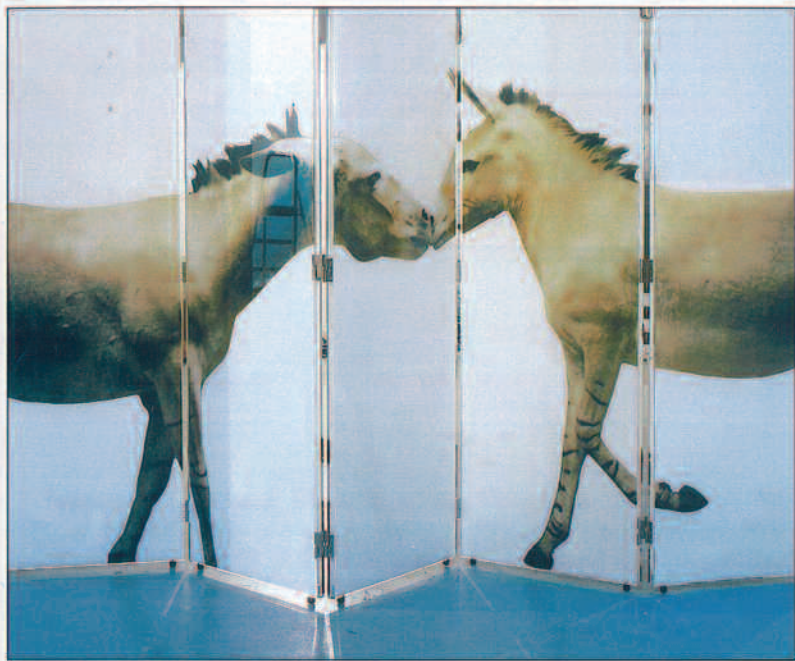


Weekend



**The most
embarrassing
moment of my life...**

by Margaret Atwood,
Janice Galloway,
Irvine Welsh,
Rupert Thomson
and Michael Ondaatje



The artist Abigail Lane has long worked the macabre into her art pieces. Now, with her first interiors collection, she's bringing bugs, lizards, storms and volcanos into the living room. By Susie Steiner. Pictures by Annabel Elston

HER DARK MATERIALS

Abigail Lane likes a gentle pun. For her art installations at the Freud Museum in London last year, she created a silky nightdress called Freudian Slip and an elegant perfume bottle labelled Eau de Ego: Made With You In Mind.

Her debut home collection, under the company name Showroom Dummies, has a similar quiet humour to it. Lane has created a graphic, monochrome wallpaper featuring jaunty skeletons, frolicking among floating femurs and skulls. (So, theoretically, you could have skeletons in your cupboard.) A Perspex screen is decorated with an elegant photograph of two white horses, nuzzling one another. She calls it Kissing Asses.

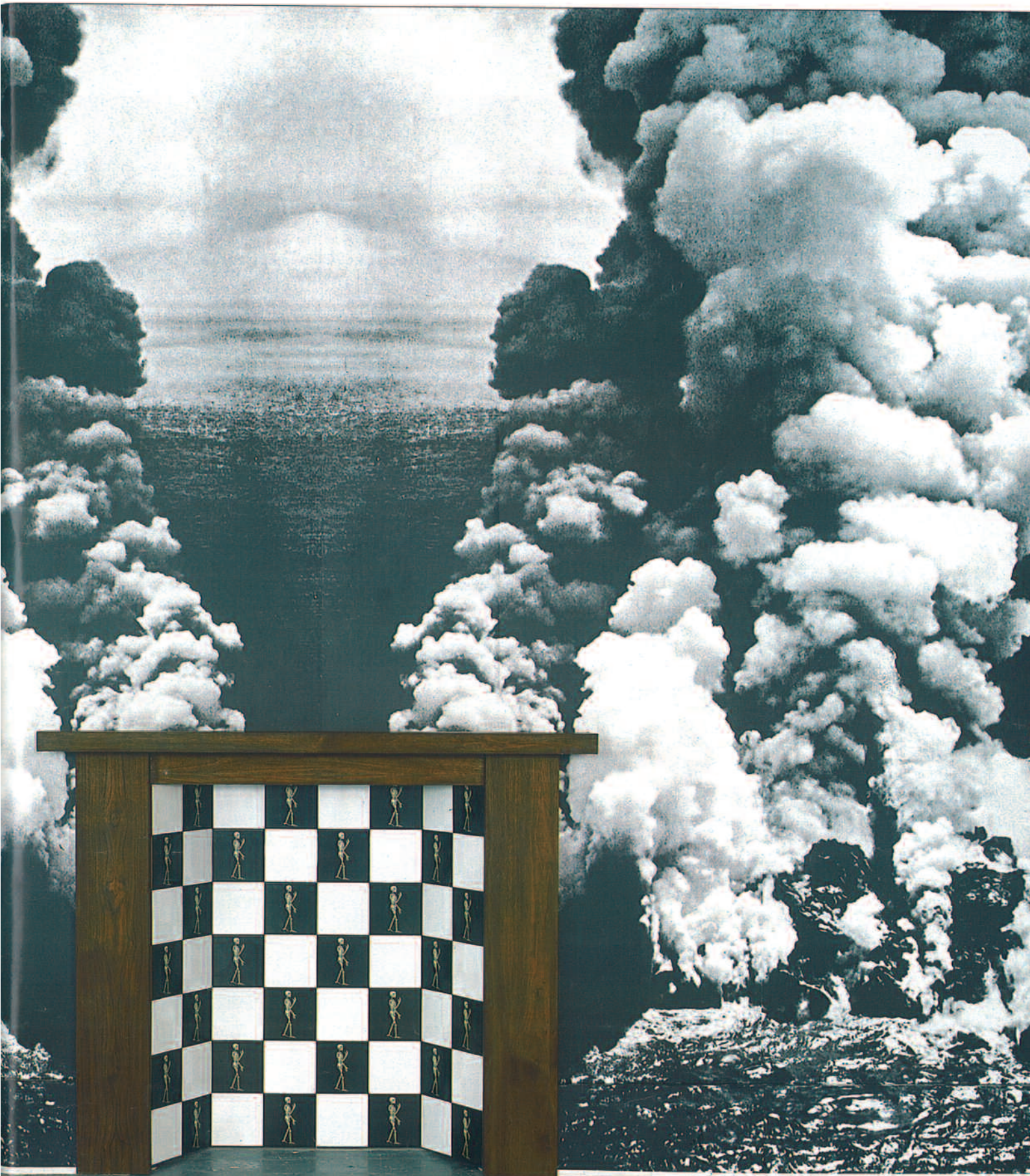
"I think it's really funny to put the electrical storm mural over the bed"

in a gallery, people really feel they have to try to get what you're trying to do."

The launch of this interiors collection — called Interior Motives: Natural Histories And Natural Disasters — is a departure for Lane, 36, who established herself as an artist (and part of the celebrated YBA movement) at the same time as friends Sarah Lucas, Tracey Emin, Gary Hume and Damien Hirst. For the past year, Lane has put aside her artwork to design bespoke decorative pieces, which go on show for the first time today.

The objects owe much to her preoccupations as an artist, featuring gothic images from the natural world in often surprisingly soothing patterns. Her giant electric storm mural has white jags of lightning cutting through a black background like cracks in a wall, over a low-lying







Lane (left) creates pleasing patterns out of unexpected images, such as in her skeleton wallpaper and the parachute screen, which has *Kissing Asses* on its reverse side

four chairs, each decorated with a gracefully slithering lizard. Perhaps most restful of all is the parachute screen: the sand-coloured discs of wartime parachutists floating down like jellyfish through a powder blue sky. There are beetle and skeleton tiles, and cashmere blankets decorated with bugs and lizards.

"It's my inclination to go towards natural history, because I keep a lot of those sorts of images at home," says Lane. "They don't always get absorbed into my artwork, and I have a real clearing up tendency — a sort of sweeper system to incorporate anything that hasn't been used."

Showroom Dummies, Lane stresses, is a collaborative venture. Her co-partners are: Brigitte Stepputtis, whose "proper job" is head of couture for Vivienne Westwood; Edwin Wright, a set designer and builder; and Bob Pain, who runs printing company Omnicolour, and brings to the party his experience in wallpaper-scale digital printing.

While Lane focuses on the original designs, the others work on transforming them into workable pieces of furniture and textiles. For all of them, Showroom Dummies has been a gamble, carried out alongside their other work, with "zero budget", says Lane. The challenge now, following the launch of their first collection, is to see whether the commissions roll in and whether their prototype designs might be taken up by larger-scale manufacturers and outlets.

"I don't want a workshop and a factory at home, and my aim is to get back to what I normally do," she says. "At the moment it's relying on my connections, and I want it to stand on its own. Of course we want to get commissions, but the other aim is to see where the production goes. We may get someone coming to us who says, 'We'd really like to produce the tiles.' We've solved a few things — like where to get the wallpaper and screens made — but we'll just have to see what comes our way."

For now, though, the headquarters of Showroom Dummies is in Lane's home: a gaping, hangar-sized studio-cum-living space among the industrial



buildings of Hackney Wick, east London. The 6,000ft warehouse incorporates Lane's living space and her studio, while one end is occupied by the fashion label Mother Of Pearl (owned by Maia Norman, Damien Hirst's girlfriend). Sarah Lucas has moved into the printworks downstairs while she works on a major exhibition (with Hirst and Angus Fairhurst) for Tate Modern next year.

The way in which Showroom Dummies has evolved — its collaborative bent — is also characteristic of the way Lane and her friends work together. This community of artists, many of whom were contemporaries at Goldsmiths, still work and socialise together. Lucas will be cooking some "rude food" at a VIP evening for Showroom Dummies, while Bob Pain is currently working out how to hang the 700 square metres of wallpaper that Hirst, Fairhurst and Lucas are creating for the Tate Modern exhibition ("It's a nightmare, figuring out whether the walls have been primed properly").

Just as the people cross over, in and out of each other's projects and homes, so the work (Lane's in particular) flows from art to the domestic and back again. The launch of this interiors collection is taking place not in a shop or a gallery, but in a sort of hybrid space: the former Old St Pancras Conservative Club. What's curious, says Lane, is that an interest in the domestic interior is often viewed differently in a gallery context than in a commercial one. "The art world tends to be a bit snobby about all that. If you do it in the art context — I used to make wallpapers for my exhibitions — somehow that's acceptable, because then you're talking about the domestic from an intellectual standpoint. But the reality of the art world is that it's completely commercial anyway. For me, there are ideas in even the most commercial project." ●

Showroom Dummies' first collection is at The Old St Pancras Conservative Club, 26 Argyle Square, London WC1, until November 9, 020-7278 4123 (showroomdummies.com)