

Adrian Morris  
*In The Office*  
May 24 – July 1, 2023

In March 2020 Essex Street / Maxwell Graham exhibited 10 paintings by Adrian Morris. The exhibition closed to the public that same month. The paintings of empty rooms and empty doorways and empty windows hung in a dark room with no inhabitants for many months. The exhibition never again opened. In May 2023 Maxwell Graham hangs 4 of those 10 paintings in the office. The following is the press release for the incomplete exhibition.

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I was in bed, the lights were out; I was ready for my trip. Slowly my eyelids closed. I wriggled a little and I was asleep. I faced an iron door covered with pictures, small pictures of another life.

Adrian Morris, Age 13, 1943

My paintings reflect something of the continually changing relationship between that which lies within and without. My aim has always been, to create from a tabula rasa something which even if is only a fleck of dust, is at least a reality coming from my own searches, rather than borrowed experience.

Adrian Morris, Age 35, 1964

You see the darkened doorway. Either you go into it or you come out of it. It depends how you look at it. In these doorway paintings I was very aware of balancing the 'in' and the 'out' like a respiration. Claustrophobia, or more particularly the opposite, is a theme which has influenced my painting. The desire to create a world in one's work in which one could live and breath, a kind of environment in which people relate to one another in a harmonious way, and an environment in which one could move freely and happily.

Adrian Morris, Age 52, 1981

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Essex Street / Maxwell Graham is honored to present the first ever exhibition in the United States of Adrian Morris.

Adrian Morris was born in London in 1929, the son of an Anglican Priest. Avoiding the second world war, Morris lived in New York from 1941–47. During these years, Morris already showed an advanced commitment to painting and poetry, and was taken under the mentorship of John L. Sweeney, professor of poetry at Harvard and brother of James Sweeney, then a curator at the Museum of Modern Art. He also frequented Peggy Guggenheim's The Art of This Century gallery, encountering major exhibitions by both the Abstract Expressionists and the Surrealists. Morris went on to pursue painting in Paris at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière from 1950–51 and then at the Royal Academy in London from 1951–55.

By all accounts, Adrian Morris walked into his studio and painted almost every single day of his life. When he died in 2004 at the age of 75, Morris had produced less than 100 paintings.

Over the full course of his lifetime, Adrian Morris had only one solo exhibition of his artwork, in 1955, at Lea Bondi Jaray's St George's Gallery in London. The exhibition consisted of 32 gouaches and drawings with titles such as *The journey towards heaven; The melancholy picnic; Straining Atlas; The cloud of poison. A crucifixion; The journey through limbo; Immortal of sunset; and Imaginary head*. Morris would altogether participate in only four other group exhibitions, the final and most significant being the Hayward Annual in 1978 at London's Hayward Gallery. Morris was selected for the Annual by artist Liliane Lijn, and had an entire gallery dedicated to his 16 paintings, which were well received and warranted feature articles on the artist in *Harpers & Queen* and *Artscribe*.

For the next 26 years Morris maintained close friendships with many other artists and remained a keen and frequent observer of exhibitions. However, he would never again exhibit a work publicly and it seems that only on a handful of occasions did he allow anyone, except his wife Audrey, to enter his studio.

Essex Street / Maxwell Graham is honored to present 10 paintings continually worked on from 1978 – 2004.

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Both levels of the gallery are accessible by elevator. Open To The Public. Free Admission For All. Tours Available Daily. Groups Always Welcome.