

# REGEN PROJECTS

Wilson, Michael. "Rebecca Morris." *Artforum* (February 2011) [ill.]

## ARTFORUM



Rebecca Morris, *Untitled (#01-10)*, 2010, oil and spray paint on canvas, 84 x 72"

Rebecca Morris  
HARRIS LIEBERMAN

"Abstraction never left, motherfuckers." Los Angeles painter Rebecca Morris adopts a confrontational tone in her 2006 text *Manifesto (For Abstractionists and Friends of the Non-Objective)*, but viewers less intimately invested in the rise and fall and rise of her chosen mode may wonder at the necessity of such combative sloganeering. It may be true that when Morris graduated from art school back in the mid-1990s, other practices were in the spotlight, but is there still a need to bolster work of this kind with a pose of such clubbish toughness? Perhaps I'm taking her apparent indignation the wrong way; when paintings are marked by the kind of *joie de vivre* that is evident here, even a seeming insult can turn out to be something closer to an expression of glee.

In five large canvases, Morris ranges across a broad landscape of forms and finishes, exploring a painterly logic that essayist Anthony Elms (espousing what he confesses is a "crackpot theory") compares to that of the run-on sentence. Aiming to exploit the potential of a consciously disjointed material grammar, Morris layers metallic enamel over dry, scumbled oil, and places what might seem the most unassuming of pictorial elements center stage. In the lively *Untitled (#10-09)*, 2009, for example, a diverse group of forms is sprinkled across an expanse of pure white, with even the gentlest—a delicately brushed patch of gray-brown top right; a scattered constellation of blue-green speckles bottom left—given ample breathing room.

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While *Untitled (#10-09)* and *Untitled (#06-10)*, 2010—which occupied the gallery’s rear space—both convey an easygoing feeling of lightness and space, others of Morris’s pictures, by contrast, trade in density. *Untitled (#07-10)*, 2010, is a jigsaw puzzle-like surface of interlocking shapes, each with its own mix of pattern and coloration. Thus a rough grid of moss green on white abuts a rose-pink circle spattered with magenta, which is itself overlapped by a square of pallid blue-gray. And so it goes on, every shape cut across by another, every color inflected by its neighboring hue. Morris’s application here is soft, slightly fuzzy, closer to staining than painting, hardly the “rumbling and forceful gathering” described in Elm’s text, but striking nonetheless.

In *Untitled (#01-10)*, 2010, and *Untitled (#09-09)*, 2009, Morris brews a richer blend, applying metallic spray paint atop her customary oils, producing the effect of a kind of armor plating. In the newer canvas, this faux-precious finish adopts the form of a banded, irregular, straight-sided field that neatly skirts various forms—a fractured green and peach chevron here; a red-veined, purple-edged circle there—and is bounded by a foundation of white brushed casually with gray. In the earlier work, it runs edge to edge, allowing a mottled ground—actually a drop cloth salvaged from the artist’s studio floor—to penetrate in the form of a scatter of geometric shapes. In both panels, the sprayed surface is wrinkled and pockmarked, seeming at times about to separate itself from its support.

In these two works in particular, Morris makes good on the fist-pumping bravado of *Manifesto*, forcing the technically fractious or even seemingly incompatible into precarious alliance. Exercising a loose-limbed style that evokes a cadre of her seniors (Mary Heilmann, Jonathan Lasker, and Fiona Rae among them) but also boasts its own peculiar and elusive appeal, Morris succeeds in avoiding cliché and hints—strongly—at her genre’s rude health.