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## Artist of the week 132: Andrew Grassie

The Scottish painter's exquisitely realised photorealist works mirror art's most narcissistic tendencies



**Skye Sherwin**  
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Andrew Grassie's *New Hang 9*: Art Now, Tate Britain recreates a gallery interior in egg tempera. Photograph courtesy Maureen Paley

Andrew Grassie's paintings seem like unobtrusive little things: photorealist depictions, based on photos, of other people's artworks and the spaces where art is made, shown or stored. Their exquisitely realised doll's-house detail in egg tempera holds the eye, yet they're far more than a virtuoso display of daubing skill. Spend some time with them and they become creepy and airless.

At art college in the late 1980s, after working his way through a litany of styles, Grassie found himself adrift on art's sea of allusion. One day, he gathered all his works together, photographed them and painted the photos in exacting detail. As a strategy for making art, it's a disarmingly simple form of copying, void of a signature style. But it makes an unnerving comment about art's tendency to look in the mirror and be captivated by its own reflection.

Sometimes Grassie depicts the gallery you're standing in and the painting you're looking at, giving the eerie feeling that you're trapped in a closed system, like a circular labyrinth in a story by Borges. He's also created fantasy shows with artworks that never actually shared space, photographing them separately and combining them in a painting. For *New Hang*, his Art Now exhibition at the Tate in 2005, works by Hans Bellmer, William Blake and John Martin made strange bedfellows. Even without knowing that the cohabitation has been faked, the mathematical precision of his images often seems too exacting to be a representation of something real. These artworlds within artworlds soon turn uncanny.

His current London show explores the veiled life of art beyond the gallery. Three of just four paintings on show are derived from photos of unchoreographed art spaces: a modern storage room, a museum backroom crowded with classical sculptures, and the anonymous wall of a warehouse. While he explores artworks as a law unto themselves, Grassie also probes what artworks are, as real things in the world.

**Why we like him:** The Making of the Painting won Grassie the 2004 John Moores Painting Prize. It depicts his studio, with its mess of folders and books and pictures tacked to the wall. Propped up on his desk is the painting we're looking at.

**In the gut:** While most artist's fledgling works rarely get beyond their family's fridge door, Grassie's earliest break came when his father, an art teacher, discussed his son's drawing *Two Tummies* on a 1970s educational programme. Created by Grassie when he was four, it showed a man with two stomachs.

**Where can I see him:** [Maureen Paley](http://Maureen Paley), London until 10 April.