

## Artist of the week Art

---

---

---

---

### Jessica Lack

Wed 15 Apr 2009 16.04 BST

## Artist of the week 37: Andrew Cranston

Jessica Lack continues her series on contemporary artists with Andrew Cranston whose dense claustrophobic paintings are inspired by rooms in great works of literature



Man/Partition (2008) by Andrew Cranston Photograph: Andrew Cranston/International Project Space

**L**ike Francis Bacon, Andrew Cranston's currency is claustrophobia, imprisoning both viewer and subject in a hellish nothing. By using fiction as his source material, he ensures that his subjects remain forever suspended in an impenetrable isolation.

Cranston makes paintings of rooms alluded to in literature. Perhaps the most obvious example is a split-panelled piece, *Illustration for a Franz Kafka story (2nd version)* (2007), depicting the bedroom of Gregor Samsa, the hapless travelling salesman who transforms into an insect in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*.

What is disconcerting is Cranston's tendency to suggest that these rooms are stage sets. In many of his paintings the walls are merely partitions, and a dense background encroaches and encircles the picture, trapping whatever is within. As a viewer of these solitary scenes, the experience is intensely unsettling. There seems to be no recourse. In the few paintings where Cranston has painted a door, it opens on to an impassable grey expanse; there is little indication of another world outside the murky confines.

These art-works were a big hit at *East International* in 2007, and the Royal College of Art graduate now divides his time between studios in Aberdeen and Glasgow, both of which he describes as suitably uninviting. This is palpable in his recent painting *Man/Partition* (2008), which depicts the artist in his studio resting his head against a free-standing white canvas. It could conceivably be a slab of plaster: either way, his chances of support are thin. Perhaps he hopes the aesthetic concepts of minimalism - truth, order, harmony and simplicity - will be enough to keep the square grounded. Unfortunately the encroaching blackness surrounding the tableau (there is nothing solid but the scrubby dirt of the studio floor) offers little hope of redemption. *fart*

**Why we like him:** For *Blank Canvas* (2008). Like *Man/Partition* it imparts a despondent poetry about the creative process. A white canvas is tacked on to the wall of a studio, the only image on it is a muddy grey shadow with no discernable features.

**First impression:** Cranston's earliest memory of art was a print of Van Gogh's sunflowers in his parents' front room, which for years he thought was a dog's head.

**Tortured artist, then?** Certainly: he suffers from claustrophobia.

**Where can I see him?** Andrew Cranston's solo exhibition *What a Man Does in the Privacy of his Own Attic* is his *Affair* is at *International Project Space*, Birmingham until 25 April 2009.