Rebecca Morris

and

Molly Zuckerman-Hartung

In 1968, the choreographer Yvonne Rainer clearly declared *The Mind Is a Muscle*, accepting this tenet as emotional, physical, and effort-laden fact. For both Rebecca Morris and Molly Zuckerman-Hartung then, the studio may be a gym. It is where aesthetics are sweated, thoughts tested, predilections exhausted, behaviors broken, space expanded, expectations pushed, abstractions made physical, practice toughened into work. Cotton duck as CrossFit. As inspiration, Morris has "Manifesto (For Abstractionists and Friends of the Non-Objective)," and Zuckerman-Hartung "The 95 Theses on Painting." Where Morris advises to "campaign against the literal," for Zuckerman-Hartung, "painting reminds me of my actual size." Upon getting your mind and body into their paintings, you realize that embracing such surface contradictions is the deeper connection each painter mines.

Pushed to name something I miss from my decade-plus in Chicago, I'd say that my years overlapped with plentiful opportunity to experience the work of both painters developing in real time, alongside getting to listen casually as each processed these changes. All three of us are dispersed elsewhere now, making this current conversation, conducted over Zoom and worked into after, a tonic to scratch that phantom itch.

There's a certain thrill in the intelligence of artists who aren't afraid to bare the day-to-day-to-decade-to-decade difficulties of being an artist dedicated to making. Who admit not all challenges are thrilling. Who identify banalities (fruitful), refusals (bawdy, elegant), blobs (this and that), generosity (goopy), process (gray), colors (feeling), doors (ajar), time (anxious), moods (play), frames (some sewn), taste (bad), margins (pushed), and the indignities of being gendered as opposed to having the space to be your own gender.

If in the discussion we learn both painters appreciate the Energizer Bunny, the steady pink automaton's got nothing on the determination of Morris and Zuckerman-Hartung thinking in their studios. Any insistent fool can *just keep going and going and...* It takes playful rigor, and embracing the unembraced, to learn to be your "own worst enemy in the studio" and own it. They do. And we who observe the results keep getting luckier and luckier.

—Anthony Elms

page 52: Rebecca Morris, *Untitled (#27–25)*, 2025, oil on canvas, 98.25 × 88 × 2 inches. Photo by Flying Studio. Courtesy of the artist and Regen Projects, Los Angeles. © Rebecca Morris.

page 53: Molly Zuckerman-Hartung, *Scarification. Deadhead. Transplant. Harden off.*, 2023–25, oil and string on canvas, 42 × 32 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

opposite: Molly Zuckerman-Hartung, *Notley*, 2013, latex house paint, enamel, and spray paint on drop cloth, 96 × 132 inches. Photo by Sean Fleming. Courtesy of the artist and Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago.

MOLLY ZUCKERMAN-HARTUNG: I, of course, made a list of things that I wanted to talk about.

REBECCA MORRIS: I also have a list. Mine's very scribbly.

MZH: Do you want to go first, or should I?

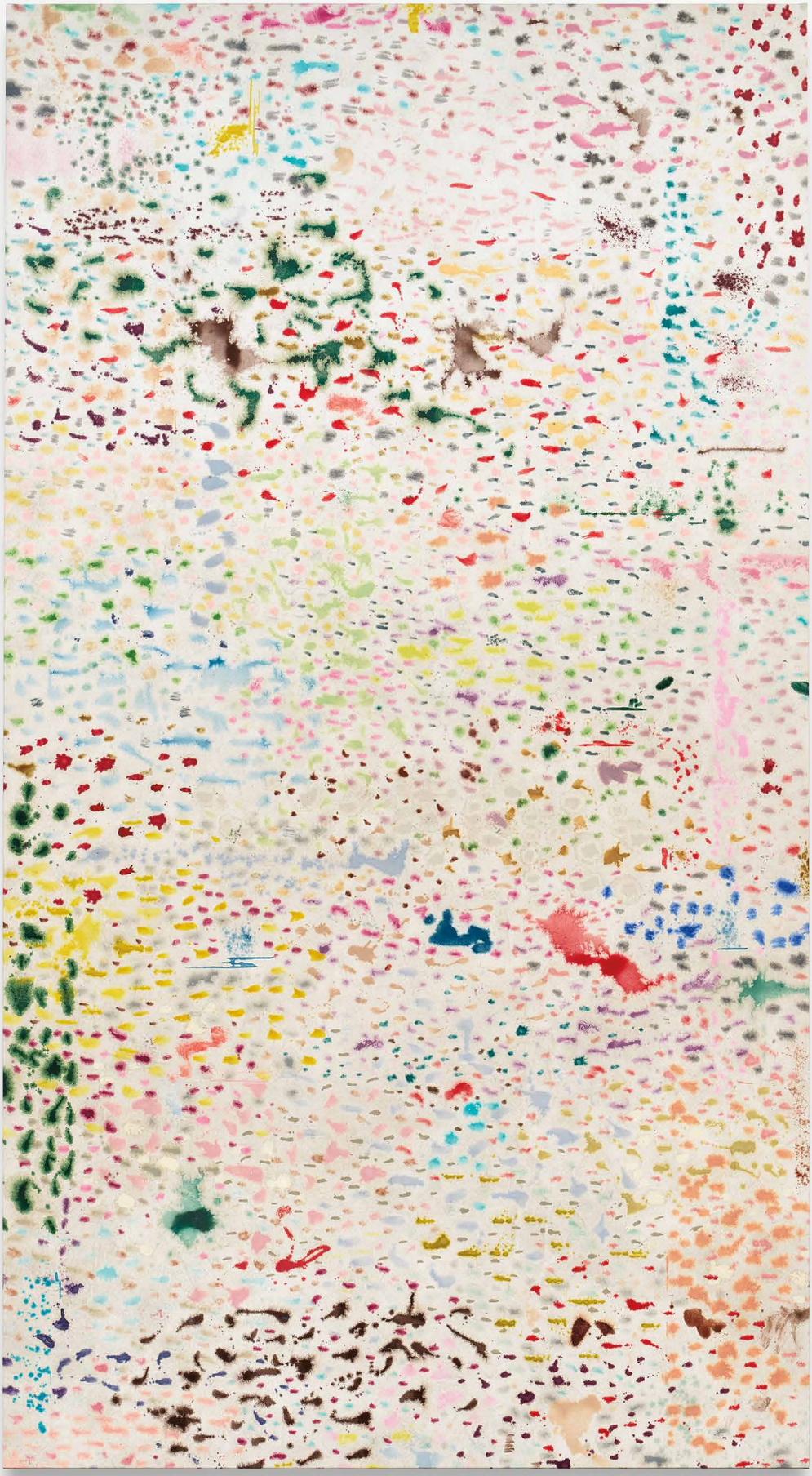
RM: I'll go first. So, there's no order to this: Abstraction as a form of refusal and as a form of generosity, simultaneously—for me, those are not at all opposites, but they do have a distinct relationship to each other. Abstraction as a form of protection. Abstraction's ambiguity—which I don't have a problem with but seems fraught in critical contexts. Abstraction as container and as rupture. Abstraction's address to form and assumptions about surface. And abstraction's relationship to narrative, time, and chronology and the way it deconstructs codes of linearity and hierarchy. Oh! And I was also curious about how you arrived at being an abstract painter, if there's an origin story.

MZH: Oh God, that list is beautiful and absolutely speaks to how I think about abstraction and to how I see your practice. So, before I read my list, I'll say that your work is part of my origin story. Your survey show at the Renaissance Society in 2005 that Susanne Ghez put together was hugely influential to me. There's no living artist who I want to talk about abstraction with more than you.

Okay, here's my list: Emptiness. Design. Systems, especially textual systems. Fragments. Excess. Margins and the frame. Repetition and the grid—I think repetition connects strongly to chronology, boredom, narratives of longevity, and how one reads a body of work versus an individual show. I'll keep going: Taste—especially glamour, tackiness, and kitsch. Figure-ground. Modernism and Hamza Walker's ongoing championing of you as a kind of last modernist. The Energizer Bunny. (*laughter*) I want to talk about the Energizer Bunny as encapsulating ideas about labor and production in cuteness. Abstraction and utopian ideals. Abstract thoughts and how the ongoingness of abstraction allows for a different kind of thinking than representation does. The value of keeping a "dead language" alive.

RM: Boredom is really interesting. I've been thinking about boredom lately because I realized I'm actually never bored. I can find something interesting at any moment, and if I can't, it's a relief. Boredom, quiet, or nothingness are not problems. They're places to recalibrate and think.

In your work, I see a kind of constant searching and open-endedness. There are so many different ways you start a painting, and you create tipping points where you seem to decide if the work is or isn't finished. You could be done, or you could keep going, and you may hold a painting open for a long time. That's a big difference between us. For me, there are certain procedures and systems that make the painting done. I could always go back and fix things up, but that's a risk, and I don't want the



paintings to look labored, heavy, or overwrought. There needs to be a genuine nonchalance.

Process, I think, keeps boredom at bay, and we're not people, perhaps, who feel bored. Do you ever get bored in your studio?

MZH: No, not at all. I do get exhausted and feel a sense of dread. Boredom and exhaustion are both anxious relationships to time. I may worry that I'm going too fast or too slow, or I won't have the energy to start something. Boredom is so far away that I actually long for it. My approaches to painting are various and, at this point, also predictable to me, but I never know which one I'm going to bring out first. I may be overstimulated, longing to sink into something that opens up into boredom, but exhaustion and dread are primary feelings.

RM: Is dread at the beginning and exhaustion at the end?

MZH: I often feel exhausted at the beginning, unsure if I can muster the energy. It's a problem of process. For me, part of the purpose of being an artist is wondering what comes up in the process of being an artist. I've been rereading Gertrude Stein's "Composition as Explanation" and thinking about her idea of beginning again. One of the things I think we mean by "process" is "starting over." What's important to me about abstraction is that its history has an established narrative about beginnings, the so-called blank slate. Of course, the slates are never actually blank, and investigating how those foundations are already fraught and loaded is interesting to me. I think I overfreight the beginning, by which I mean my intention, and then once I get going, there's silliness and lightness.

RM: That's interesting. When I'm painting in my studio, the dread lifts. I'm usually an enthusiastic person, and I can tell I need to go to the studio when I feel my Energizer Bunny fading away—I just want to point out that the Energizer Bunny is pink.

MZH: Oh, that's important. Let's name the pink bunny in the room. (*laughter*)

RM: I've long been interested in when boredom becomes banality. I remember, in 1996 or 1997, Hamza Walker brought Susanne Ghez to my studio in Chicago, and I was talking to them about these brown paintings I was making, which really had a lot of gray in them. They weren't boring, but they were banal, and Hamza said that the more of them there were, the more banal they were. I thought, Of course! Repetition is the bedfellow of banality. I've always liked thinking about that. Banality is augmented through repetition, and the idea of creating something banal is way more interesting to me than the goal or concept of repetition. I like how banality has a direct relationship to taste.

Certain palettes and tones synchronize chromatically. I still put a lot of a particular gray in my paint. The gray itself isn't visible, but the effect is: It makes all the colors a little weird, a little banal. If the term "bright colors" gets mentioned in reference to my palette, I get annoyed. "Bright colors" doesn't communicate anything of significance and is a throwaway descriptor. Color is a huge idea for me. I may use a highly keyed color, but I'm consciously trying to bring it down or do something icky to it. That's a kind of banality. Banality in the earlier paintings was different than it is now, but I'm still trying to dampen something, to degrade it.

MZH: Oh boy, do I feel you on bright colors. I really see the banality in your work, which also speaks to what I think of as irony, which is both refusal and generosity. Graying color down pulls it into the background and allows other things to happen in the foreground. This has me thinking about what it means to be a "last modernist" in this time when modernity is so palpably in the past. Your paintings consciously acknowledge space internally but also, when they are hung together, externally to each other and to the subject, or the viewer, moving in space. Your paintings mediate the history of abstraction, for me, in the sense of being alive through social, political, and aesthetic changes in history. I'm fifty now, and I feel like I bring a certain history with me as a viewer and maker. It's not actual history; it's subject history. Does that resonate?

RM: It does. Thank you for recognizing this aspect of subject history. I think that's a great point.

I printed out an email you wrote to me about four years ago, and I taped your incredible painting *Notley* to it. That painting was your contribution to the 2014 Whitney Biennial, which we were both in—you in Michelle Grabner's section, me in Anthony Elms's. I love that painting so much and how it highlights this idea of refusal and generosity at the same time. It screams a large, all-caps *NO* in impenetrable black, gray, and silver, but it's also an open and generous love letter to refusal in its creative disobedience. Its sewn-together pieces create a forceful gesture, like it needs that much buttressing to state "NO" and hold fast. In your email, you said that I was holding a door open that always seems to be slamming shut on abstraction, women, painters, modernism, and a conversation about form. And I thought, If keeping a door open is what I can do, or anybody can do, that's pretty amazing. I don't love certain sociopolitical aspects of modernism, and I don't like who got included in it and who didn't. And I don't like how that period of art history in the United States was commercialized and how abstraction came to be seen as contaminated with money. People who don't like abstraction often seem suspicious of it. But especially for artists of color, female artists, and artists who identify with underrepresented groups, modernism is a place where the door should still be held open.

What I like so much about your work is that you are so free and wild and reckless. There are no boundaries in the way you collect things and fold them into each other. I find that really inspiring. Even these paintings that you've talked about that were all beds. I think about making a bed and folding a bed and all these metaphors for fabric and how things can be contained. It all feels like an open proposal. I remember

opposite: Rebecca Morris, *Untitled (#20–25)*, 2025, oil on canvas, 156 × 84 × 2 inches. Photo by Flying Studio. Courtesy of the artist and Regen Projects, Los Angeles. © Rebecca Morris.

seeing your show *Learning Artist* in 2017 and thinking, Fuck, this is so good. The entire environment was like being in your brain.

MZH: Right, paintings and beds. That is partly about banality. Many of my paintings are scaled to the measurements of a queen-sized mattress. I have used my own bedsheets, sometimes sewing seams to make them smaller than queen-sized, but all the fabric is still there. This was a way of making a direct correlation between a generally familiar space of sleep, sex, relaxation, or depression available to anyone.

I can't emphasize enough that that recklessness and freedom is predicated on my understanding of a historical language of abstraction. All I want to do is ignite older discourses that are so exciting and full of life for me. Those discourses talk to each other, but the space in which they unfold is not totally free. I'm constantly trying to figure out how painting is a language and how it can be discursive. Right now, I'm taking a course through the Brooklyn Institute for Social Research on psychoanalysis and race, reading Freud and thinking about how Hortense Spillers writes about him. The fact of this textual history drives me, and I work with painting similarly to how an intellectual works with a historical text: I'm pulling painting apart and finding what's still potent, like gesture's relationship to form. When does a gesture solidify into a cliché? When does it open up and become truly expressive as a gesture again? And, the ongoing question, what do we even mean by "expressive"? Like bright colors being a generic association with your work, expression has always been attached to mine. I'm constantly questioning what is being expressed, who is expressing, and what is an expressive subject.

I'm energized by the way that you make some paintings through a kind of a conscious address, and then there are other canvases that function like drop cloths and hold the more "authentic" moments of gesture. There's intention and an unconscious. You allow the painting process to function on these multiple levels so that the clichés, ideas, and ornaments get caught, and then something—let's call it drawing, in the sense that drawing is improvisational and exploratory—emerges underneath them or around their edges. That structure is so fruitful. It feels so generative. The feeling of invention *is* invention: It's play, and play is a mood, literally, an endogenous hormone our bodies produce that makes endless variation within a structure possible.

RM: I think I compartmentalize and you don't. Your process feels so porous.

MZH: I long for compartmentalization. (*laughter*)

RM: I've heard you lecture on your work multiple times, and each time it's been a different talk, and you reorder your work. I do that, too, through disordering chronology and not creating a progressive hierarchical timeline and by creating a new lecture for each invitation. I'm trying to see the work in a new way or make different connections. At a

above: Molly Zuckerman-Hartung, *History Painting for the New Queer Subject*, 2016, dye, acrylic, enamel, paper, ink, rope, wood, and mixed media on canvas, 65 × 80 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago.

opposite: Molly Zuckerman-Hartung, *One Lives Several Lifetimes in the Space of an Hour*, 2025, ink, dye, spray paint, silk screen, and oil paint frottage on various synthetic and organic sewn textiles, 77 × 58 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

AN-KILLED

certain point, an artist is their own worst enemy in the studio. You have to be the creator but also the destroyer. And if you are an artist who has been working for a long time, you know how you be both. There are ways we create and ways we destroy, and neither is necessarily more creative or ingenious than the other. I like to interrupt the linearity, the chronology of the work. An artist talk is one way to do that. I hate the idea that there's one version or one story of a painting or time period because, when you were working in the studio, there were so many different possibilities in the making of the painting. I want to communicate that when I show my work—I want to highlight potential and potential potentials!

I've seen you give entire lectures on your work where you don't present a single professional image but instead show only snapshots and personal documentation from your studio. It's a nonhierarchical, real view into the studio practice. I take many, many of these shots, too, because they document the thinking. To me, there's so much generosity in your propositions, attitudes, and modes and the ways you combine material. It's very punk—maybe that's not the right word. Your refusal is about not embracing mastery, though there is mastery in your work, just not like rendering an object as photographically perfect. How do you think about refusal and abstraction?

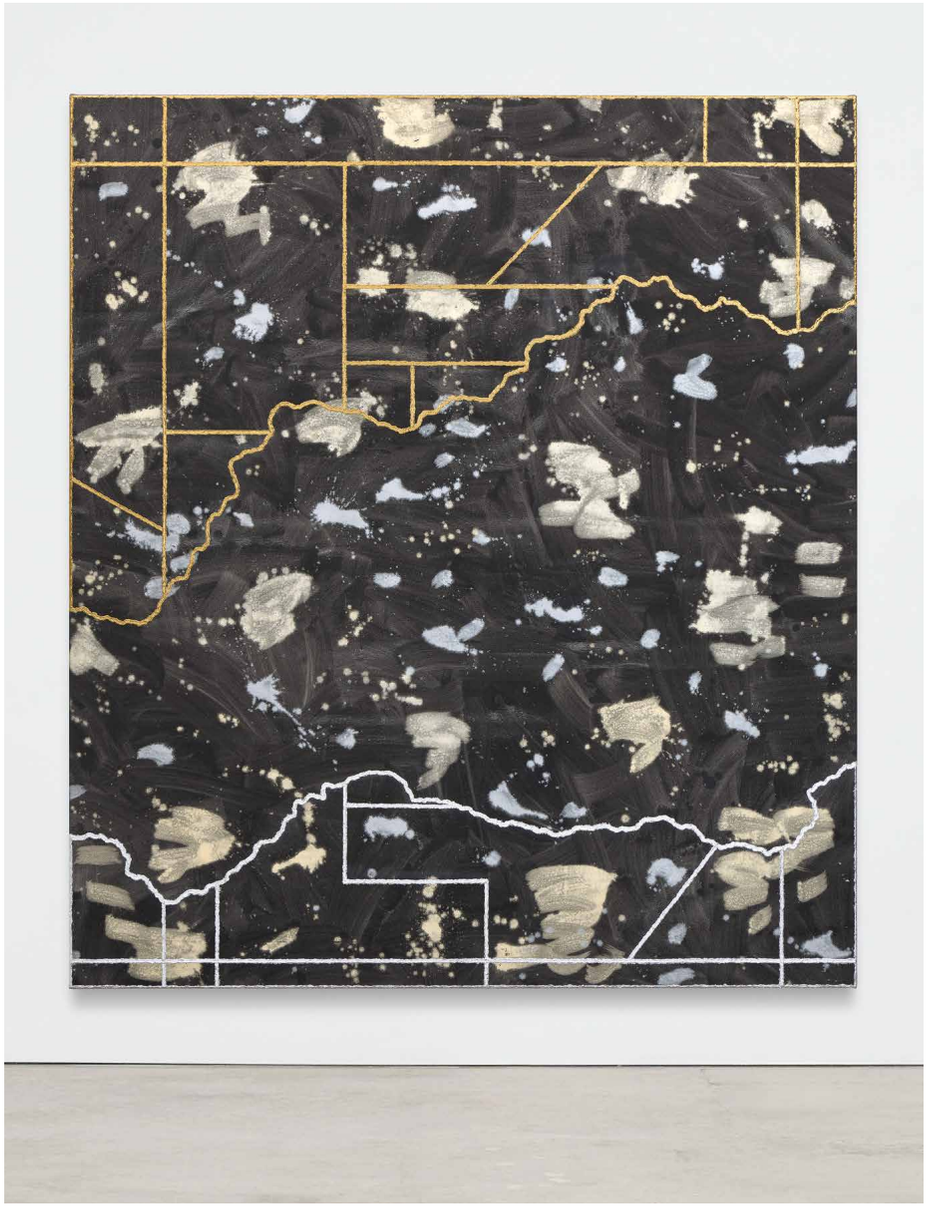
MZH: That's such a hard one. It is true I push against mastery. If somebody says "hand skills," part of me starts grumbling. I have a lot of childish punk animosities, but it feels too simple for refusal to just be equated with punk. It's a process of questioning what the actual refusal is: Where is refusal, and how can I work through it? Can refusal become a critique of value, or can it work up into an argument about social structures and the deeply disturbing assumptions we all function on? How can I rupture enclosures of identification and perhaps unsettle people, which means unsettling myself? Negation comes as a slow working through of reactivity, but then what can I actually do in the world? Lately, invitations to lecture at art schools have been my main opportunity to be an artist in public, and what I can do in those

Installation view of Rebecca Morris, *#34*, Regen Projects, Los Angeles, 2025. Photo by Flying Studio. Courtesy of Regen Projects, Los Angeles.

performances is bring a conversation back down to the ground and make the experience of what we call freedom both more ambiguous and more concrete. People come to art school, for example, looking for their style or a way of knowing. They might be trying to find a fortress of self, and they think that once they find that fortress, they can live freely inside of it. My ongoing project is to say that the fortress of self is a falsehood, and that there are other possibilities for being alive that involve more risk but also greater reward.

I think your performance is one of compartmentalization in terms of how the paintings present. On initial viewing, they are internally organized, like shelves or cubbies. Everything seems "put away." There's power in this presentation. But upon further looking, the push and pull of space challenges this impression. The paintings begin to speak to each other in a way that tells me about their construction and how they deconstruct what's built into them. Undoing operates in them. It may look like an incredible performance of competence, but the paintings become so much more complex and nuanced when installed. I felt this in your survey exhibition at the MCA Chicago. It wasn't chronological; it was relational, comparative: this blob, that blob, from paint skins to paint soaked into the canvas, these huge changes in the haptic quality of material while repeating the same gloopy shape from ten years before. There's a clarity to that in your practice. Deconstructing may be clearer for you because there are fewer parts. One of my frustrations is that I always have more parts.

RM: Thank you! Within that undoing I am describing taste. Good taste can be banal, and bad taste can disrupt. It's a faux pas to have bad taste, but bad taste is a way of pushing back on normative ideas about gender and class, capitalism and aspiration. I am a woman, and when I grew up in the '70s as a kid, the '80s as a teenager, and the '90s in my twenties, taste was a way to push back against expectations of what and where I was supposed to be. I use it now to make something that can't be consumed so easily as beautiful or polite. Being a woman and making paintings that could be considered beautiful is fraught.



above: Rebecca Morris, *Untitled (#04–25)*, 2025, oil and spray paint on canvas, 94 × 83 × 2 inches. Photo by Flying Studio. Courtesy of the artist and Regen Projects, Los Angeles. © Rebecca Morris.

MZH: I'm so with you. This also has to do with modernism—I'm thinking about Baudelaire and his definition of beauty in "The Painter of Modern Life" as being composed of a duality between the frivolous, inessential, and fashionable and the eternal and invariable. There are different discourses of taste, and I think you cannot bring up taste without knowing you are speaking about class. But maybe I would venture that modernism involves engaging consciously, even critically, with fashion, as Baudelaire proposes. Questions of what is seen as tasteful are fascinating to me.

Something I've noticed over my lifetime is this constant sense of getting it wrong, sometimes intentionally, sometimes not. Growing up in a punk scene, for example, everybody painted their houses gaudy colors. One of my first shows in Chicago, I painted the floor blue, and Michelle Grabner wrote a review that called the shade "lurid." I thought it was beautiful. So, when I moved from the context of 1990s Olympia, Washington, riot grrrl, and punk rock into the early 2000s conceptual-inflected Chicago art scene, I had a crash course in self-consciously deployed taste. I encountered your work during that hungry, exciting, but

also highly shame-filled time, and it was a kind of life raft, like your pairing of pink and brown, for example. Pink is a constant obsession for me. It's not about the body. Using fluorescent pink pigment, wearing it as lipstick—like, Should I wear lipstick? Should I not wear lipstick? These gender problems keep changing as I age, and I don't think I ever get it right. I still don't know what gender I'd like to perform, but I know it's going to be a performance, whatever it is. I feel that in how I make objects too. How do you come to your gender?

RM: These questions about appearance and gender are charged in what things look like—how smooth or rough a surface is, how direct the paint handling is, the literal thinness of the paint, and the color. Through all this an attitude, a stance, is taken. I feel like I can better figure this out in making work. I can dig in, in ways that feel satisfying.

MZH: This brings to mind the weird impasto parts of your paintings that are so compelling to me. These built-up, chunky lines do something dialectically between deep space and surface. There's a kind of abjection to them, too, in that they're glammed up in gold or silver. The placement is not exactly ham-fisted but somehow kitschy or bawdy in just the right way. The first time I saw a painting with them, I was like, What? I hate that. (*laughter*) The fluidity of the pour and the wrinkling of the paint in your early paintings, like the brown puddles, felt so right, and then these lumpy things felt so wrong, maybe because they're so handmade. I've spent a few years thinking about that rightness and wrongness of touch. It feels related to getting dressed in the morning, like putting on lipstick or not.

RM: Putting on lipstick is ornamentation. There is that terrible expression about trying to make something ugly beautiful: "putting lipstick on a pig." The impasto lines are specific forms of ornamentation in the painting that disrupt expectations about taste in timelessness. When to do it and what it does are some of my questions. It'd be great to make a masterpiece, a timeless work of art that would always be relevant and always offer someone something to appreciate. But at the same time, I'm attracted to things—objects, colors, styles, design and architecture, and so on—that have timed out and no longer look good. Those are really important. I've become fascinated by their usefulness and how they revolve through cycles of being remined and repurposed. I look to these cycles to think about how to pull these things into a work. If you represent them explicitly, then you're just referencing something that's out; but if you can involve them in abstraction, they have a lot of power to ask questions and create a crack. I'm interested in timelessness as a goal, but timelessness is not interesting in and of itself.

MZH: In "Manifesto (For Abstractionists and Friends of the Non-Objective)," you wrote about black and brown being the future and making paintings that look like they'd been locked up in a shed since the '40s. So powerful. I mean, you mapped out the timeline: past, present, and future! I'm thinking about color and how I relate to these ideas. I have long used color in a way that was cultural or trying to feel the mood of a time. There is always a palette for a place or for a time. You can take a lot of notes about color, and I do, but it's something you have to feel. Color sets a haptic, bodily mood. With painting, seeing and touching are never actually separated, and that feels always relevant. At the Whitney Biennial in 2014, you had started draining the saturation and materiality out of your work. The paintings felt so thin, like they were really absorbed into the canvas, but you had done something with the ground. I've heard you speak about Los Angeles and the light, and this must have been the LA light but bleached.

RM: It's true the color was draining from the painting. I was exiting painting then and heightening drawing. Neither of us makes the same thing over and over, and I think that goes back to boredom and trying to build something for ourselves, trying to break out of a single narrative structure.

I love what you just said about trying to feel the mood of the time through color. That experience is personal. You told me once that you were doing a lot of research into one's subjectivity, thinking about it as a sufficient reason to act. I'm curious where you are in your thinking about that now.

MZH: I'm still concerned with the question of one's subjectivity and thinking about the subject dialectically. How I became a subject, how other people became subjects, is through the social: The social comes first, and we emerge from that pressurized, totalizing space into something broken, riven with unconsciousness, but somehow beautiful for that. People use the word *identity*, but for me, *subject* and *subjectivity* allow messiness and confusion and a nonscientific approach to lead the way. And subjectivity, something shot through with the experience of the world, is messy. I've always tended to be an effusive, exuberant speaker. I say a lot of things that come out in a big tumult, and that gets read as a continuity of expression. But I really want expression to feel fragmented because there isn't a single subject here; there are parts vying, and there's argument. Understanding the subject as a problem is part of the ongoing push against fascism, which I see privileging this longing for wholeness and continuity and closure on the subject level. The more we feel rattled by the things around us, the more that need emerges.

RM: Yes, continuity in a dangerous way—that desire for the one narrative, the one clean version of things.

MZH: Totally. That brings us to this question of chronology. Could you riff on the way you number your paintings and shows? You're introducing linearity with this numbering system, but then what does that do to chronology?

RM: I started not titling my paintings around 2000, but then that got complicated, so I created a numbering system along with the word *Untitled*. It was very pragmatic: *#01-25* would be the first painting I finished of 2025, and *#02-25* would be the next. What I like about the numbering system as it stands now is that it's not truly as chronological as it seems, because the number doesn't refer to when I start a painting, only when I finish one. Paintings sometimes take two years

to make, and in that time I'll start and finish others.

I stopped titling paintings because I didn't want my point of view to be a guiding principle. I don't like how people hold on to the information in a title and privilege the artist's intent. I wanted to remove language from the work. Titling a show seemed like an opportunity to recognize what a body of work was doing, so there were shows called *Shards and Skywindows* and *The Ache of Bright*—that was a really good title from Martha Ronk, a poet in LA, which encapsulated this moment in my paintings that you described earlier, when color was being desaturated. But then, since I was numbering the paintings, I thought to number the solo shows too. I've done it more consistently recently, and once I stopped putting any narrative on the work, it's gotten harder to reintroduce it. I did give my survey show a quasi title that was just my name and the years of the paintings, 2001 to 2022, which is just a catalog entry, so the exhibition would be recognized for what it was: twenty-one years of work.

MZH: There's something about the way those numbers feel in relation to your paintings. For me, you hold the systems that the numbers seem to point to, and they become a kind of internal organizing system that allows for cross-referencing. No painting is unique; it's part of a larger system. Indexing is a subjective activity but also keeps track as an organizational method.

At your show at Regen Projects, there are two brown and pink and gold paintings hung on adjacent walls. The smooshy gold lines describe a grid that's been torn, and my associative connection was to maps, Rolodexes, index card files at the library, all these tactile memories of archives and organization. The gold lines are thick but thin and delicate as jewelry but then not. I kept exclaiming at how the material sits on the ground and how deep the paintings are. That pinky brown is emotional, earthy, soulful. And the paintings are slightly different pinkish browns, but it's not a difference you can hold in your mind; it's experiential. For me, when painting pushes at my analytical brain too hard, it's like being tickled. It breaks down a defense, and then the warmth of the paintings holds me—holds things that feel far apart inside me close together. The paintings are spatially tricky, which they aren't always. In the early 2000s, for instance, they used to sit very much on the surface.

RM: I really appreciate your take on those paintings and those lines as tactical organization. I also think of them as physically soldered lines or seams because of the metallic aspect. I was obsessed with dollhouses as a girl. When you look at the back of a dollhouse—which is really the front, because it's the side you play with—it's a grid. Each room is a cube. I think these two paintings can look like maps, but your read as defunct forms of organization is great and circles back to outdated things that don't get used anymore but still have meaning. The grid is great because it can hold fragmentation, hold in a protective orbit.

You have your own way with lines and delineating, which is maybe why you see it in my paintings. Your fragments are often pieces of various things that you've made or collected—fabric, canvas scraps, drawings—and you sew them together. So, like my impasto lines, you have the raised lines of the seams to contend with. They three-dimensionally mark out zones, and you've used both the "front" side, the good, seamless side, and the reverse side, which in sewing is the wrong side, as a surface.

MZH: You're right, I recognize and process your impasto lines as akin to my seams. I see them serving meaningfully and also variably, like how the line in your painting is deployed differently over time, and this is what makes it feel more semiotic than aesthetic. It was great to go back and forth between those two brownish pink paintings. The two slightly different shades in each are like two really great lipstick colors that you can't quite differentiate, like, Which one? Which one?

RM: I was surprised when you said that pink didn't feel like a bodily color. I don't think it's a color you see on the outside, but it does feel like something from inside the body.

MZH: Yeah, absolutely. It's weirdly latent. Pink swells. It's so emotional, and it can be in a very hard or cold package. Pink emerges, literally, in my memory. De Kooning's pink is so fucking good. It's a go-to; I can't help it. There's something deeply heart-concerning about pink, and at the same time, what is that shitty, calamine lotion pink? And then there's Barbie pink. Pink does it for me in a funny way because it feels fundamentally fraught and also earnest and direct. It's a cooled-off warmth. There's something about the way the various shades lay down on a surface, and how they work with other colors: Hot pink and brown do something amazing together. Pink and orange is one of my all-time favorite color combinations. It can really buzz.

RM: Agreed, in full. Pink just makes me bonkers. There are certain colors I focus on for a while, get what I need, and set aside, but pink creates an endless loop of desire. If I make a pink painting, I'm trying to do this encyclopedic experience of pink, and when I finish it, all I want to do is start another pink painting right away. The finished painting does not satisfy the lust. It's a desire to mix the color and sit with it, to see all the versions of it, to contaminate it, make it filthy, like a dirty ballet shoe, and then to heighten it to some kind of gentle petal or something pretty like porcelain. It drives me crazy.

MZH: God, I so relate to that loop of desire and labor. I was on an airplane back in 2004 or 2005, and I just started thinking intensely about pink. It filled my mind. When I flew back to Chicago, I started making a pink painting, and that was really the beginning for me. It was about this feeling of pink and the difference between the feeling of a color and actually working with colors themselves. I still think about that transition between the memory and feeling of pink and the making every time I return to it.

RM: Which I think is why it's important that the Energizer Bunny is pink. That feels important and satisfying as truth.

MZH: As truth.