

Rebecca Morris

#31

8 Sep–4 Nov 2023

39 Walker

*"If there is one takeaway from the past twenty-one years of Morris's paintings [...] it is that the frame and the surface can hardly contain the marks and strategies devised by the artist and her skillful inversion (or evacuation) of the oversized baggage of canonical painting. Her paintings take up space—physically, gesturally, psychically." Morris has an "inexhaustible engagement with color, particularly those that flout conventions within the historical arc of painting and the boundaries of taste."*¹

-Jamillah James, Manilow Senior Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago

Bortolami is pleased to announce Rebecca Morris' second exhibition with the gallery and the thirty first solo exhibition of her career. In her latest work, Morris has retained the complex, overlapping patterns and expressive mark-making for which she is best known, but their density has been dispersed within broader, brilliant fields of color. This distillation of visual information has heightened a sense of expansive, atmospheric space within her abstractions. Emphasizing a purity of color, subtler shades have been deployed in the boldest possible permutations, confounding expectations of painting and probing new possibilities within her practice.

The map-like *Untitled (#12-23)* is a veritable balancing act of intense, seemingly incompatible pigments: a checkerboard pattern of deeply saturated magenta and brown awash in a vast expanse of metallic gold. It is a dizzyingly potent chromatic combination, as suggestive of Italianate marble as it is of the psychedelia of the Chicago Imagists, a formative influence on Morris. *Untitled (#10-23)* includes excerpts of the same pinks beside other recurring pigments from the artist's repertoire such as brown, black, and turquoise green. They are inset within a rigid, silver square surrounded by a wide perimeter of iridescent pink whose faint, delicate presence only announces itself with the shifting of light. New colors and textures emerge, as well: a rich, swirling pattern of jade green is introduced in *Untitled (#05-23)*, its matte pigment sitting beneath a thin golden grid. And in *Untitled (#14-22)*, a cerulean blue ground encircles a hazy, effervescent field of spattered seafoam and teal, as if an action painting was executed underwater.

Throughout her career, Morris' aesthetics have evolved in an almost genealogical progression. She will often cull from recent works, pairing dissonant elements to form new and innovative pictorial concepts, the results of which can prove generative for many subsequent paintings and years of work.

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The timing of #31, Morris' first show since the opening of her traveling survey exhibition last year, has afforded her the retrospection to skip further back in time and revisit ideas and paintings which long ago left her studio. *Untitled (#11-23)* is what the artist has described as a "reinvention" of *Untitled (#09-05)*, a landmark painting from 18 years ago which was the first to include a metallic line. The 2023 painting utilizes a similar gold border to frame the diluted magentas within it. They are each "tarp paintings," in which Morris lays an unstretched canvas on the floor of her studio to receive the incidental drips, splatters and edges of other, still-wet paintings in progress. Seeing both canvases, executed nearly two decades apart, reveal the consistency of the artist's approach and her constant drive for experimentation.

Rebecca Morris (b.1969, Honolulu, HI; lives and works in Los Angeles, CA) is the subject of a new survey exhibition curated by Jamillah James which will open September 30, 2023 at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. An earlier version of the show debuted last year at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. A new monograph, *Rebecca Morris: 2001-2022*, published in tandem with the survey exhibitions, will provide an overview of the last two decades of her painting practice.

Morris has been the subject of significant solo exhibitions at the Blaffer Art Museum, Houston (2019) and Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht, Holland (2014) as well as presentations at Made in L.A., Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2016), the Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2014) and The Renaissance Society (2005). Other solo shows include those at 356 Mission Rd., Los Angeles and LAXART, Los Angeles. Her work is in various public collections which include The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden; Washington, D.C.; The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; The Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego; The Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Sammlung Goetz, Munich, Germany; Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht, Netherlands; DePaul Art Museum, Chicago, IL. Morris is the recipient of awards and fellowships from The John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation, California Community Foundation Fellowship for Visual Art, and Art Matters Inc., among others.

¹Jamillah James, "Who's Afraid of Pink, Silver, and Brown" in *Rebecca Morris: 2001–2022*

(Los Angeles: Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; New York: DelMonico Books, 2023), 193