



**COVID-19 and the Creative Process(es)**

**Jessica Stockholder**

*by Evan Carter*

**New Art Examiner: How are you doing?**

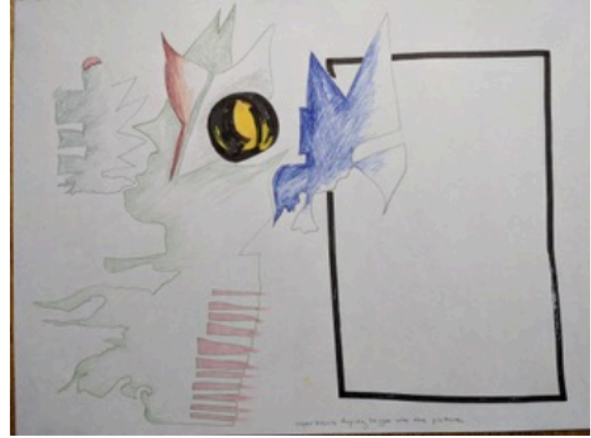
**Jessica Stockholder:** Well, kind of interesting. I don't mind being at home. I'm fortunate to have a relatively nice home [with] a tiny patch of yard, and [I] can see the outside. Hyde Park is a quiet neighborhood, so I can go for walks, and the days flow surprisingly quickly.... [My] son is in New Jersey [living] alone, so I keep him company with video chats... and my brother is in Islamabad alone—his family's in Vancouver, Canada. I also call [to keep him company]. I stay in touch with my father who is in his late 80s living in Vancouver. And then there are all kinds of friends, colleagues and art world people. Though I'm not teaching this quarter I am on various committees, we have faculty meetings and I'm also advising students. So, it's not hard to pass the day, a lot happens.

**NAE:** That sounds like a really busy schedule. And [that] you're on screen almost all of the workday.

**JS:** I also make artwork... I don't have access to my studio [now]; it's locked down as it's part of UChicago. I've been working at home on a series of collage drawing things that are amenable to the circumstances here.

**NAE:** How would you characterize the cultural moment right now? Just like how are you seeing the world?

**JS:** Well, I don't see much of the world (laughter). I'm inundated as so many of us are, I'm sure you are too, with [an] enormous number of videos and online programming from galleries, museums and all kinds of people, and... as I have to spend a [fair] amount of time online anyway... I don't find that terribly compelling... People are reaching out [and] trying to stay in touch... [which] feels good... but it's also kind of painful. [I] feel exhausted afterwards.



**Left:** Jessica Stockholder, *Corona Virus Homework #19: It's normal to feel anxious during a pandemic (NY Times)*. April 14, 2020. Made of: dusting mitt, two kinds of paper, paint, pencil crayon, pen, pencil. 16 x 17 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist.

**Right:** Jessica Stockholder, *Corona Virus Homework #14: (Comic Series) Super hero trying to get into the picture plane*. April 11, 2020. Made of: pen, marker, pencil crayon, pencil, paper. 21.5 x 15.5 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist.

**NAE:** Have your feelings towards the creative process changed at all? Are they serving a different purpose for you or does it feel the same? What are the differences?

**JS:** It's kind of nice to be working without any [goal-oriented] pressure... I [always] make art as a way of making sense of being alive. I care about the thinking that happens in that way. I [do] need people to see it eventually; it's not just for me, but I imagine [that] one way or another people will see what I'm doing... I have engaged a couple of online events: an online interview for Kavi Gupta Gallery about a recent body of work I made in Kathmandu, and Max Estrella Gallery in Madrid invited me to do something similar focusing on the work I've been making since the lockdown...

I'm fortunate that I'm here with Patrick. [It would be] really different to be locked up alone for months on end [without] another person to... talk [with] and [to] share work with. That matters... [I] also have friends in the neighborhood who I can walk with at a distance. So, I'm not totally isolated... This [reduced social situation] makes me aware of the way in which my work as an artist is often a solitary endeavor [that nevertheless] needs other people. I don't have anything definitive to say [about that; I'm] just kind of ruminating around the way in which it does need other people, but also doesn't for the time being.

**NAE:** Some people I've talked to have mentioned that in knowing there isn't an immediate audience or an immediate obligation to get the work out there, it has changed their approach to making work.

**JS:** Going to galleries and museums looking at contemporary art, I'm very aware that the scale of production and the money that goes into producing [much of it] is enormous. I mean a person can't make really large things without money... Most people don't have [those resources]. Some few artists are anointed with the privilege [to produce large things]; either they're born into wealth, or the market picks them up... There isn't a lot of really successful artwork being produced at a small affordable scale... What does that mean? Why is that? I think that the

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market produces a kind of pyramid with just a few at the top whose work becomes a kind of currency. [It sometimes feels as if there's] deliberate exclusion of people who can't afford to participate.

[I feel] very fortunate to have a career... These questions about scale hover around my work. I *like* making big things. I enjoy space. It's not just about money; there are all kinds of significance and meaning that come from working with [scale]... Right now, I'm enjoying the challenge to make things within a much more limited framework, and I wouldn't be at all unhappy to see the whole world shift gears a little, to welcome that more vulnerable quieter smaller piece of being human...



**Left:** Jessica Stockholder, *Corona Virus Homework #25: (Comic Series)*. May 5th, 2020. Made of: pen, marker, pencil crayon, pencil, paper. 21.5 x 15.5 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist.

**Right:** Jessica Stockholder, *Corona Virus Homework #27: (Comic Series)*. 21.5 x 15.5 inches. Made of: handmade paper from Nepal, thread, vellum, silk fabric, paint, pencil, pencil crayon, printed magazine paper ink. Photo courtesy of the artist.

**NAE:** Since you did not teach this past quarter have you talked to your colleagues about how the adjustment has been to teaching art courses online?

**JS:** Yes, and I will likely have to teach online in the fall, so I have a keen interest in how they're doing. It's been interesting... I think that there [have been] some good things about it... One of my colleagues expressed yesterday that the students are able to make themselves more emotionally available online than they tend to in the classroom... I've been doing online studio visits with some of the MFA students; some of those conversations are really great. And I think that there's something about people being sort of slowed down and having to take stock and develop a new relationship to what they're doing that is productive.

At the undergraduate level it's certainly possible to orchestrate a class that enables something of value to happen... [There is also a lot] missing. Especially the parallel play part of the classroom where students notice each other and influence each other even though they're not talking to

each other. They [usually] don't know each other [at the outset], but [slowly] get to know each other as they work side by side.

**NAE: What do you look forward to doing the most when things are back to 'normal'?**

**JS:** I guess [I] just look forward to being able to move around in the world without fear... To be with people and have dinners together. My son who's in his early twenties... really wants to travel... [For now,] I'm happy to have given up traveling. I'm happy to be slowed down with my feet on [the] ground.

**NAE: Obviously, everybody handles this differently, but would you like to suggest, share, or put anything out there for people who may be struggling? What's a simple thing that you think is being overlooked but is easily accessible [and] easily accomplished by people who are struggling or dealing with anxiety?**

**JS:** I think maybe a simple thing is that anybody can make drawings. People tell you, 'I can't draw.' Anybody can draw. It's just a question of accepting what it is that you bring to it and then going from there and enjoying it. Everybody can be creative and get something going... it's not like you have to be a genius or make the best thing in the world to make something of value and move your thoughts along that way.

**NAE: Absolutely, that is good advice.**