

ARTIST IN PROFILE

BRIAN JONES: THE REAL AND THE FAMILIAR

by Janice Andreae

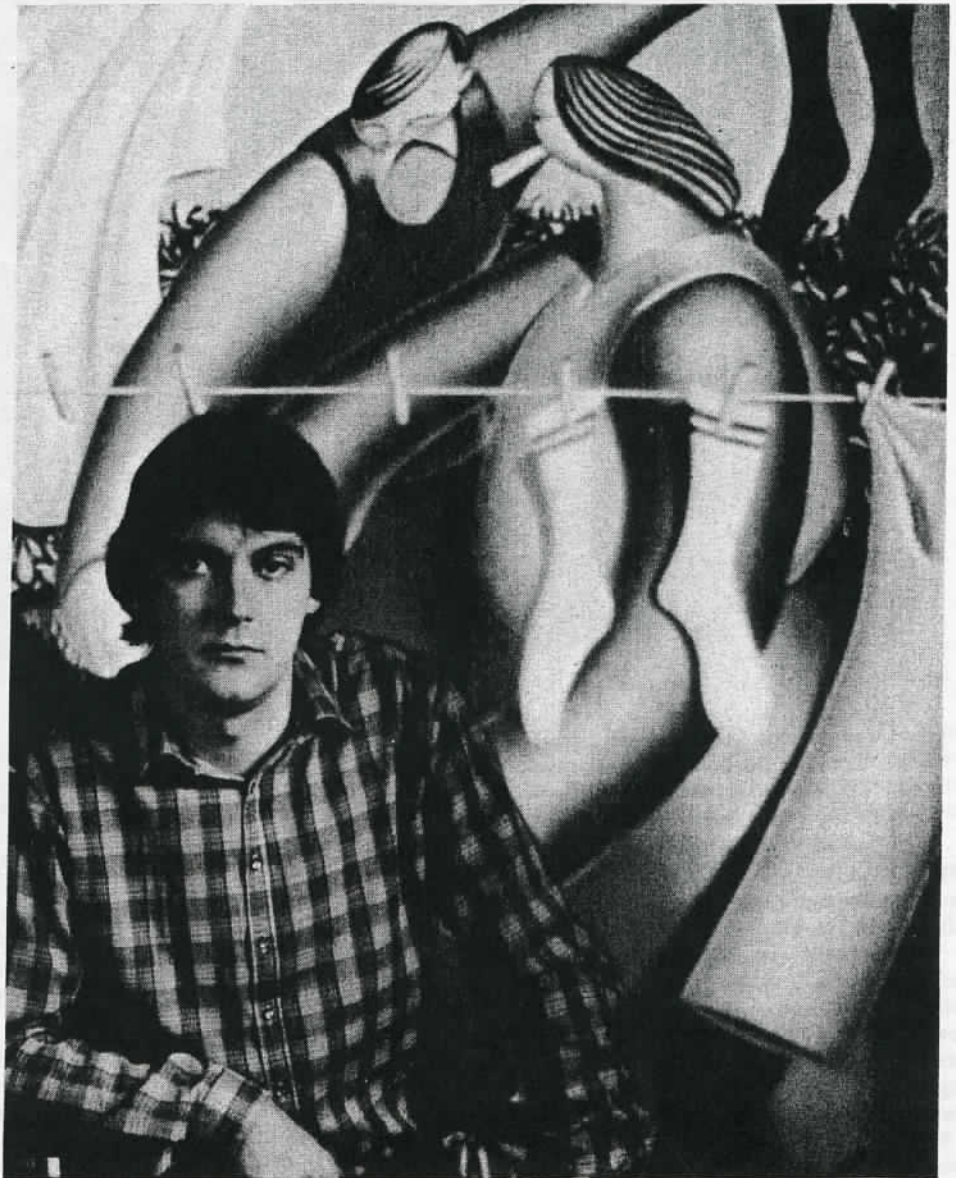
Brian Jones, at thirty, has achieved what many dream about. He has developed a significant body of paintings and drawings which have been exhibited throughout Canada on numerous occasions and have formed the content of several solo exhibitions in Toronto and here, in London. His downtown studio overlooks Victoria Park in the heart of London.

Born in Chatham, Ontario, in 1950, Jones transposed adolescent daydreams into a direct desire to become an artist after reading an article on Alex Colville in Canadian Magazine in 1968. Intrigued by Colville's painting, he decided to go to art school. A year later he moved to London to study at H. B. Beal Technical School in the special art program where he fondly recalls spending his time with classmate Geoffrey Holdsworth, painting and drawing in one room while the rest of his class carried on with their various studios.

Jones found an apartment over Anderson's Art Store, half a block away from Beal on Dundas Street. The owner, Willard Green, sold his paintings so that Jones could meet the \$75.00 rent. To his surprise, Jones often found himself ahead at the end of each month and although he was just beginning, his work was popular.

He lived over Anderson's for six years. The time spent there has become a bleary memory of eating endless tins of stew while pondering if his life would ever change. Paintings and drawings sold through front-window-viewing have become treasured items for his early followers. This kind of exposure brought many encouraging words, including those passed on by Jack Chambers, who later figured prominently in the young artist's development. It was also during these years that Jones developed the discipline which he now unassumingly regards as an inherent aspect of painting and drawing.

Glancing around Jones' studio makes one feel that his personal artistic balance lies between refinement and the classics with a touch of homespun spontaneity. The room



Brian Jones seated in front of his popular 'Hanging Laundry'.
Photo/Morgan Studios, London.

exudes clean lines and warmth. It is cosy, like his paintings. His work table occupies the central focus. Around it stand his easel, on which his current work rests, and a natural pine bookcase lined with biographies, fiction, art books and classics. Nearby, his guitar leans against a Canadian pine sideboard. Music books are strewn in stacks from his recent studies of classical guitar. A Windsor bow-backed chair provides a nice proportion, a pleasing silhouette against the brick wall which meets the northeast wall overlooking the park. At the opposite end, his collection of clockwork tin-toys, "things that you wind up," and the

large pile of records which stand by his stereo tell something about many solitary hours spent contemplating, reading and painting. A Matisse poster is the only spot of colour in the whole room other than stacks of his paintings. He likes the poster because the artist used pure flat colour and hard edged contours. Each of these inanimate objects has its special place — the wicker rocking chair was chosen for its fat, little woven curves which resemble the compressed tubular shapes of his figure/subjects.

Jones' life revolves around his work and it, in turn, deals primarily with life around



'Swimmer', 1978. Oil on wood. Private Collection.

him. His urban landscapes bear immediate resemblance to London, its buildings, houses and 'people' activities. Earlier work, more closely concerned with realistic representation, shows how the local landscape inspires creativity. He lashes back at the weighty routine of city life by exposing its common aspects in mini-farce settings. These are represented within the juxtaposition of 'building' areas with anonymous and exaggerated characters.

'Hanging Laundry,' completed just over one year ago, has a lyrical quality not seen in earlier, domestic scenes. Before, his subjects grimaced and leered, as if their commonality was hideous. While completing 'Hanging Laundry' in August, 1979, Jones mentioned that "the routine of life takes on a kind of mystical air. The figures are intense." More concerned with the interplay of figures than with detail, it is evident that Jones' artistic focus is changing. The vortex of energy in his earlier abstract drawing, 'Man in a Bar' (1976), appears to prefigure the unified harmony of light and tension in later work and the most recent body of work exhibited at Nancy Poole's Studio, Toronto. (November 22 - December 4)

Jones' more abstract works, done simultaneously with the neighbourhood pieces, often focus on a solitary figure — man as a muse gazing out into fathomless depths, perhaps eyeing the escape back into the perfect world of "innocence". With 'Hanging

Laundry', the neighbours and the muse have merged, giving a moving perception of their task. For Jones, art is "the take-off on reality, the invention". His present work is testament to the integration of emotion and thought.



'Water Pools'. Victoria Park, 1980. Private Collection.

In Jones' work, colour and composition are more important than theme and illustration. In more abstract images, landscape motifs convey the conceptions themselves. He likes dramatic contrast and says that "the colours have to contrast in a finely-done painting." In the same breath, he mentions that Leonardo de Vinci also used the principle of the silhouette. Jones strives to establish subtle tones within the figure. While he stated a year ago that his contours must remain hard, his most recent work shows a transition to softer edges. The effect of blurring creates an interesting, ambiguous tension which is less discernable than the stark contrast of earlier abstractions derived from "neighbourhood"

motifs. Similarly, the realistic nature of portraits and landscapes, previously portrayed in a stark contrast is now warmer and more subtle with a light that infuses the composition with a softened vitality.

Working with Jack Chambers from 1974 until his death in 1978 developed Jones' respect for the use of subtle tones and lighting. But unlike Chambers, who defined his edges in a very soft way to create a diffused yet intense light, Jones has tended to work in tight, compressed surface areas. However, over the past year, several personal experiences have affected a change in style. The softening of boundaries between images reflects a greater awareness of the continuum of life-change around and within him. He is more aware of himself as an artist, his artistic contribution, and the people in his life. In this way, images seem to be endowed with a greater life of their own.

An earlier expressed concern with "filling up the whole surface of the canvas," like 20th century English painter Stanley Spencer, who shared his interest in the landscape and the hometown people, is now overshadowed by his interest in diffused light atmospheres. This can be seen in two new realistic pieces influenced by Vermeer entitled, 'Early Morning' and 'Interior'. These pieces are closer to Chambers' style than any previous work because they contain less detail and evoke an experience of timelessness. The image 'stays' with the viewer. ■