

# HYPERALLERGIC

GALLERIES • WEEKEND

## The Party We Are All Invited To

by **John Yau** on September 4, 2016



*Installation view of "The Guests All Crowded Into the Dining Room" (2016), Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York (all images courtesy Mitchell-Innes & Nash) (click to enlarge)*

Jessica Stockholder lives in a contingent domain, which means it is very much like the one where most of us live. A chair serves multiple functions: a place to sit, a platform on which to stack books; a rack for hanging a shirt or jacket, or draping a skirt or pair of pants; a handy step stool for changing light bulbs; a convenient weapon for taming lions and warding off would-be burglars. Stockholder's work — a mixture of the made, bought, found, and painted: domestic objects, toolbox goodies,

backyard decks, urban markers, and, most recently, a multi-purpose stage-set, viewing platform and pedestal – is inventive, practical, funny and very down-to-earth. While many have commented on the important role she played in further opening up the dialogue between painting and sculpture, I think it is also important to recognize how she has further dissolved the boundaries between life and art, everyday use and non-use.



*Jessica Stockholder, "Assist 4, Carved Spaces" (2016) (click to enlarge)*

I remember once being invited to a party in which the host owned a Damian Hirst sculpture, which was part of the edition, “Away from the Flock” (1994), a glass and painted steel case in which a lamb is preserved in formaldehyde. At one point, having no place to leave their empty tumblers, tulips and flutes, tipsy guests put them on the steel and glass top of “Away from the Flock,” turning this “priceless object” into an island for empty glasses. Ad Reinhardt was wrong. Sculpture isn’t just “something you bump into when you back up to look at a painting.” It can serve other purposes, which Stockholder is interesting in evoking in different, often humorous ways.

In her current exhibition, [\*Jessica Stockholder: The Guests All Crowded Into the Dining Room\*](#) at Mitchell-Innes & Nash (August 25 – October 1, 2016), the artist brings together an installation and several smaller works, which are part of her ongoing project, *Assists*, in which, as the gallery press release states, “sculptures must attach to something other than themselves – a bed, the wall, furniture, other sculpture, or appliances. Each *Assist* is made up of four parts: two bases and two top parts. The bases and top parts are interchangeable.” In this exhibition, the two *Assists* are strapped to club chairs that have seen better days. This isn’t some version of Picasso and Braque roped together like mountain climbers but two comedians (Laurel and Hardy, Richard Pryor and Gene Wilder?) stuck together in an intimately uncomfortable situation. At one point I felt as if I had wandered into a Lars von Trier movie set for a story about a dysfunctional relationship.



*Installation view of “The Guests All Crowded Into the Dining Room” with “Shadows Over” (2016), Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York (all Images courtesy Mitchell-Innes & Nash) (click to enlarge)*

Towards the back of the gallery and extending out of the corner, with its lower platform or walkway curling around a column, while an upper platform (furnished with a guard rail) stays closer to the wall, “The Guests All Crowded Into the Dining Room” (2016) looks like something you might see in a backyard or a school gym or small town fair. The viewer must ascend the stairs to view the unframed drawings Stockholder has affixed high on the gallery wall, which she has painted orange and magenta. Even this large piece is contingent, connected to the wall by virtue of its function as a viewing platform for the drawings, which are arranged in sets, like something you might see in a school science fair.



*Jessica Stockholder, "Detached Detail"  
(2016), industrial metal fencing, dance floor  
tile, leather, vinyl, rope hardware, floor tile,  
floor mat, masonry square tile, bent metal  
rod, acrylic and oil paint (click to enlarge)*

“Shadows Over” (2016), which is made of blue ice cube trays, scallop shells, a green plastic bottle, copper wire, a wooden pepper mill top, and

hardware, stands alone at the far end of the platform. From one side, “Shadows Over” looks like a three-drawer wooden cabinet painted orange. However, once you walk to other side, you see that the sides of the cabinet have been removed, and the drawers are not functional, their fronts are just a façade. An astute sensibility informs what seems casual, even offhand: the blue of the ice cube trays stacked on top of the orange pedestal, the green plastic bottle in one corner. The scallop shells, copper wire and wooden pepper mill top become a still-life, an allusion to domestic life, as well as a re-envisioning of the modernist aesthetic of the sculpture and pedestal, with the platform acting as the pedestal for the sculpture, which is, in turn, a pedestal for supporting a still-life. There is something sweet, funny, tender, and perhaps paradoxically, painful about “Shadows Over.” Might we read a narrative into the gathering of scallop shells, ice cube trays and the green plastic bottle? Or is it just a chance meeting? Stockholder invites you to read into the work, but never tells you what to think. We might think of the objects as a structuring of color, but that seems too narrow.



*Installation view of "The Guests All Crowded Into the Dining Room" (2016), Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York (all Images courtesy Mitchell-Innes & Nash) (click to enlarge)*

While "The Guests All Crowded Into the Dining Room" invites all kinds of connections, the one that left the deepest impression on me is the artist's sense of community. We can walk around it, ascend it, and from its upper level, take in what else is in the room. There are diagrammatic drawings on the wall, made up of signs and words that are easily decipherable. The orange and magenta are bright and solid. Meanwhile, "Shadows Over" evokes the stuff of our everyday life, which perhaps has become too filled with disposables. Perhaps, as the piece suggests, we should not be so quick to get rid of them. Maybe we should think about what we are using. Maybe we should stop and look around and see that everything we have done has an aesthetic component. Maybe

art should be part of our everyday lives, not just a trophy. Maybe we can even begin talking to each other about such matters. Or is that too much to hope for?

[Jessica Stockholder: The Guests All Crowded Into the Dining](#)

[Room](#) *continues at Mitchell-Innes & Nash (534 West 26th Street, Chelsea, Manhattan) through October 1.*