

A R T S C R I B E  
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## Malcolm Jones at the Tom Allen Centre

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In the small gallery of the Tom Allen Centre in Stratford in the East End, Malcolm Jones is showing seven paintings. It is a modest, and partly for that, an endlessly reassuring show: specific in its subject and clear about its scope and intentions. Jones makes it very clear what he sets out to do. There are no baffling twists or sudden turns as the artist pours paint, scrubs and strains to conjure up an image, surprising both himself and

the spectator.

His subject in all of these paintings remains the same: a frontal view of two rows of terrace blocks, back to back (with the back yard clutter of fences, gardens and sheds in between), situated across the way from his studio in East Arbour Street. In fact, the effect is surprisingly painterly, although always in a calculated relationship to the gleam of light on a wall, the glass roof of a garden shed or on the branches of a tree. It is in these shifts and interactions that a quiet, lyrical, but engrossing, drama is communicated.

The one "odd" painting, *Inside East Arbour Street*, 1981, shows an imaginary cross-section of the building, the wall removed, revealing all three floors at once, with their mysterious corners, spaces, windows and slanting staircases. It is an odd painting because within the context of the exhibition it is so blatantly a work of the imagination. But it is the one work which encapsulates the overall spirit of the show. The colour of the various views through the window shimmer like bright quilt work patches in the wide expanse of the grey tones of the rest of the painting. It is a strange, quiet work, embodying that invigorating, slightly perverse, childhood feeling of being alone in a strange house whose contents and secrets one is about to explore at leisure. Something of this sense of imminent disclosure runs through all the paintings.

Though these paintings appear marginal and eccentric in their concerns one can't help feeling that Jones is following a sympathetic course, that the painting is wrought out of a solid foundation: Sickert, the early Chiswick/Hammersmith paintings of Victor Pasmore, the landscapes of Morandi, but more importantly, an earnest attachment to his immediate surroundings, to things seen and experienced every day, which allows him to transform these sources so effectively. His is probably one of the more heartening exhibitions around. □



MALCOLM JONES *Black and White House* 1980  
oil and acrylic on canvas 30" x 22"