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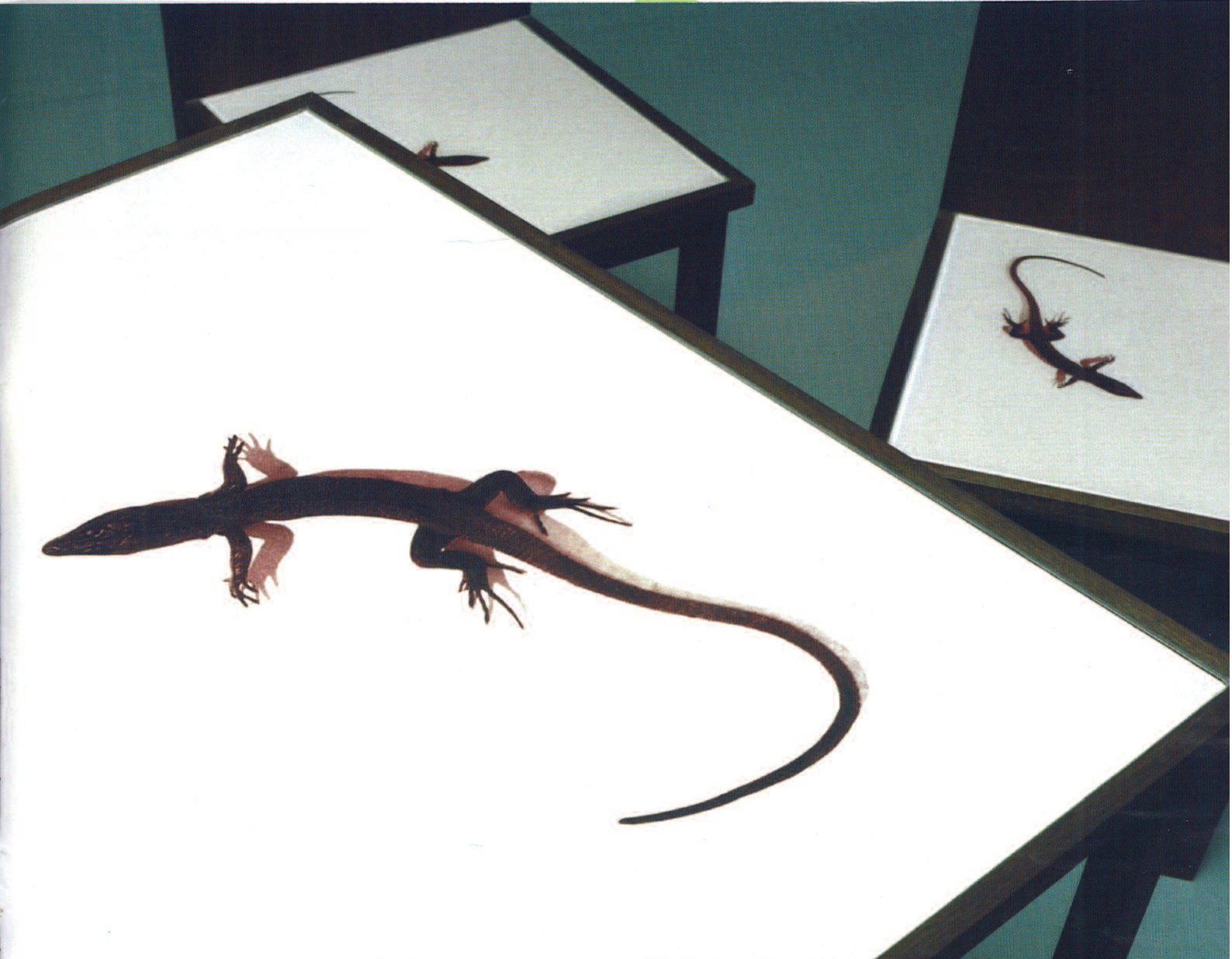
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Abigail Lane
Born in 1967 in London, Abigail is a sculptor and installation artist. She also designs interiors and furniture together with three friends under the name "Showroom Dummies." Their latest collection is called "Interior Motives: Natural Histories & Natural Disasters."



Art is always looking for exciting new directions. We met up with some of Europe's hottest young artists to see where art is going next.

writer **Michael Dee**

“The world has become more complicated and the wheels are turning faster. The competition from other types of media, especially visual media, is now so fierce that artists seek out their own domains.”

Today's art comes in many shapes and sizes. Like installation and performance, conceptual art, video- and photo-based art, and fashion. It is irreverent and borderless. Lars Nittve, Director of Moderna Muséet in Stockholm, counts among the international heavyweights in his field. His past jobs include managing the Louisiana Gallery in Copenhagen and Tate Modern in London. According to Nittve, the concept of art has undergone a total transformation in the last 25 years.

“Back then you could easily say, ‘That’s art, that’s literature, music, theater, architecture, design and fashion.’ These days all of it can be filed under art, as long as the person who creates it thinks like an artist,” says Nittve.

“The other major change is the globalization of what used to be the Western concept of art. Twenty-five years ago, Western art was something that took place mainly in America and Europe. Today, there isn’t one urban place on the planet that doesn’t have people who see themselves as artists in the Western sense of the word. I can go to Ulan Bator of Mongolia and discuss Andy Warhol. The amount of art from outside Europe and America that we get to see has grown enormously. Also, many contemporary artists have a double, cultural identity. This duality plays a very central role in their art.”

An example of cultural duality is Yinka Shonibare’s film ‘Un Ballo in Maschera’ (A Masked Ball). Working with a group of dancers, Shonibare stages the assassination of Swedish King Gustav III, who was shot in 1792. But instead of wearing clothes that are characteristic of the period, the dancers wear clothes made of African fabrics.

Alongside photo- and video-based art, three art forms in particular have played a dominant role during the last 15 years. Performance, installation and conceptual art. These three art forms originated from the early 20th century art movements including futurism, Dadaism and surrealism. Not until the 1960s did they come into their own and were established as independent art forms.

“The world has become more complicated and the wheels are turning faster. The competition from other types of media, especially visual media, is now so fierce that artists seek out their own domains. Domains where they can express something complex in an exact and unique way. Performance, for example, lets the artist create a total experience that the audience would never get by reading the paper or watching TV,” says Nittve. Contemporary art has grown faster than any other form of culture. Yet, it’s often seen as impossible to understand for all but a small group of insiders. “Not much of today’s contemporary art manages to reach a wide audience at first. That’s the way it’s been for the last 150 years. It seems to be part of the essence of art – art expresses itself in ways that are not simple or easily accessible.”

Berlin-based Bauhouse, consisting of Clemens Wittkowski and Fabian Grobe, has its roots in club culture. These days they produce installations for art galleries and mix media art and music in sophisticated ways.

“A lot of our images come from TV. We loop sections of the news and commercials. On TV, the images just slide by. But we let the loops run for a long time, and create a sort of breakdown within those images. It works both intellectually and emotionally, and the pictures are filled with new content,” says Clemens Wittkowski.

A big part of contemporary art is photo-based. Dutch artist Desiree Dolron is one of the most talked-about names in this field. The pictures in her recent project, ‘Xteriors’, have a historic quality, and remind you of classical portrait painters like Rogier van der Wayden and William Hammershoi.

“The pictures are based on a story I wrote when I was 11. It’s about forcing yourself into forbidden worlds, into private spheres where you’re not welcome,” says Dolron. Indeed, nothing in ‘Xteriors’ is what it seems to be. The people in the pictures don’t exist in reality.

“Every millimeter of every picture is digitally manipulated. Not just the skin tones but the facial features too. In some cases, I morphed features of two different people just to achieve the vision I was carrying inside.”

Another artist who has found her own way is Abigail Lane, part of the original YBA (Young British Artists) posse. This group, lead by Damien Hirst, made London’s art scene the world’s most happening in the early 1990s. Lane’s fascination with zoology, natural history and meteorology is reflected in her art, which includes wallpaper with dancing skeletons, gambling tables adorned with small lizards, and screens with pictures of donkeys and pre-historic animals.

Are there really no limits to contemporary art?

“That question comes up a lot. But you can never predict where art is headed,” says Lars Nittve. “The only thing you can be sure of is that it will steer clear of all expectations and pop up somewhere entirely different. Which, of course, is what makes contemporary art so exciting and stimulating to follow.”