

ArtSeen

Rebecca Shore: *Green Light*

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By Jared Quinton



Installation view: *Rebecca Shore: Green Light*, Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago, 2021. Courtesy Corbett vs. Dempsey. Photo: Robert Chase Heishman.

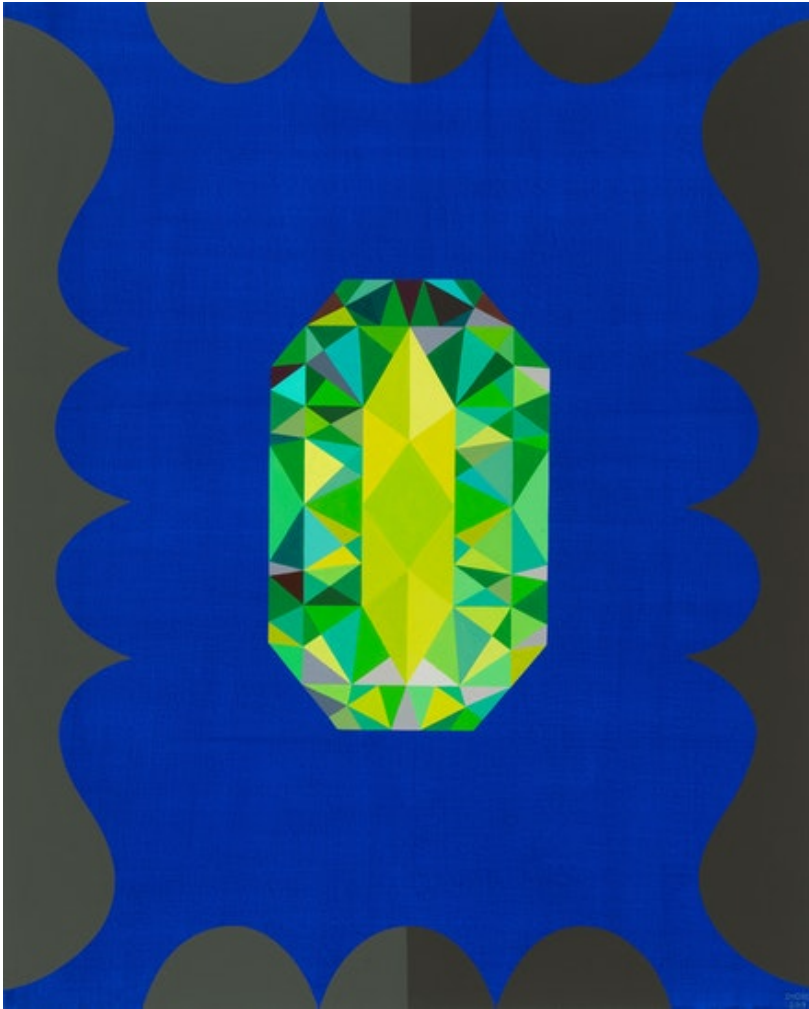
On View

Corbett vs. Dempsey

March 26 – April 24, 2021

Chicago

An emerald gemstone appears throughout the 48 modestly sized paintings in Rebecca Shore's elegant exhibition, *Green Light*. Densely faceted with triangles in all different shades of green, the jewels float against fields of soft blacks and blues, or sit woven into tangled decorative motifs. Neither symbolic nor literal, Shore's emerald forms seem to hover outside of time and space, occupying an elusive realm where illusionism and geometric abstraction merge in a dynamic but uneasy tension.

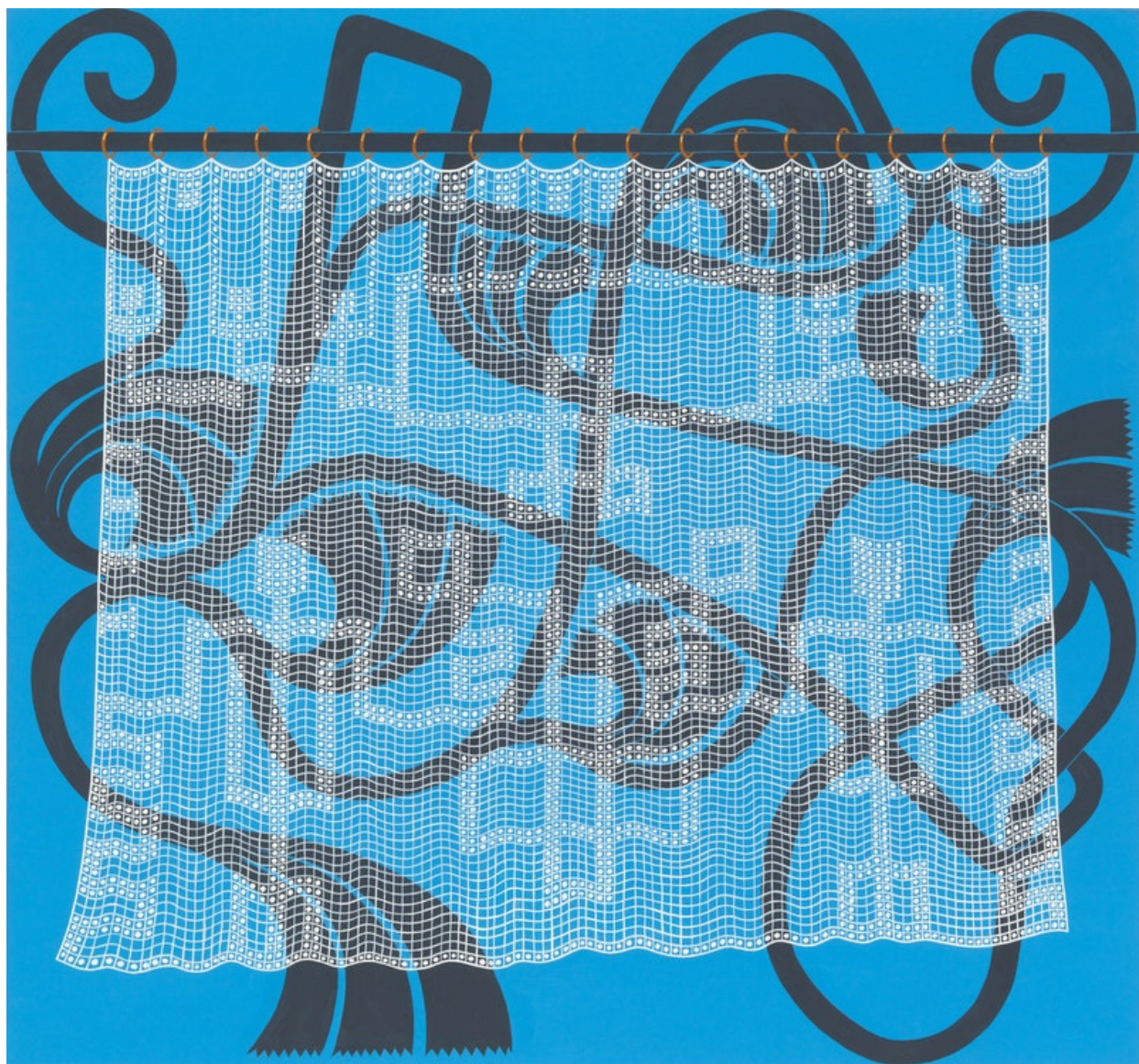


Rebecca Shore, *Untitled (19-02)*, 2019. Acrylic on linen, 35 x 28 inches. Courtesy the artist and Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago. Photo: Tom Van Eynde.

The repeated use of this gemstone feels like a marked departure for Shore. Weighty and frontal—and bordering on gaudy—it lends the acrylics on linen and panel and gouaches on paper that make up this exhibition a strong gravitational pull. Shore's work over the past several years has, by contrast, embraced a decidedly all-over and delicate compositional ethos, wherein stylized representations of chains, draperies, ironwork, and architectural ornamentations coalesce in intricate, rhythmic arrangements that unfurl subtle variations in pattern and symmetry. There is a certain logic to Shore's choice of the emerald motif, however, given the hard-edge precision, intimate scale, and jewel tones she usually gravitates towards. Here, the gallery's main wall holds an impressive salon-style hang of three dozen smaller works, which accentuates the viewer's experience of the exhibition as a collection of precious, sparkling treasures. Shore identifies this emerald as a means to experiment with variations in directional light and color relativity. It's perhaps even more interesting as an exaggerated investigation of the problem, central to painting, of representing three-dimensional objects on a two-dimensional picture plane. In two large paintings that feature a single, central emerald—*Untitled (19-02)* and *Untitled (19-05)* (both 2019)—Shore paints the facets with a precision that does not hide their handmade character. Her analytical rendering of perspective still requires the viewer to take wild leaps of imagination, and at close range, any sense of depth dissolves into tumbling patterns of triangles and diamonds, with accents of brown and gray that only vaguely hint at reflections outside pictorial space.

Meanwhile, in works that feature multiple gems, like *Untitled (19-24)* and *Untitled (19-26)* (both 2019), the perspectives and light sources don't seem to cohere quite as they should from object to object. Taking in the works *en masse*, a viewer might be both unsettled and delighted by the oscillation between hyperrealist effects and the total collapse of illusion into intricate plays of surface, shape, and tone.

In a group of works that stand apart from the rest (visually, although not physically), Shore renders sheer lace curtains that hang from rows of hoops, their delicate gravity manifested in gracefully wandering lines. Whether set against a dark, stylized rendering of a decorative iron grate—as in *Untitled (20-08)* (2020)—or occupying an empty, de Chirico-like architectural space—as in *Untitled (20-44G)* (2020)—these gauzy textiles mark another way of exploring the play between intricate surface patterning and illusionistic space. More compelling are a handful of works in which Shore's emeralds are set in eerie, almost ritualistic scenarios, suspended from chains over Neoclassical-looking fountains or supported by the silhouettes of intricate wooden pedestals; these confounding compositions conjure depth and flatness in equal measure. Shore never seems to lead us too far in any perceptual direction, reveling instead in spatial ambiguity and enigmatic beauty.



Rebecca Shore, *Untitled (20-08)* 2020. Acrylic on linen, 26 x 28 inches. Courtesy the artist and Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago. Photo: Tom Van Eynde.

When I first saw these works in Shore's Chicago studio back in November 2020, I discovered that we are both from the same part of the country: the northern Connecticut River Valley, with its rolling green farmlands and small, idyllic towns. I see a definite New England sensibility in Shore's work, expressed in the way her layered and recycled silhouettes evoke the Shaker craftsmanship, textile mills, quilt patterns, and quirky architectural details of the region. All of this intermixes with the legacy of her training with Christina Ramberg and decades working in the tradition of Chicago Imagism, with its playful approaches to color and figuration, and unabashed incorporation of high and low culture, art history, and commercial design. The subtle genius of Shore's practice lies in the gradual mutations that unfold through the measured repetition of her motifs, the way her influences and inspirations are absorbed, reconfigured, and recycled. No two forms are ever quite the same, and yet everything is related. *Green Light* maintains the intimate feel of my encounter with Shore's work in her studio: it is a generous snapshot into the artist's working process, a momentary pause along the evolutionary trajectory of her esoteric imagery.

Contributor

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Jared Quinton is a curator and writer.