

THE INFLUENCE OF ACCESS TO THE ARTIST ON THE CONSERVATION OF ALLEN JONES' WORKS FROM THE 1960S

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ABSTRACT

Interviews with British artist Allen Jones have influenced the approach to conservation and display of his paintings. The artist helped to interpret a technical study of seven paintings from 1961–1966, which assisted the identification of material deterioration, and defined goals for their conservation and display. Mechanical cracking and flaking paint were found to be associated with the use of an alkyd-bound priming (which had been used unknowingly by the artist), and his technique of mixing dammar varnish with oil paint, on glue-sized cotton canvas. Cracking and surface mould accumulation were exacerbated by fluctuations in relative humidity. A proposal for the conservation of one of the paintings considers the artist's intention and the current condition of the work.

INTRODUCTION

This paper addresses three issues of access: physical access to paintings from a number of collections; intellectual access to the artist's intentions in relation to the works to be preserved, and optimum access for the public to works as they were intended by the artist for display.

The material/immaterial and conceptual considerations for conservation and display of paintings by the British artist Allen Jones (b.1937) are explored in this study, which included interviews with the artist in 2007, in his studio, Fig. 1. These resulted in a treatment proposal for one of the paintings, *Dance with the Head and the Legs*, Fig. 2, hereafter referred to as *Dance...*. Context for the study necessitated technical examination of seven paintings made between 1961 and 1966, and discussion with the artist influenced interpretation of the technical study and provided criteria for conservation of his early paintings.

The paintings examined in the technical study include *Dance...*, and *Parachutist No.2* from the José de Azeredo Perdigão Modern Art Centre, Lisbon, Portugal; *Buses* from the National Museum and Gallery of Wales, UK; *Hermaphrodite* from The Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, UK; and three paintings (*Man, Woman; The Battle of Hastings; Wet Seal*) from Tate, London, UK. Standard methods of examination and analysis were used to characterize the painting materials and their application. The findings that relate to the creation, deterioration, condition and display of the works are discussed here in the context of information provided by the artist. The complete results and methods of the technical study can be found elsewhere [1].

Conservation history and condition of Dance ... and other works

Documentation of former condition and treatment of the painting suggests that it began to deteriorate shortly after it was finished.

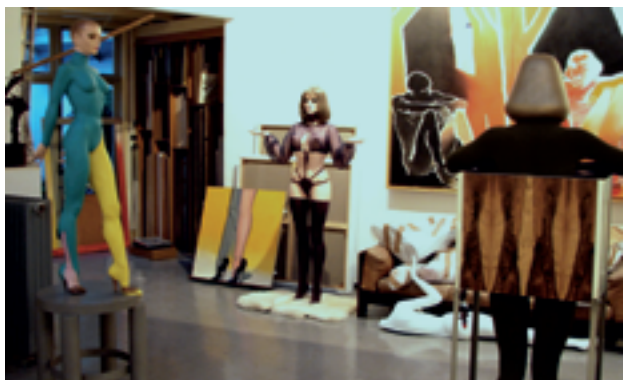


Fig. 1 Allen Jones' studio, 2007.



Fig. 2 *Dance with the Head and the Legs*, Allen Jones, José de Azeredo Perdigão Modern Art Centre, Lisbon.

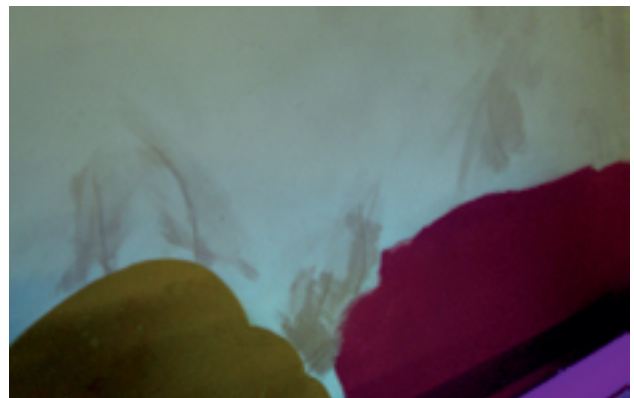


Fig. 3 UV image of detail from *Dance...*, showing areas of crude overpainting of cracks undertaken by Jones c.1967.

A report states that it was returned to Jones for repair in 1967, although no details of the treatment are given [2]. While Jones does not recall what he did, examination of the painting in ultraviolet (UV) light suggests that he broadly overpainted areas of cracked paint, Fig. 3. The retouching paint has since discoloured and affects the reading of the image. In 1968, the artist retouched passages of lost paint from *Man, Woman* [3]. Jones stated that he would like his work to be conserved in a way that retains the smooth unbroken surface originally intended. In 1968 the painting was treated at the Victoria and Albert Museum. This may have included lining, but the treatment report is now lost. In 1997 the work was surface cleaned and the stretcher replaced [4]. It was cleaned again in 2005, including removal of surface mould [5].

Recent examination of the painting noted extensive cracking and cupping in the paint and priming, causing delamination from the canvas. Superficial cracking in the paint had been caused by lack of tension in the canvas and by the uneven adhesion of the lining canvas, Figs 4–6. As the edges of the canvas remain flexible, the



Fig. 4 Cracking paint and ground from *Dance...*



Fig. 5 Detail of cracking paint and ground from *Dance...*



Fig. 6 Reverse of *Dance...*, showing delaminating lining canvas.

original function of the lining was likely to have been to reduce the impact of cracking and to retain the flatness of the work.

Consolidation of the raised cracked paint over the whole surface of *Buses* from the *verso* was carried out at Tate. A size was applied to the back to strengthen and stabilize it. The reports say that the treatment reduced the cracking; it has since continued to deteriorate.

With ageing, an increase in stiffness of the alkyd-bound priming may have caused fractures to occur, even at low strain [6]. Cracking in the priming has been found in all the paintings in this study, and also between paint layers. The effects are exacerbated by the use of cotton duck canvas, the application of glue size, and where dammar varnish was mixed with oil paint. The paintings exhibited poor adhesion between the sized support and priming, and the cracking is likely to have been caused by fluctuating relative humidity (RH).

Evidence for exposure of the painting to humid conditions includes the development of surface mould. Surface dirt was evident, in particular in areas of sized, unprimed canvas. Fingerprint marks were observed around the edges of the painting, suggesting handling without protection. Records of surface cleaning of both *Buses* and *Wet Seal* noted that the treatment was problematic due to the sensitivity of the paint to water, and passages of red, blue and green paint from *Dance ...* were sensitive to saliva used in surface cleaning tests.

The artist's role in conservation treatment

Allen Jones has taken a keen interest in the conservation of his work. A report from 1967 documents the return of *Dance ...* to the artist for 'repair' [2]. In 1968, following discussions with Tate, Jones undertook treatment of *Man, Woman* [3]. In 1980 Jones provided details of materials and techniques he used [8]. Jones has continued to change his materials to reduce the degradation of his work. This includes the use of more durable stretchers, and a return to the use of pre-primed linen canvases after experiencing the consequences of the deterioration concomitant with cotton duck supports.

The interview with Jones that forms part of the present study highlighted his views on the making, intention and conservation of his paintings: unattributed quotations are taken from that interview. He suggested both interventive and preventive measures that might ensure the longevity of his work: "I would like to think that the things were actively conserved ... and that for as long as possible the effect I had painted, was the effect someone was going to see". After considering technique and condition of the paintings, a proposal was made for the conservation of *Dance ...*

Art education, influences and exhibitions

Allen Jones' formal art education began at the Hornsey College of Art 1955–1959, and continued at the Royal College of Art (RCA) 1959–1960. Other students of the 1959 intake who exhibited in the 1961 *Young Contemporaries* exhibition, held at the RBA galleries in London [8] and considered in that year to be the first coherent showing of British Pop Art [9], included David Hockney, Peter Phillips, R.B. Kitaj and Derek Boshier.

Before 1959, Jones produced small-scale works, but on seeing the "vast canvases, which totally intrigued me" by fellow RCA artist Peter Phillips, he began to work on what he regarded as the "right human scale" for imagery which involved a physical actuality [10, p. 58]. *The Battle of Hastings* (1961–1962) was produced whilst Jones was at Hornsey College for teacher training. It employs the use of a diagram he had made as a teaching aid to explain the positioning of troops in the 1066 battle [9]. Combining his interest in the presentation of movement by the Futurists, Jones began with a series of *Bus* paintings on shaped canvases (1962). This was followed with *Parachutist No.2* (1963), where he continued to explore the sensation of movement through colour, realized within the upper heptagonal-shaped canvas using a colour wheel to generate the image [11].

The four paintings dating from 1963 (*Dance ...; Hermaphrodite; Man, Woman; Parachutist No.2*) reflect Jones' interest in the writings of Nietzsche, in particular *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, which inspired the title of one painting: "Thus would I have a man and woman; the one fit for warfare, the other for giving birth, but both for the dance with the head and the legs" [12].

The material and physical act of painting plays a prominent part in Jones' iconography. He created his paintings in such a way as to increase viewers' understanding of picture-making, and expose the pictorial illusion, by leaving visible aspects of his preparation and the later alteration of the work. Understanding the artist's intention and how this affects the presentation of his aged works is central to the present study.

MATERIALS AND TECHNIQUES

Stretchers, canvas and preparation

Jones purchased all stretchers from Bird and Davis¹ to suit the individual image planned. Ideas would develop through a series of preliminary sketches and drawings. When he felt that the

image was worth pursuing Jones would order the canvas. The dimensions, artist's initials, date, and in some cases the title of the work are marked on the softwood stretcher members.

Jones purchased supports from Brodie and Middleton (now Russell and Chappel).² He switched to cotton duck from linen in the mid-1960s, allowing him to work on a grander scale, although he knew that: "... the duck was a much softer, elastic material and would respond to the weather more quickly" [12, p.178]. Cotton canvases were used for *Parachutist No.2, Dance ..., Hermaphrodite, Man, Woman* and *Buses*; a loosely woven linen canvas was used for *The Battle of Hastings*, and *Wet Seal* was painted on commercially-primed linen canvas.

Analysis of sample threads from *Man, Woman* and *Dance ...* provided evidence of a protein-based size applied to the canvas. Jones says that he applied two thin layers of rabbit skin glue. The size layer functioned as a preparation for complete or partial priming, and protected the canvas where paint is directly applied. Size is visible on the front of the canvas of *Hermaphrodite* and all the other works on self-prepared supports.

Jones said that after preliminary drawing over the sized canvas, he would prime areas that would then be painted. Cross-sections from *Dance ...* and *Man, Woman* showed the application of a single white priming layer containing titanium white, chalk and barium sulphate. Jones said that he used an oil-based priming purchased from Brodie and Middleton during this period [8]. Alkyd was identified in samples of the priming although the manufacturers had advertised the "oil-modified" alkyd as "oil-based". Jones would allow the work to progress intuitively, by making compositional changes as the painting developed. He stated that he would either re-apply the white priming to areas that he wished to work on, or would accept the marks made, considering the act of painting a "performance".

Jones thought that the commercially-prepared canvas for *Wet Seal* was oil-primed. From 1966 he used ready-primed canvas: "There was no doubt that the oil-primed canvas was a juicy surface, and I would have laboured to get that, and I might as well be painting a picture".

Reflecting his interest in automatism, Jones would produce rapid sketches on paper [8]. Ideas would be "discovered", kept for later use or developed into finished drawings for paintings. Jones would sometimes return to an idea that he had first explored decades earlier. For this reason he keeps all his sketchbooks [13]. Sketches were made in a variety of sizes and media, including pencil, biro, chalk, watercolour and oil.

Paintings in the present study incorporate marks made in pencil, charcoal and bone black paint, that vary in visible intensity. Some are obscured by paint, and others remain exposed, signifying they are part of the finished work. This highlights the artist's notion of the aesthetic role of the underdrawing in the finished painting, and fits with Jones' desire to increase the viewer's understanding of picture-making.

Infrared photographs of *Hermaphrodite* and *Man, Woman* reveal changes in placement of charcoal and pencil lines, suggesting that certain compositional elements were worked out on the canvas. The artist made no attempt to hide these changes, as these lines are only partially covered in paint. A similar approach was used for *Wet Seal* where the right leg was painted to make the viewer aware of its construction, by contrasting the leg modelled in paint with the flat background. The outline of the shoe is visible in the final image, drawn in charcoal that has been smeared by the overlying white paint. Visible alterations in *Buses* include underdrawn *motifs* that were painted and then re-drawn, relating to elements of the original design.

¹Bird and Davies, 45 Holmes Road, Kentish Town, London NW5 3AN, UK.

²Russell and Chappel, 8 Drury Lane, London WC2 5SP, UK.

Painting and paint

Jones said that the varnish brush was his favourite, because it has a thin ferrule which does not hold much paint, enabling him to control the amount applied. The visibility of individual brushstrokes on the surface decreases with the progression of his work through the 1960s. The surface of *The Battle of Hastings* exhibits brushmarks that vary in texture and width, suggesting the use of a range of stiff bristle brushes. The large abstract colour forms and figurative elements exhibit little or no texture, which suggests that varnish brushes may have been used, Fig. 7.

Drips, splashes and flecks of paint are visible in all seven paintings, see for example Fig. 8. Jones stated: “They would have been intentional as much as if they happened in terms as a corollary to making a gesture”. Depending on their effect, a

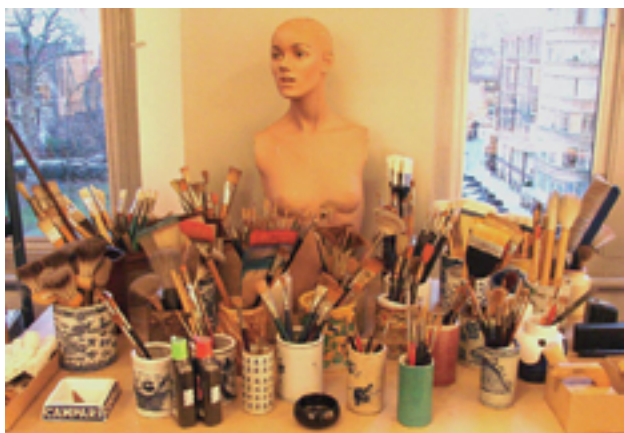


Fig. 7 Brushes in Allen Jones' studio 2007.

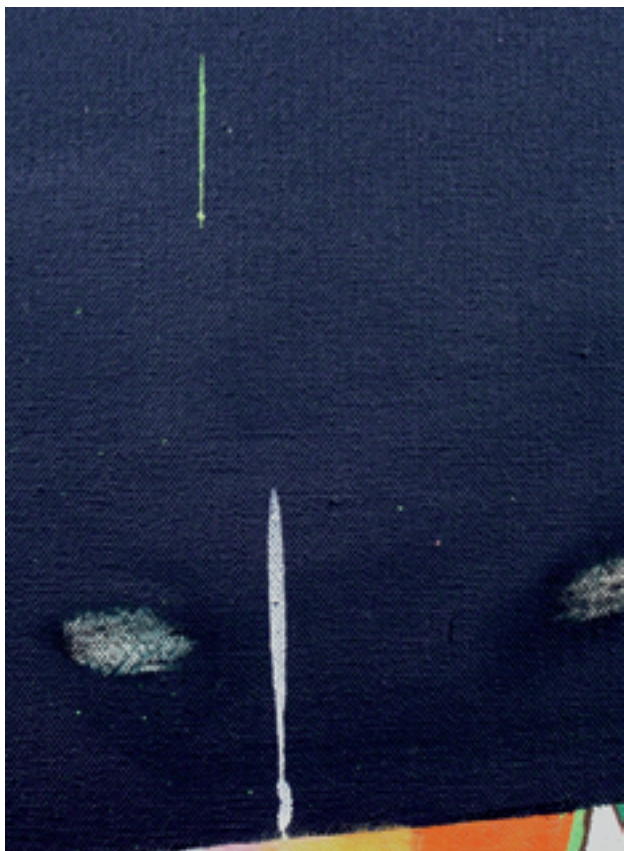


Fig. 8 Splashes of paint from *Dance ...* exemplifies the result of Jones' painting process described as “automation” by the artist.

deliberate decision would have been made as to whether to leave or remove these marks.

The influence of abstract expressionism is evident in *The Battle of Hastings*, while development in technique can be seen in the later works that have a smooth surface, interrupted only by canvas texture and ridges in the paint due to reworking of the image. Paint is thinly applied over other paint or directly on the canvas. With regard to this technique he said: “I wanted to create an anonymous surface which didn't have any gestural markings on it, but which could create a specific feel ... to make it a surface, in other words”.

All seven works exhibit changes in composition during painting. Jones evolved the composition or colour interactions directly on the canvas. He has described this technique as “freeing the image” and finding “other meanings” [10, p. 59]. Ridges in the paint surface indicating changes in the placement of the male figure in *Man*, *Woman* are evident, and infrared photographs of *The Battle of Hastings* show an abstracted form that was completely revised. Cross-sections show a number of layers of revision: a sample taken from *Parachutist No. 2* revealed that the blue band forming part of the colour wheel went through numerous alterations in colour.

Jones states that he preferred to use a range of hues available straight from the tube, to achieve maximum chromatic intensity. This is evident in cross-sections from the paintings, where a single pigment or hue is mixed with lead white-, zinc white- or titanium white-containing priming material. Jones said he used Winsor and Newton paints during the 1960s as he considered them the best brand for consistency and shelf life.

A range of pigments was identified in paint samples. These include consistent and homogeneous mixtures of cadmium yellow and viridian, perhaps supplied as ‘cadmium green pale’, an organic yellow pigment (PY4, arylide) that may be the ‘Winsor yellow’ Jones mentioned, and an organic green pigment (PG7, a chlorinated copper phthalocyanine) supplied by Winsor and Newton as ‘Winsor green 3’. Jones said that he used madder lake during this period. Aluminium and barium were identified by elemental analysis, indicative of aluminium hydroxide and barium sulphate, used by manufacturers in the 1960s as the lake substrate.

While none of the pigments used for the original works showed clear evidence of fading or other colour change, the red, blue and green passages from *Dance ...* were sensitive to water in tests for surface cleaning. The presence of zinc stearate, and aluminium compounds that were added to manufactured oil paints, may be linked with the water sensitivity of the dry oil paint [14].

Medium and finish

The paint surface has clearly defined areas of matt or gloss. No final varnish was applied to the paintings, although Jones said that he mixed dammar and refined linseed oil to his paints, primarily with the aim of retaining the elasticity of the paint, and also to modulate the saturation of the surface. To achieve a matt surface, he would mix a small amount of primer with paint. This is evident in samples taken from *Man*, *Woman* and *Dance ...* where the upper paint layer has composition closely similar to the priming.

Although Jones says that the medium he used was oil, resin, polyvinyl acetate (PVA) and alkyd have been identified in samples from his works. Drying oil was identified in samples from all the paintings. A mixture of oil and resin was found in paint used for *The Battle of Hastings*, *Dance ...*, *Wet Seal* and *Parachutist No.2*, while *Buses* was painted using oil, resin and PVA.

Jones said that initially he mixed dammar and refined linseed oil in the right proportions for use by eye. Later he followed a formula suggested by the American artist Tom Wessleman: equal

parts of dammar resin, refined linseed oil and turpentine or white spirit, mixed with the oil tube paint [8]. Jones commented: “The varnish was not really to do with drying, but with the fact that it allowed the surface to retain its elasticity, and rightly or wrongly, that’s why it’s in there”.

From the mid-1960s Jones said that he added Winsor and Newton Oleopasto medium to his paint, and probably used it for *Wet Seal*. According to the manufacturer Oleopasto was made from alkyd, with silica added for stiffness and to accelerate drying.

Jones was fairly confident that *Buses* was painted in oil. He recalled using PVA during his time at Hornsey, and mentioned that his experimental use of acrylic for earlier *Bus* paintings was disastrous, but also that he used emulsion paints in some of his work, often in combination with oil. Analysis of samples from *Buses* suggest that he used paint of more than one medium. Alkyd was identified in the priming and paint from *Dance ...* and *Man, Woman*. Jones did not consciously choose alkyd paints for his works of this period: the use of this medium was linked with his choice of commercial primer.

Framing

Originally, staples were used to attach canvas to the back of the stretcher. By leaving the edge unframed, Jones felt that it asserted the physical nature of the object. He said that without a frame the eye would be allowed to move out of the picture plane: “One of the problems is (and sometimes it can upset the picture) that it [the frame] becomes part of the compositional element, you have this line that just limits the picture”.

All except *The Battle of Hastings* and *Wet Seal* are framed with either wooden or steel battens attached to the canvas edge. According to Jones they would have left the studio unframed. He is aware of these frames and commented that: “If the wood or steel has been on there for a long time, it needn’t be visually offensive as you see it as a piece of the archaeology of the painting”.

On the issue of glazing, he approved of strategies that would protect his work, but deemed the Perspex box-frame that currently houses *Wet Seal* suitable for storage but inappropriate for display, as he felt it would hinder interpretation of the work.

TREATMENT PROPOSAL FOR *DANCE ...*

A plan for treatment of *Dance ...* was influenced by the results of the technical study, the conservation history of the work [2–5] and the other paintings in this study [15–20], the artist’s views, and consideration of the demands of storage and display. The proposed treatment includes removal of surface dirt and mould using non-aqueous methods in sensitive areas. Removal of Jones’ discoloured repaint, and re-integration of the image, should comply with Jones’ demands to retain the integrity of the surface texture, matt and gloss surfaces, and the visibility of underdrawing, *pentimenti*, and splashes and drips of paint. Elements of the above lost due to deterioration or damage will need to be reintroduced to retain the integrity of the image. He agreed that inpainting should be reversible. Stabilization of the paint and priming is proposed, to prevent further cracking. This could be achieved by re-adhesion of the lining canvas followed by the maintenance of a controlled environment for both storage and display.

Preventive treatment could include attaching a stretcher bar lining, together with a stiff backboard to buffer environmental fluctuations and reduce canvas vibration. While effective preservation of the deteriorated work from environmental changes would require a sealed and glazed microclimate, Jones’ views on framing should be taken into account. It is possible that separate housing could be designed for display, storage and transit.

CONCLUSIONS

The technical study of a selection of Allen Jones’ seminal works of the 1960s, and the opportunity to interview the artist on the aesthetic intentions and presentation of these works, was definitive in making a proposal for conservation of *Dance ...*. The paintings in this study show deterioration linked with his materials and working methods, and exposure to fluctuating RH, that has led to visual and structural changes, including accumulation of surface dirt and mould, cracking and delamination between layers. Similar structural deterioration has been observed in all the works painted on cotton duck supports, with the exception of *Wet Seal* executed on commercially-primed linen canvas. Jones’ desire to retain a flat paint surface unbroken by cracks influences the approach to cleaning and in-painting of his works, which aims to disguise rather than accept the changes on ageing in these works.

There are common alterations in Jones’ paintings made between 1963 and 1964 that can be attributed to the materials and techniques used by the artist for these early works. This was observed in the course of the present study of *Dance ...*, though the changes are not evident in his earlier or later works. The use of specific materials and techniques is implicit to the meaning of the paintings, and thus their deterioration affects their interpretation. These techniques include the manipulation of surface texture, use of matt and gloss films, deliberate exposure of *pentimenti* and underdrawing, and the implementation of automatism or evidence of process, by leaving splashes and drips of paint.

The interpretation of data from the analysis of materials and the holistic investigation of his painting techniques was facilitated by information from the artist. Analysis of the medium used for the paint and priming revealed the use of synthetic materials including alkyd and PVA. Unknown to Jones, manufacturers incorporated these into ready-made paints. The addition of dammar resin and Oleopasto medium to paints to change the rheology and surface finish of the paint was recalled by the artist.

Jones’ stated aim to preserve the evidence of his working process and the integrity of the surface, leading to an enduring aesthetic, provided critical guidelines for conservation of his paintings. The artist’s views on framing, and display of the paintings unframed, balances concerns for preservation and handling of the works with the artist’s intention.

The CEF foundation for the conservation of modern art in the Netherlands and the recent European project *Inside Installations* have developed a strategy and guidelines for artists’ interviews that relates to the material/immaterial issues discussed here. The information derived from these projects is shared with partners of the International Network for the Conservation of Contemporary Art (INNCA)³ that may be of use in future projects. The holistic approach applied in this study provides public access to the works by enabling them to be experienced as the artist intended.

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