

Press Release

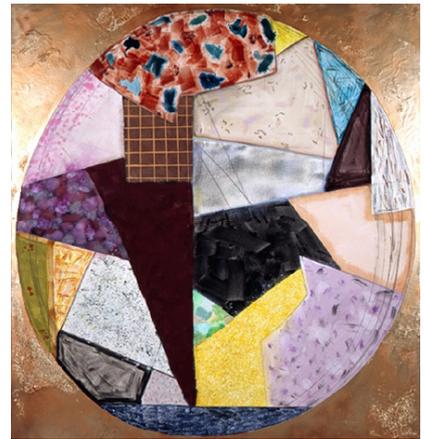
Rebecca Morris

For Abstractionists and Friends of The Non-Objective

September 2 – October 4, 2006

Opening: Friday, September 1, 7 – 9 pm

Gallery hours: Tuesday – Saturday, 11 am – 6 pm



Rebecca Morris, *Untitled (#05-06)*, 2006

The works of the American painter Rebecca Morris confront elements of cool formalism with a conspicuously hands-on use of material and paint. She paints many-layered and evocative works replete with art-historical and everyday references, and with a very personal and topical approach to abstraction. Following her solo exhibition in the renowned Renaissance Society in Chicago 2005, Galerie Barbara Weiss is now showing new large-format paintings. Rebecca Morris lives and works in Los Angeles, California.

The works selected show indefinable ornamental coloured shapes on a predominantly dark background, using multiple layers of oil and spray paint. Rebecca Morris lays her canvases flat and paints them from above, applying amorphous, often rounded, drop shaped, but also sharp-edged and pointed clusters of colour that can be either seamlessly adjacent, cut and superimposed on one another, or isolated. They combine to form collage-like images reminiscent of patchwork blankets, piled up remnants of wallpaper, displays of semi-precious stones or drops of colour on velvet.

One explicit art-historical reference made in several pictures in this show is to the Electric Prisms, Orphistic colour disk paintings done by Sonia Delaunay-Terk in 1915 and 1916. Together with her husband Robert, Delaunay-Terk played an important role in the development of geometrical abstraction. She made her name less as a painter, however, than through the practical application of her aesthetic principles on tapestries, book covers, furniture and interior decoration. After the war she opened a fashion salon.

In her use of spray paint Rebecca Morris alludes to the (sub)cultural medium of graffiti, giving her motifs a powerful depth, softness and ephemerality – in the painting *Untitled (#04-06)* of 2006 the silver and gold sprayed patches of colour seem like floating meteorites. This use of spray paint can also be seen as a reference to the little-known painter Hedda Sterne, who was born in 1916 and used acrylic spray alongside oils in several works (like *Black Cloud*, 1959). Sterne is the only woman to be seen on the legendary group photo “The Irascibles” that featured in the popular magazine *Life* in 1951 and showed the first generation of the male representatives of the New York School.

“There is no style”, “there is no school”, proclaimed Thomas B. Hess, editor of *Art News*, in 1958, in support of the Abstract Expressionists who were refusing to have their works subsumed under the idea of one pictorial language. This defiant motto could also apply to Rebecca Morris, whose works reject any clean, self-referential and forced abstract style. She rather uses an unconventional mix of references that point to various languages, including realms outside of modernism, crafted tricks and conscious “mistakes”, as well as “real” materials, so as to cultivate a tense presence that challenges the viewer to a spontaneous response.

„Cool is when I have the freedom and capacity to step forward as well as back. Instead of being alone and exposed with my oedipal trauma. This ability to use at will not only the moments one has always commanded, the subjective ones, but also those one does not command, the objectivity and historicity of one’s languages and backgrounds, is without doubt what is truly surprising, but also relaxing and entertaining about Morris’s work. It shows us that, as a contemporary subject, one can carry out an easing and unburdening reference to things that came before, a relationship that is not religious or traditionalistic, but the opposite: *modern*.”

(Diedrich Diederichsen on Rebecca Morris’ painting, in the exhibition catalogue *Rebecca Morris: Paintings 1996-2005*, The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, 2005)

Barbara Buchmaier

Exhibitions (selection)

2006: (*Keep Feeling*) *Fascination: Recent Abstract Painting in Los Angeles*, Luckman Gallery, Los Angeles, California; *Figures in the Field*, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois; 2005: *Rebecca Morris: Paintings 1996-2005*, The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois; *Diamond Hand Grenade* (group show), Midway Contemporary Art, Minneapolis, Minnesota; *Abstraktes* (group show), Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin; 2004: *Drawing: Seven Curatorial Responses* (group show), curated by John Rasmussen, Katherine E. Nash Gallery, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota; 2003: *Frankenstein*, The Santa Monica Museum of Art, Project Room, Santa Monica, California