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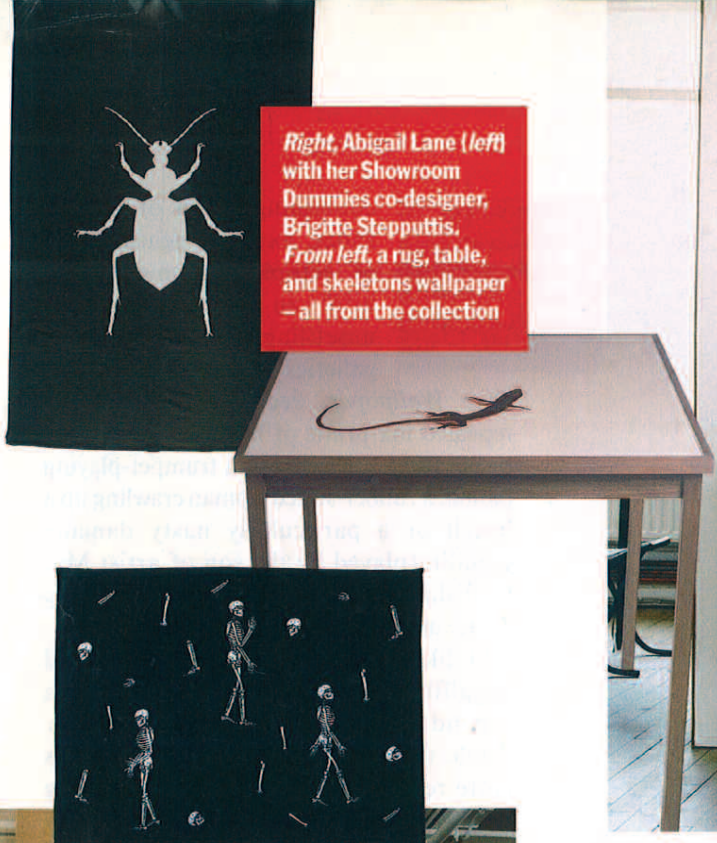
The Great Debate

Thongs vs knickers



Supernova

Right, Abigail Lane (left) with her Showroom Dummies co-designer, Brigitte Stepputtis. From left, a rug, table, and skeletons wallpaper – all from the collection



design picture this

After years as a successful artist, Abigail Lane is applying her striking visuals to furniture, wallpaper and fabric. And in her universe, functional doesn't have to mean dull, as Louisa Buck discovered

"I'd be happy to give up the title of 'artist' if necessary," laughs Abigail Lane. "I'd rather just do what I want to – I'm all for diversity." With her international reputation for uncanny installations, objects and films, she seems stuck with the artist tag for a while, but at the same time, like so many of her Goldsmiths contemporaries (Lane graduated in 1989, the same year as Damien Hirst), this intense, energetic 36-year-old has always liked to collaborate with others and venture beyond the world of art.

For two years, she ran a weekly "hair salon" in her studio; while, under the cheeky label Complete Arthole, she and her then-partner Paul Fryer designed fabric for Fendi's menswear collections and hosted a range of memorable events, including a show

of fire-eating and sword-swallowing by The Great Stromboli. "I don't believe there are any rules," she states, giving me a firm look.

Currently scattered throughout the third floor of the vast east London warehouse where she lives and works are the fruits of Lane's latest venture: a range of household accessories, co-designed with Brigitte Stepputtis, Vivienne Westwood's head of couture. They chose the name Showroom Dummies for the collection, from a song by cult Eighties German band Kraftwerk. "For years I've had interesting homes and I've always had nice things in them, so it seemed a natural thing to do," explains Lane. And although the bespoke tables, chairs, rugs, screens, murals, tiles and fabrics are being officially unveiled at a show, *Interior Motives*, in a former Conservative Club in St Pancras, they also seem strikingly at home in Lane's dramatic hangar-like space, with its sweeping views of the depots, warehouses and railway tracks of Hackney Wick.

Running up one wall is an extraordinary >



Clockwise from left, Showroom Dummies' "Fly in the Sky" fabric was used for the catering staff's dresses for the BBC4 launch; a Showroom Dummies screen; mirror-image lightning pictures over a bed in Lane's Hackney loft



Left, Lane's sofa in her Hackney loft is covered in the "Fly in the Sky" fabric

containing a pair of lace-up shoes, exuding gentle drifts of ectoplasmic smoke. Her work can also be funny, in an unsettling way: she's papered galleries the world over in her

Bum Wallpaper, decorated with neatly repeated ink-prints of her bottom, and her recent films – whether of a trumpet-playing panda, a rubber-suited woman crawling up a beach or a particularly nasty dancing gremlin (played by the son of artist Mat Collishaw) – use every throat-grabbing device at their disposal.

"I like catching people in loops and engulfing them in experiences that can expand their perceptions," she declares. While the Showroom Dummies range is more restrained than her art, everything from the tables and chairs with glassed-in pictures of lizards, to the wallpaper of dancing skeletons, is infused with her particular brand of problematic beauty. "Everything is image-based – we're not interested in being furniture or fashion designers as such," she states; and to this end, the Showroom Dummies pieces are all simple, classic vehicles for eclectic but highly emotive images, all from Lane's personal collection. "I've got drawers full of photographs, cuttings, pictures from books or magazines, that I've accumulated over the years – I'm using a lot of things out of cupboards that I couldn't incorporate into my art work."

As with all the activities of Abigail Lane, the flamboyance and fluidity of this new foray into interiors is underpinned with a beady, rigorous eye. Although she and Step-puttis have set up the company with two others (Bob Pain, who runs a specialist printing company, and set designer Edwin Wright), Lane freely admits that "nothing happens without it being checked with me. I'm very, very controlling over it." She may have put her own art production temporarily on hold to get this enterprise launched, but Lane does not see the two practices as mutually exclusive. As far as she is concerned, each can feed into the other: "The art world is a very useful structure, and I'll work with that when they'll have me," she says, "but I don't need the art world in order to be creative."

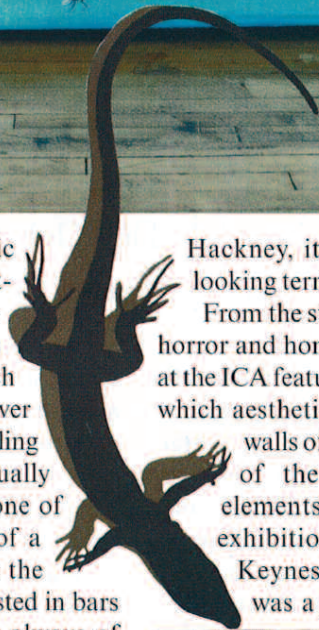
"Interior Motives" is at the Old St Pancras Conservative Club, 26 Argyle Square, WCI from October 16 to November 9. For more information about the Showroom Dummies collection, visit www.showroomdummies.com

black-and-white photographic image of multiple forked lightning, which is shown with its mirror-image to produce a doubly unnerving Rorschach effect. "That would look good over a bed," says Lane with relish, pulling it aside to reveal two other equally apocalyptic doubled designs, one of billowing smoke and another of a tornado. "I wanted to revamp the idea of those murals you see pasted in bars and clubs," she says. "They're always of happy sunflowers and woodland scenes, and I wanted to twist that totally and make them dramatic black-and-white pictures of disasters and bad weather."

Equally disquieting is the "Fly in the Sky" fabric, depicting rows of bluebottles hovering ominously in a baby-blue sky – it's become the unofficial Showroom Dummies logo. It got its first full-scale airing last year when it was worn as uniforms by catering staff at the BBC4 launch party and has recently been used by photographic agent Tiggy Maconochie to cover her vintage Sixties Eero Saarinen dining chairs. Back in

Hackney, it confirms its versatility by looking terrific on an expansive sofa.

From the start, Lane's art has combined horror and homeliness. Her 1995 solo show at the ICA featured *Bloody Wallpaper*, which aestheticised the splattered walls of a crime scene; one of the more macabre elements in her 2001 exhibition at Milton Keynes Art Gallery was a garden shed



From top, a lizard motif, used on the glass tables; graphic dog-print rugs; and a playing-card-inspired coat