

# Celebrating the spirit of the black male

**Ben Jones**

**In The Spirit**

“Celebration, inspiration, beauty, dignity, integrity, responsibility and respect are some of the qualities which come to mind.” This statement summarises everything this artist projects in his work. Ben Jones, aged 52, was born in New Jersey, USA and has lived there for most of his life. Jones’s experiences have taken him into the African diaspora: Brazilian, Canadian, Cuban, Ghanaian, Haitian, Spanish, and Martinique cultures. However, Jones has an especially intense interest in African-Cuban and African-Brazilian aesthetics. This artist’s work strikes at the heart of black male spirituality and rejects what he describes as: “The scrap heap that the wider society has designated as being the appropriate home for black men.”

The Ben Jones exhibition, *In The Spirit*, is a powerful fusion of work, with a series entitled *We Love You Malcolm*. Jones creates a powerful fusion of acrylic and oil painted on paper. The colours are bold and dark. The brush strokes are strong and deep, cutting into, separating and revealing an array of shades and shapes:



hearts, eyes, birds and symbols of peace highlight the inner beauty of his work. Within and around these shapes are words which enhance the messages of power, love, faith, struggle and trust. A series entitled *Shango* features the central motif of a two-headed axe carried by Shango, the Yoruba god of lightning and thunder. Jones takes the axe and represents it

as a powerful symbol made stronger by the images of snakes, eyes, fish and birds.

Jones summarises by saying: “This exhibition is a celebration of black men in a positive and spiritual way. Black men have to empower themselves spiritually and collectively.”

Ben Jones has made a difficult but successful attempt at redressing the re-humanisation

of the black man. *In The Spirit* challenges the concepts of the wider society and points us all in a direction which is both positive and truly representative of black people.

**June Campbell**

*In The Spirit can be seen at the 198 Gallery, 194-198 Railton Rd, Herne Hill, London SE24: June 9 - July 9. Phone 071 978 8309.*