

# REGEN PROJECTS

Zapfen, Patrick. "Rebecca Morris, '#34,' at Regen Projects." *Caesura Magazine* (October 3, 2025) [online]



## Rebecca Morris, “#34,” at Regen Projects

Oct 3, 2025  
Patrick Zapfen

Rebecca Morris’s current show at Regen Projects, titled simply *#34*, after its place in the sequence of solo shows that constitutes the artist’s career evinces a painter who, having reached a certain stage of maturity, looks to take stock of the work she’s produced. How does it reflect her understanding of painting? What has held up and what is yet to convince? Where are the points at which painting can be made to go further, through which it can still argue its claim to experience? *#34* is a waypoint along Morris’s *curriculum vitae* (literally “course of life”), an exercise in aesthetico-historical judgment, dilated and condensed into a baker’s dozen of paintings.

The work proceeds largely by way of contrast, a kind of call and response in which one move inspires a subsequent counterpoint, and so the elements push and pull against each other laterally across the surface, creating the effect of a tectonically vibrating collage. Morris’s drawing, by which she delineates the border of each field of painterly gesture, consists largely of grids, ovals, and a tremorous line that in paintings like *Untitled (#25-25)* and *Untitled (#28-25)* seems to mimic the contours of mineral formations or follow the edges of roughly torn paper, resulting in a shallow depth of field made up of overlapping planes — a collaged terrazzo effect — while in paintings like *Untitled (#04-25)* and *Untitled (#20-24)* this line snakes across the canvas from edge to edge as if tracing the path of a river seen from above or, as in the case of *Untitled (#21-24)*, recording the wiry tendrils of a lightning strike. These are abstract paintings, of course, but ones that seem intent on staking out a kind of non-representational naturalism that painting could exclusively claim for itself, from which it could derive its own problematics of form and thereby attain a semblance of objectivity — *autonomy*, in other words.

I want to say something about this latter point, which I take to be one of abstraction’s most misunderstood precepts and thus the source of much confusion and malignment. The objectivity towards which art asymptotically tends is not a real objectivity (in the sense of belonging solely to ‘things-in-themselves,’ apart from any subject) but the

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appearance of an objectivity — the mirage — formed out of the congealed supra-individual subjectivity of society as an estranged, transcendent whole (i.e. greater than the sum of its parts). Put more plainly, the 'moments' of aesthetic experience which the abstract artist isolates in the work find resonance with other viewers — who are not the artist and therefore cannot share their intuition — because these elements possess something universal about them that while not immediately identifiable is nonetheless recognized and felt. Using the language of psychoanalysis, we might say that they have been invested with libidinal energy and that the accumulation of this energy over time (in history) creates a forcefield that attracts the unconscious mind's attention. How else to explain the spell that's sometimes cast by the most ordinary and familiar of sights, in which one almost expects to find the secrets of life divulged and the whole of existence resolved? And once felt, how hard to dispel the impression; how hesitantly we return to the matter at hand.



*Untitled (#28-25)*, 2025. Oil on canvas, 90 x 97 x 2 1/8 in. © Rebecca Morris, courtesy the artist and Regen Projects. Photo: Flying Studio.

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*Untitled (#06-25)*, 2025. Oil and spray paint on canvas, 80 1/4 x 80 x 2 1/8 in. © Rebecca Morris, courtesy the artist and Regen Projects. Photo: Flying Studio.

Coming back to Morris, I get the sense that she is trying to make a case for [‘Painting’](#) after all — for painting as a still uncharted territory into which the artist must boldly venture, groping through the dark corners of matter and memory without definite sense of direction or any guarantee that the effort pays off, that the land is worth mapping. The work that results from such speculation necessarily skirts failure; it possesses an uncertain, yet-to-be-decided value. At times, the paintings in #34 present as awkward and ungainly. Morris’s pursuit of contrast above all does not always resolve into a coherent *tableau*; despite the vibrant wash of turquoise energetically brushed in to form the ground, the isolated *morceaux* of *Untitled (#27-25)* feel like they’re floating in a painterly purgatory, as if Morris simply wanted to catalogue them for a later, more purposeful use. For all their abstraction, the best works in the show — *Untitled (#23-25)* and *Untitled (#24-25)* — remind me most of Manet’s portrait of Zola in that the illusionistic space of painting is compressed without thereby being eradicated; emphasis



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is placed on the shallow depth of flatness, and Morris's paintings read as a careful arrangement of screens or windows: paintings within paintings. The framing mechanisms that she deploys in these lead the eye into the paintings' interior ("[t]heir interior, rather than their inwardness," as Benjamin remarked about Klee), and give the effect of passing through a series of thresholds while never quite penetrating the scrim of appearance. Like Kafka's condemned, we are left to make sense of answers whose questions cannot be named.



*Untitled (#24-25)*, 2025. Oil on canvas, 90 1/8 x 80 1/8 x 2 1/8 in. © Rebecca Morris, courtesy the artist and Regen Projects. Photo: Flying Studio.