ALMINE RECH

Allen Jones
From the Gods

Apr 26 — May 25, 2024 | Paris

Almine Rech is pleased to present *From the Gods*, Allen Jones's third solo exhibition with the gallery, on view from April 26 to May 25, 2024.

"Prior to the cinema, visual artists depended on line and colour to create a sense of movement. A commission from Christian Louboutin gave me an actual chance to work with a moving image, the resulting video becoming part of his touring exhibition. This present Work shows the figure, again becoming involved with a sculpture that stands nearby. The sequence plays with our perception of space, 3D becomes 2D when the sculpture materialises behind her on the screen. She turns and embrace it and gradually becomes consumed by the building blocks of Art, light, line and colour."

— Allen Jones

There is an air of exuberant defiance permeating the works that Allen Jones has made since 2017, the period encompassed by this exhibition, when he turned eighty. These paintings, sculptures and hybrids between the two, which include some audacious new directions, constitute not only a vigorous refusal to back down from his lifelong pursuit of erotic imagery centred on female bodies but also a sense of celebration and wonderment that he should still be here at all. Like the astoundingly fresh paper cut-outs made by his hero Matisse during the decade preceding his death, this late flowering displays a youthful vigour, invention and joyful sense of abandon that easily match the trailblazing Pop Art on which Jones staked his reputation and place in art history in the early 1960s.

There are many nods in these recent works to Jones's own artistic past, not least in the interaction between two and three dimensions – with some forms appearing to erupt from the flat surface of the painted support – and the constant interplay between the depiction of human and other immediately recognisable images, on the one hand, and, on the other, pure form, sensuous brushwork and high-keyed colour as carriers of emotion and sensation. That Jones has been one of the great colourists among British painters of his generation there can be no doubt. The abstracted landscapes against which sculpted figures seen in profile stride in *Kind of Blue* 2015 and *Your Move* 2015-17 suggest the plenitudes of endless vistas and a heightened experience of space, light and atmosphere, through colour and shape alone.

(From) The Gods 2017 harks back, but without any element of nostalgia, to Jones's fascination with theatrical interiors made as long ago as the 1970s. Where the stage has previously functioned for him as a literal re-interpretation of the surface of the canvas as 'an arena within which to act' – to quote a famous description by the critic Harold Rosenberg of the large-scale paintings of the Abstract Expressionist 'Action Painters' – in this recent work he places the spectator in a position overlooking the painterly drama from a high, vertigo-inducing, perspective. The term 'the Gods' refers, of course, to the cheapest seats in the top balconies of a theatre. But it takes on a weightier import here in an almost Wagnerian sense, one in which the viewer is offered a momentary experience of a god-like command over a vast, never-ending, delirious abyss.

With *Moving Picture* and *Premonition*, both made in 2021, and *Seeing Red* as well as *Hymn to Her* from the following year, all large-scale works on hard surfaces rather than canvas, Jones creates surprising new adventures that expand on terms he had introduced into his art nearly six decades earlier in such works as *Curious Woman* 1964-5. In each of these one is made conscious of the miraculous manifestation of a mirage in succulent oil paint against the unyielding surface of the support. Jones's willingness to try a variety of strategies – including the incorporation of printed posters and photographs, three-dimensional elements and even a photographic image printed directly on the prepared ground – opens up new avenues that could sustain him to his centenary. Equally impressively, his virtuoso handling of oils shows a command of the medium that outshines even the undoubted skill he had demonstrated in his youthful prime. His friend and colleague David Hockney, born in the same year and a fellow student at the Royal College of Art in 1959, is fond of the Chinese adage that 'Painting is an old man's art'. That long accumulated knowledge, and an ease born of experience, is much in evidence in these ambitious new works by Jones.

Though sculpture has been in dialogue with painting in Jones's art since the mid-1960s, independent works in three dimensions have occupied an increasingly central position in his development since the 1980s. Some of the newest works, such as *Shelf Figure* 2023 and *Stand – By Me* 2024, take their cue from such early examples of totemic figures as *7th Man* 1965, which had already introduced the notion of transparency as a way of conjuring a human presence from schematised elements reduced to their essentials.

The range of Jones's invention, from streamlined abstraction to the hyper-real, has long been embodied particularly powerfully in the poles of his sculpture. The notorious women-as-furniture pieces of 1969 – in which life-sized, mannequin-like female figures double provocatively as a chair, a hatstand and a table `– remain as electrifying today as when they were made. In the left-hand panel of *In Camera* 2020 that same standing figure, conceived now as a video animation, appears to have come to life like a robotic creature more unnerving in her range of movement than the zombie Stepford Wives populating the 1972 future-horror satirical film by Ira Levin. The right-hand panel represents the stairs up to the consultation room used by Sigmund Freud at the home where he resided for 47 years at Berggasse 19 in his native Vienna, since 1971 open to the public as The Sigmund Freud Museum. This narrow passageway, through which patients could enter discreetly on their way to unburdening their most secret thoughts and fantasies, was painted from a photo taken by Jones himself; this suitably private unadorned space beckons us towards the strange apparition that is about to greet us on the landing as the materialisation of a dream by turns beguiling and disturbing. Did any Surrealist artist ever get closer than this to an expression of Freud's concept of the uncanny? Luring us into the void, confronting us with the complexities of our own infinitely varied fantasy lives, Jones leaves us delightfully suspended as always between the here-and-now tangible reality of material existence and the evanescent, inexplicable spectacle lodged within the human imagination.

— Marco Livingstone, art critic