

Steward, Sue, *Morbid magic flowering in the dark*,
Evening Standard, 21 January 2008.

Morbid magic flowering in the dark



Life and death issues: The Rose Gardens

EXHIBITION

Sarah Jones

Maureen Paley Gallery, E2

★★★★☆

SUE STEWARD

THIS enchanting show opens surprisingly, onto a large photograph of a seductive, red silk-covered couch. Shot face-on, it lacks all perspective and resembles a painting, but the ruffled silk suggests the unsettled subject suggested in the title, *Analyst (Couch)* (1).

The viewer then enters a white room hung with five large photographs of rose bushes, like windows opening on to a garden. With their branches and flowers set against intense, uniformly matt black backgrounds, they

recall paintings from the medieval Dutch school.

Sarah Jones shot in London's parks by night, using a vintage plate camera to guarantee such clarity and dense blackness. She banishes shadows, scale and context, to exaggerate the drama of the flowers' life and death.

Her rising reputation is based on portraits of young girls — sullen, uncertain and often looking away from the camera. She treats the roses similarly, taking them clear of garden magazine imagery by photographing from the dark side, away from the sun.

Instead of advertising perfection and only glossy leaves, we see pale undersides, prominent veins and brown blight spots which suggest ageing human hands. She glories

in such allusions to death. She captures flowers at all stages on one branch — papery petals clinging to a swelling hip, or curling and newly brown, perfect pinky-orange blossoms in their prime, and a starkly erect bud, turgid with life. But as the light fades in *Wild Rose: Blue Flower* (1) only the thorns in a tangle of dead briars, are highlighted.

Emerging past *Analyst (Couch)*, the ruffled silk now suggests a symbolic dream-world. But even without such interpretations, Jones's latest work is expanding the vocabulary of flower photography — and creating morbid magic.

■ *Until 24 February.*
Information: 020 7729 4112,
www.maureenpaley.com.