

If it weren't for the Surrealistic atmosphere of Liam Jones's precisely painted trailer homes and tract houses, these pictures would seem to be a new, obsessive version of Photorealism. On the one hand, every beam of every partially constructed new house is truthfully rendered. On the other hand, these ruler-straight lines are too straight, the rhythm of their repeated verticals too regular. Likewise, the shrubbery and foliage seem to be too green, their play of shadow and light too high-keyed. It is the perfection of the metal siding of the trailer homes, the cinderblocks in the surrounding walls, and the freshly sodded lawns that transcends the sense of reality. Hyperrealist "truthfulness" leads to visual puns: In two of the five paintings in Jones's first solo show, he allows the wood of the panels on which he works to show through. Neither painted with gesso nor acrylic, these sections of smoothly sanded birch are integral parts of the represented images, becoming the most realistic of illusions.

Jones has composed some of his apparently Photorealist paintings so that they teeter on the edge of the symmetrical. In two pictures, he plants the image's focal point in the panel's dead center, giving otherwise banal scenarios something of an off-balanced edginess. The center of *Fountain* (all works, 2000) is occupied by an elaborate stone basin whose interior is lined with blue tile that is at odds with the rustic stones

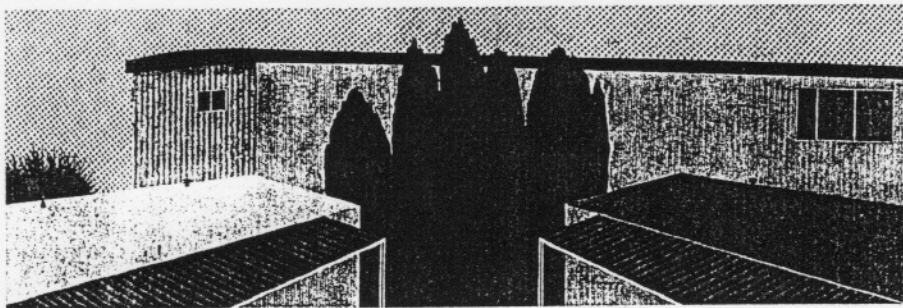
of its exterior. This strange, not yet functional element prevents viewers from knowing whether they're looking at a landscape or a cityscape. Taking up more than half of the composition, the aggressively decorative abstract emblem weighs heavily against the frail wooden structures in the background, which describe a world of supposedly rational planning. The absurdity of the fountain's claim to represent the character and demeanor of the as yet unbuilt neighborhood takes compellingly flatfooted shape. Each and every one of its earth-colored stones is meticulously rendered, as is its concrete rim and the lawn around it. In spite of Jones's precise realism, one can hardly escape the feeling of seeing the fountain as a monstrously fat old lady, who, dressed unfashionably, is oblivious that everyone is staring.

Something different transpires in *Trailer #17*, whose otherworldly setting of variously textured hues of off-white, bland gray, and beige serves as a queasy backdrop for a central cluster of dark green cypresses. This centerpiece is a straight quote from Arnold Böcklin's 1880 painting, *The Island of the Dead*, in which a similarly dense group of cypresses—traditionally planted in cemeteries—symbolizes the mystery of death. In Jones's painting, the deadly white of three trailer homes, along with the creepy symmetry and sharp geometry of their carefully rendered contours, suggest a vision as surreal as it is understated, in which unspoken notions and implied statements take on greater resonance than directly addressed issues.

As in *Fountain*, where the monstrosity of the truthfully rendered is evident, in *Trailer #17* Jones uses precision to create an eerie sight that is all the more powerful for its apparently innocuous ordinariness. The unpopulated scene of tidy whiteness, crammed with the flimsy, impermanent objects and punctuated by dense, light-swallowing cypresses, recalls the icy tension and underlying anxiety of paintings by De Chirico. Putting the well known, recognizable, and obvious into the service of the unknown, the irregular, and the strange, there's a lot more to Jones's paintings than immediately meets the eye. His sober, geometric compositions, which appear to be photographically truthful copies of a well-engineered reality, in fact point to a vast realm of unconfined emotions and uncontrollable associations that lurks just beneath the surface of rationalism's thin skin.

Liam Jones

at POST, 20 January–17 February



Liam Jones
Trailer #17, 2000
Acrylic on panel
24" x 72"

Éva Forgács teaches at Art Center College of Design.