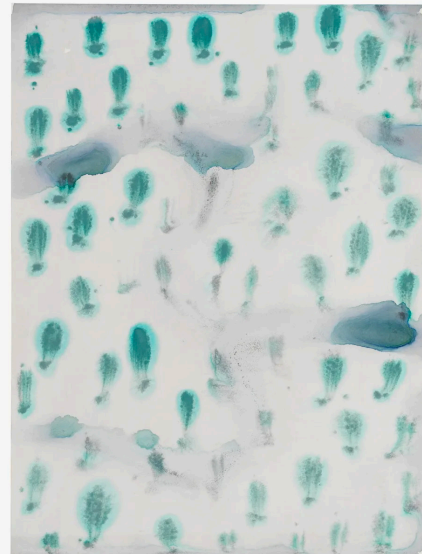


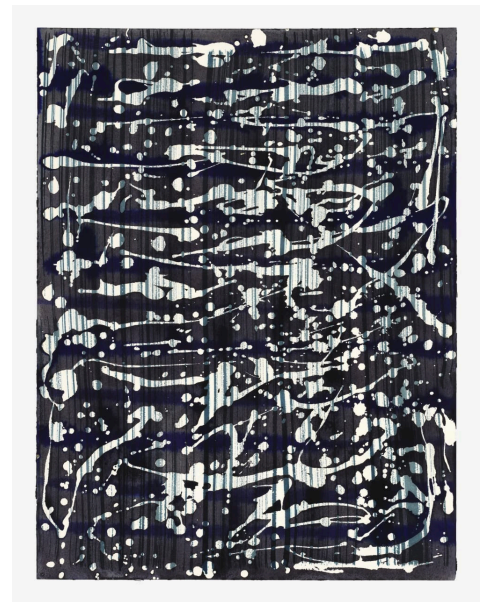
THE BIG DIG: REBECCA MORRIS • DRAWINGS

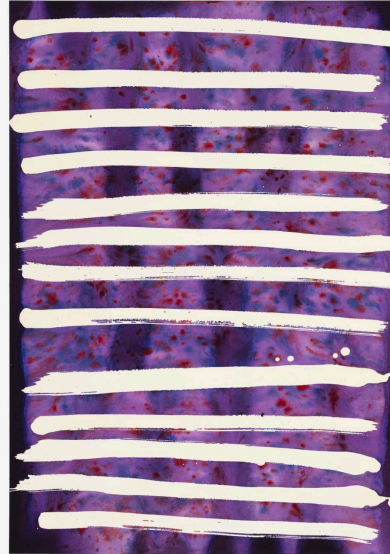
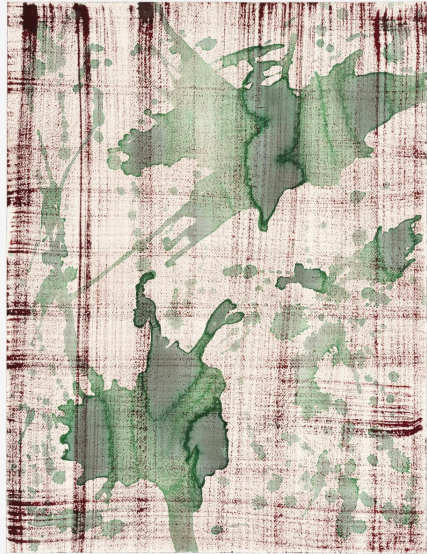


SINCE HER EARLY YEARS AS A PAINTER IN THE MID 1990S, REBECCA MORRIS HAS PERIODICALLY STEPPED AWAY FROM HER CANVASES

to make drawings. She comes to the works on paper fresh, with an open mind and no particular agenda, as a way of uncorking ideas, but she is also systematic about them, letting each sheet draw her into new material, then rigorously exploring it by means of theme and variation, experimentation and refinement. If the paintings are like complex musical suites, these relatively modestly scaled drawings are more like ambient meditations - uniform fields of activity, little closed ecosystems of color, pattern, and texture, in which a viewer can get completely absorbed. In her studio in Los Angeles, Morris dedicates a discrete space to the organization and storage of these works, which occupy a parallel universe to that of her authoritative large-scale abstractions. In this inaugural Big Dig, we introduce a selection of Rebecca Morris's recent drawings, featuring an interview with the artist and studio images that place the works on paper in the context of her current studio practice.







JOHN CORBETT AND REBECCA MORRIS

IN CONVERSATION

John Corbett: Some artists treat drawing as a preparatory act, some as a totally independent activity. In your case, painting and drawing clearly have a pact, but the nature of that understanding is hard to plumb, remains mysterious. What's the relationship between drawing and painting in your practice?

Rebecca Morris: I love to paint but taking a time out—often when work leaves the studio or at some other natural pause—is really important. It sort of refreshes everything. It helps to flip the energy into a new kind of mode.

I do the drawings (waterbased mixed media on paper) a few times a year in concentrated blocks of time. The drawings are smaller in scale, very spontaneous, and made quickly, working with the liquidity of the water-based material. They are very color driven.

Many moves that take place in the drawings can precede actions or moments that happen in the paintings. It's rewarding on a personal level because I see visual connections, choices and directions before they have more concretely manifested. I am not someone who needs proof they are in the right direction but it is cool to see a kind of consistency and searching drive that doesn't waver, even if it has no name or location yet.

JC: How do the works on paper occupy space in the studio? They're collected into boxes, but it seems like they also have a periodic presence in relation to the paintings. Like they're in conversation with them, or like they're an audience of drawings looking at the paintings. And in turn being looked at by them. And when they're spread out in the studio, they have a swatch-like quality that bears some relationship to the patchwork element in certain trajectories of the canvas works. From one to another, they manifest a kind of color intensive quick change vibe, moving from one whole visual world directly into another in the span of a sheet of paper, but within one drawing they're unitary and singular, more drone or techno than complex multipart composition.

RM: I like that the works on paper have to start on their own, from a ground zero to create their own autonomy, but that over the course of making them, connections to the paintings will become clear and visible. The drawings are single images within the space of the paper and don't have to fit into something else, like the sections of the paintings do and I work quickly and more serially than I do in the paintings.

Standing as I work, looking across studio as they dry on the floor, is great for seeing the repetitions and color. I replay things, certain gestures, colors. But each comes out differently even if I make the exact same mark on the same kind and size of paper, because the liquidity of the paint and paper absorption is unique each time. I can make the "same one" over and over, without making the same one. This interests me.



JC: You have a special set of watercolors from the year 2017. What's the story with those?

RM: I didn't make any works on paper in 2015 and I saw the gap as a missed moment to catalog and record whatever might have developed. So, when I ordered paper in 2017, I ordered a lot thinking I would make up for it. I ordered so much paper that the two week period I'd planned to spend, turned into two months. The rule quickly became "you have to work until you run out of paper". Which me pushed me through a lot of natural stopping points because I still had paper! It was also an intense moment. I had just finished doing a solo show at Galerie Barbara Weiss, my first one since Barbara passed away. So, the activity felt really good and grounding, and the perimeters of the activity were very direct, uncomplicated. No big scale shifts, nothing toxic, I didn't need help to move things as I worked. I could just go.

I haven't actually counted the complete number, but there are seven boxes from 2017. Seems like lots of sevens in any case. My hope for them is a solo show where they would be exhibited in a context exclusively with each other. Probably not all of them, as the amount is too large, but generous sections from that year. Works on paper leave my studio in small groupings or one by one for various occasions; 2017 is not allowed to leave that way. They must be exhibited together first. I want to mark their accumulation as a distinct continuum and for them to be experienced this way.

JC: I'm thinking about medium specificity and migration between mediums. Is there a definite way that discoveries you've made in the works on paper have informed your painting methods, and vice versa? Are there ways that the two remain impervious to one another?

RM: I like to think they are impervious to each other, but I do see things that interconnect them. Mainly kinds of marks and casual attitudes in application. Usually I am only catching this in hindsight though. I'll look through an older box of works on paper and see something I thought I had invented in a painting only to find it earlier on paper. I also see the thin paint aspect of my oil paintings as partly coming out of the works on paper.

Ultimately though, what I am doing in the paintings, extreme scale, detailed compositional strategies and very determined color relationships, I am not trying, nor want to do, in the works on paper.

JC: How does resist function in your watercolors? It seems to have a precise way of turning a mark into an absence and back into a mark, messing with the way patterns and gestures seem to do their thing, introducing a kind of hovering ambivalence which, a productive tension.

RM: I use a resist material on the paper. It's a traditional product that I use for mark making like paint, instead of like its intended purpose as a tool. I do a similar thing in the painting with masking and spray painting. I like how the effect carves out and through space in a literal and illusionist way.



