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ArtReview



Ibrahim Mahama

Rebecca Morris #29

Corbett vs Dempsey, Chicago 18 March – 23 April

Almost every discussion of Rebecca Morris brands her as a hard-line abstractionist – due, in part, to a cheeky manifesto published in 2006 as an *Artforum* ad, since widely circulated, for an exhibition at Galerie Barbara Weiss. One wonders if the expectations of that designation ever get tiresome. In her 29th solo exhibition on the matter, Morris discloses that abstraction isn't really about following rules; rather, it is a vague, occasionally serendipitous and thus insatiable pursuit.

The show opens with a sampler. *Untitled* (#08–21) (2021) is an excavation in progress: amidst a brushy, black background, distinct patterns float in little windows. Sooty dots and dashes; a chamomile network intersecting at lime-green coordinates; various microscopic views of craquelure; and a little nestled triangle of crusted cobalt all appear like fragments of an uncovered mosaic – until one notices the

colourful drips atop the painting. Morris actually painted the black first, set the patterns in like gems with a wet brush – hence the interstitial drips – then sealed off the edges with a knobby, silvered fringe.

Of the eight paintings on show, roughly half jigsaw together in the sedimentary vein of *Untitled* (#08–21), though their parts are not exactly complementary or unified by any agreeable colour scheme. In *Untitled* (#02–21) (2021) a bare field of coal-coloured squiggles abuts a contained collision of varying green swatches – two of twelve distinct, scaffolded sections. By letting paint pool and dry variously and working between several canvases at once, it's as if Morris is constantly starting over, allowing each move to be new and discrete.

The other works play with self-imposed structures: a chequerboard, an overlaid outline. *Untitled* (#01–22) (2022) is a saturated red expanse,

within which silver and chartreuse spatters trail and oddly snap to invisible perpendicular lines. Stray footprints signal the painting's beginning as a drop cloth, recording also the edges of past canvases; Morris garnishes that memento of action painting with her signature silver trim – more oil paint, dried and spraypainted. Though not the most immediate at first, it is *Untitled* (#11–21) (2021), a chequerboard, that lingers. The pink squares appear diluted and textureless, with no trace of brushwork. The green panes each feature three tones: celadon, moss and seafoam. Blotted and pulling apart to the edges, the marks continually negotiate their clarity. From afar, the painting is still a grid, but the progression falls just short of a logic. Rather, the whole composition shifts like camouflage, momentarily beckoning us towards crystallisation, while keeping its endgame subtly elusive. *AlexJen*



Untitled (#11–21), 2021, oil and spraypaint on canvas, 203 × 142 cm.
Photo: Flying Studio. Courtesy the artist and Corbett vs Dempsey, Chicago