

words **Justin McGuirk**

Ludlow 38 is a tiny art space in a former Chinese store on New York's Lower East Side. Open the door, and you face a bank of steps raising the floor several feet above street level. It's just the first taste of an engagingly original interior designed by artists Liam Gillick and Ethan Breckenridge.

"The stoop is a classic element of urban American street life," says Gillick. "There's an echo of social life here - people tend to sit on the steps and deal with things."

Opened earlier this year, Ludlow 38 was established by the New York branch of the Goethe-Institut as a multi-purpose art venue. Raising the floor towards the ceiling was a counter-intuitive move in such a cramped space, but it was the artists' way of creating a platform for talks and performances. At the far end of the room the steps descend more gradually towards a stage curtain and a back office.

Gillick, who credits Breckenridge with the idea, says creating the right conditions for displaying art was a secondary consideration. "People worry too much about whether the art's going to be OK - we decided to forget about that side of it," he says. However, the steps do change the art-viewing experience - as an obstacle, they slow visitors down, helping them appreciate the exhibition.

The space, on Ludlow Street, is programmed by the Munich Kunstverein with funding from car-maker Mini. Currently on show is a series of artists' films.

[www.ludlow38.org](http://www.ludlow38.org)

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