choose to absorb the spirit of this space-filling art environment through a more intuitive approach, as they make their way attentively through each of its rooms.

But in either case, upon entering "INITIUM ET FINIS," visitors leave the real world behind and become immersed in an underworld of light and shadow. As they navigate the labyrinthine zones, their experience may feel both harrowing and poignant. The courageous among them will be richly rewarded as the sensation of darkness transitions into something bright and liberating. And while entering "INITIUM ET FINIS" is to consider the evidence of Korb's own personal, philosophical explorations, at the same time, visitors may find themselves on journeys into their own unprobed psyches.

A view into one room of the multi-part, site-specific "INITIUM ET FINIS" art environment. Photo courtesy of Matthias Korb



Left: The farmhouse in the small town of Lohrheim, which is located about 58 miles (93 kilometers) northwest of Frankfurt am Main, in which Matthias Korb has created his large art environment.

Below: A scientific sensibility meets an artistic spirit in the elaboration of Korb's creative vision.

Photos courtesy of the artist

Korb's respectable, middle-class, small-town neighbors, with their tidy houses and front-yard gardens, might dismiss his work as a junkyard, some kind of physical-visual limbo, or a tangible expression of madness that suggests a completely absurd world. For many of them, its enormity is too much, too dense, too crazy, too excessive, and too incomprehensible.

"INITIUM ET FINIS" is nonetheless entirely coherent within itself, and Korb identifies what he has produced as a single, holistic organism. He considers his environment to depict all creation, in which everything that exists in the world is to be found in miniature. Each of the thousands of found objects on display represents an aspect of nature, science, or art. Nothing is missing.

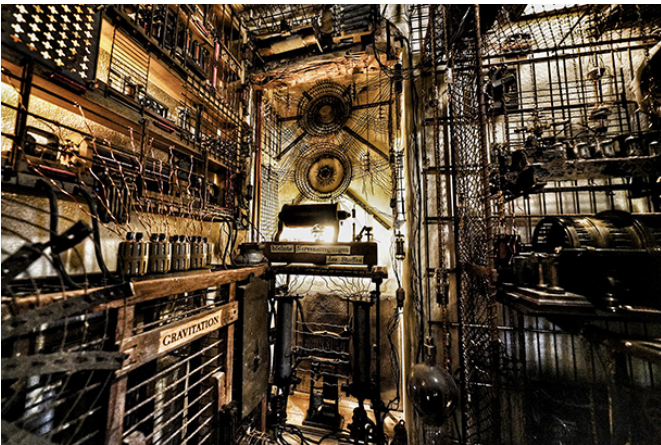
This gigantic artwork-organism naturally has what may be seen as a head, a center, or a brain. An entire room is dedicated to this control center, where everything converges: thousands of wires and cables connecting machines, capacitors, coils, devices, and magnets all form what appears to be, symbolically, a functioning intelligence that considers profound philosophical and scientific questions while holding the entire body of the artist's huge artwork together. "Consciousness of the World" is written in large letters as the title of this space, an area that is so secret within "INITIUM ET FINIS," and so essential to the whole artwork, that no one but Korb is allowed to enter.

The artist, who has been deeply interested in nature and books since his childhood, became a gardener as a young man. By his late twenties, in 1997, he had launched his own gardening business, yet even after working all day, he devoured countless books late into the night. When he was younger, he almost exclusively read books about nature, but later he became increasingly interested in philosophy and poetry. He still reads and writes every day.

It wasn't until he reached the age of 35 that he discovered his artistic talent: although he had rather playfully designed his first work of art, a collage, he was surprised at how viscerally moved he was by the result. Korb's art-making, which began with that first powerful experience, continues to this day.



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©2025 Ballena Studio, Inc./brutjournal; all rights reserved. • This article was originally published online at <https://brutjournal.com/article/matthias-korb-a-german-artist-packs-all-of-the-world-and-more-into-an-old-reimagined-farmhouse/> and has been reformatted for this .pdf file.



Top: Filling some 20 rooms of his farmhouse, Korb's enormous production is made up of countless found objects. Among them: masks, dolls, taxidermy specimens, measuring instruments, tools, old radios, books, magazines, vintage photographs, lamps, crucifixes and other curiosities.

Middle: A detail of one section of Korb's vast art environment.

Bottom: Another interior view of a part of "INITIUM ET FINIS."

Right-hand column, top: Each section of Matthias Korb's mixed-media, multifaceted art environment is a complex work of assemblage art in its own right.

Photos courtesy of the artist

Korb now dedicates himself full-time to further developing "INITIUM ET FINIS," a project he describes as "still in its early stages." He spends every free minute screwing, hammering, soldering, filing, sanding, and installing. His expression is personal, and his art-filled farmhouse is not well known, although the artist gladly guides his infrequent visitors—generally specially interested photographers and art lovers—around the property.

Korb is a self-taught art-maker, and regards himself as a student of nature and philosophy. The processes of growth and decay within nature and the universe are reflected in his art, and viewers can intuitively recognize his themes in a variety of ways. Quiet and soft-spoken, Korb is an artist of seemingly unfathomable depths of thought and sensitivity. Everything he creates emerges from within himself: he has no role models, he aspires to no archetypes, and he follows no familiar patterns.

"INITIUM ET FINIS" may be seen as a record of Korb's personal journey as he navigates his way through his unique and evolving world.

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To view videos of Matthias Korb's "INITIUM ET FINIS," visit the artist's YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/@initiumetfinis1880>

Use this link to see Korb's "INITIUM ET FINIS" website, which includes photographs of and a short film about his site-specific art project:

<https://www.initium-et-finis.de/>