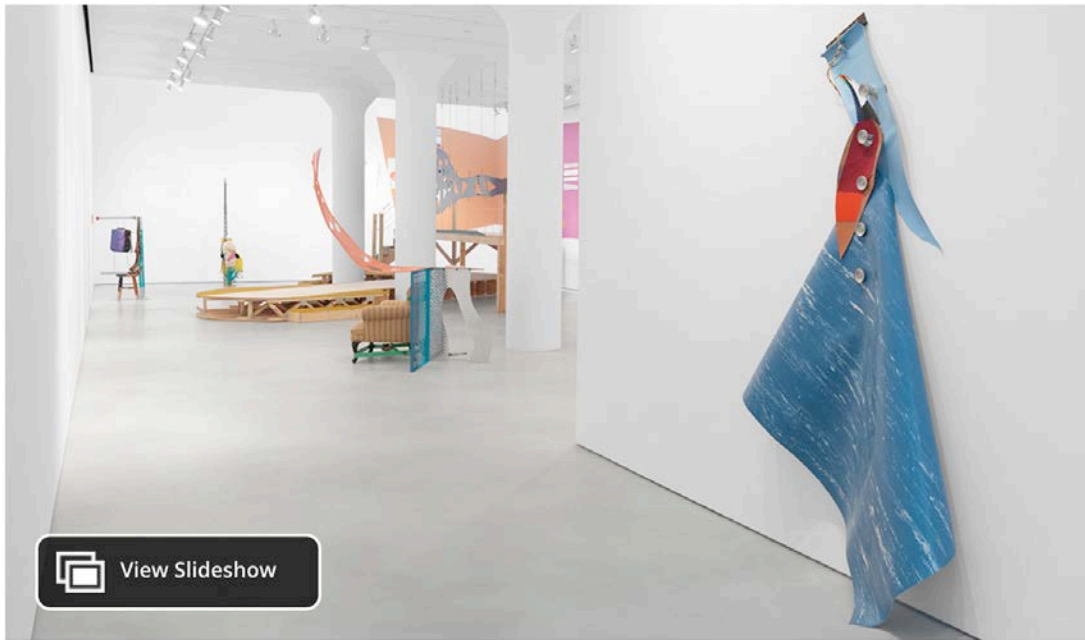


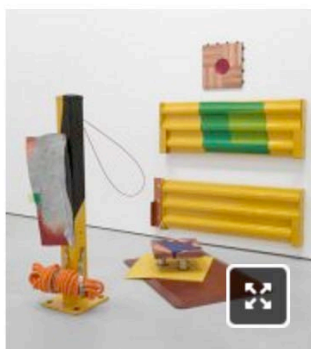
BLOUINARTINFO

Everyday Abstraction: A Q&A with Jessica Stockholder

BY TAYLOR DAFOE | AUGUST 26, 2016



Installation view of Jessica Stockholder: *The Guests All Crowded Into the Dining Room* at Mitchell-Innes & Nash
(© Jessica Stockholder; Courtesy of the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, NY.)



Jessica Stockholder, *"Detached Detail,"* 2016 [© Jessica Stockholder; Courtesy of the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, NY]

Jessica Stockholder's work is difficult to talk about because it eschews so many of the typical classifications we use to discuss contemporary art: "installation," "site-specific," "ephemeral." Indeed, that's one of the most central elements of her practice: the dissolving of boundaries.

Look no further than her immersive new show at Mitchell Innes & Nash, "*The Guests All Crowded Into the Dining Room.*" In it, multifaceted sculptures made from found items are installed sporadically throughout the space, calling into question what belongs with what. Discarded scallop

shells rest atop blue ice cube trays. An old dance floor tile is mounted to the wall above sheets of industrial metal fencing. A sagging square of linoleum hangs from a rusty hinge. There are two new pieces from her “Assists” series — modular sculptures that can only stand upright when attached to something else: a car, a piano, or in this case, two threadbare lounge chairs the artist sourced from Craigslist. (Though, the furniture isn’t technically a part of the sculpture: “If you buy an ‘Assist’ attached to a piano, you don’t get the piano,” Stockholder says.)

Finally the show’s central work, the eponymous “The Guests All Crowded Into the Dining Room,” features a large, winding, wooden stage connected to an elevated deck gallery-goers are encouraged to walk onto. Part sculpture, part viewing platform, part pedestal, it’s easy to love, but hard to explain why.

While the installation was wrapping up in the gallery, Stockholder sat down with Artinfo to talk about the show and some of the larger themes that run throughout all her work.

For your older work, it was important to have self-imposed parameters —predetermined rules you’d work within when making work. Do you still set those kind of parameters for your practice now?

My work as a student developed into something that wasn’t contained by its frame or pedestal; it bled into the architecture, and it was ephemeral. As a student I didn’t keep anything anyway. I wasn’t focused on the preciousness of the objects I was making. One of the nice things about being a student is that people come to look at the stuff you’re making—peers, faculty, etc. You take it away and you put something else up and then people come to look at it again, and so on. When I finished school, that

stream of audience dried up. Being in my studio making work, then taking it back down, didn't feel right. I cared about having an audience. So at that point, after grad school, it was a little bit of a crisis moment for me as I tried to figure out how I was I going to do the thing I really cared about, while also making something that I could take out of my studio. I didn't want — and I *still* don't want — to be in a situation where I need a gallery or a show to work. I want my work to be something I own and that I can control. So I developed the “Kissing the Wall” pieces, in which there was a light pointing at the wall; it was a way of making the space between the object and the wall active. When you plug something in, the electricity is active, and if it's the space between the object and the wall that matters, there's a kind of ephemerality to it, a kind of objectless-ness alongside the objects. So that's how I began to define some parameters. I am aware of the parameters that are organizing the work. - I choose them. In my studio, I don't make installations, I don't make things that are ephemeral, because I care to share my work with other people.

In this show, there's one work that's pointing at the wall, there are two little painted panels, and there's an inch between them and the work on the floor; so there's a tension between the two reds pointing at each other. There's an object sitting on the floor, but it's seen against the wall; it's imagistic so it's both sculpture and painting; it participates in both traditions.

This show really plays with the conventions of display. There are your “Assists” works, which can only stand upright when attached to another object (one of which actually features the work of another artist); several pieces reminiscent of pedestals; and the biggest work, “The Guests All Crowded Into the Dining Room,” is a massive, deck-like sculpture that elevates viewers, allowing them to see a series of drawings installed in the

gallery's upper corner, effectively acting like a large pedestal itself.

Well the pedestals came to be because, for me, it's nice to be able to work at a small scale. There's a lot of stuff in the world and at a small scale you don't have to pay for anything. You can just find everything — we are surrounded by a plethora of things. So to be able to work with that stuff that's in the world in a more casual way is a lot of fun. But then I thought, *How do I show people this thing I've made?* And so I decided to make a pedestal. But I couldn't just make a plain pedestal—

Artinfo: [Laughs] Of course not.

The pedestals were made by somebody else, as are the “Assists”, but they're made within a set of criteria that I've established. They each have two parts: the bottom part is made with cut-up wooden furniture, and the top part is an MDF box. The bottom part gets a brilliant, intense color of one kind or another — in relationship to what goes on top of it — and the top part gets an off white color of some kind. Then the piece that I made sits on top. The dimensions of the pedestal and the colors of the pedestal are resonant with the object itself.

I am exploring the pedestal in a number of different ways in this show. One of the Assists acts as pedestal for a small paper work by a former student of mine — Elisheva Levy. I understand the “Assists” to exist between things — they are interstitial objects. And the deck, “All the Guests Crowd into the Dining Room,” acts as pedestal in a number of different ways. It is acting as pedestal for a work that is sitting on the top deck — “Shadows Over.” That work, part of a series of ‘stack’ pieces, engages playfully with the idea of pedestal following in Brancusi's footsteps. The platform and deck also act as pedestal, or stage, for people walking on it. Viewers are put on display.

Can you tell me about your relationship to color? It seems like you're often attracted to bright and vibrant colors.

Yes, though I try to challenge my color sense all the time. When I started working as a teenager, I noticed after a few years that everything I was doing was pivoting around red and green; it's a color combination I like a lot. It became a challenge to broaden what I could do with color. The possibilities are infinite; if you spent too much time suffering over your choices you wouldn't do anything. Eventually you just have to jump in and swim. Though I try to explore past my comfort zone I'm never going to be an artist that works only with pastel colors. I love the intensity of color. I like it to have a vibration and a sense of atmosphere and eventfulness that's distinct from the thing that it's on and the world where it lives. There's a way in which it's separate from the rest of experience.

Is that how you're drawn to the objects you include in your sculptures and installations — their distinctness of color?

Sometimes. The kind of color could be a reason something is chosen. Or it could be because it's made out of a material that's really paintable. And sometimes it's for other reasons, like the texture. I'm interested in the relationship between surface and structure. You know, painting is the surface of the canvas. Our walls have a skin of paint on them. We live in a world where we control the skin, but often don't worry about what's behind it. I'm interested in exploring that relationship— what things are made out of, how they're made, and how all of that does or doesn't resonate with the skin we see.

What about your relationship to painting? The way you use color and arrange your works — there's a painterly aspect to your compositions.

My work is, in many ways, orchestrated by composition within rectangles. I'm interested in the pictorial-ness — the flatness — of what one sees, which is different than the experience of walking around something three dimensional and understanding it's volume and structure. This show includes both kinds of experience. Though I began as a painter early on my interest in the flat image and pictorial space, broadened to include sculptural space. That said the history of painting, framing, and composition is always mixed up with what I'm doing, in one way or another. The “painterly-ness” of things — sometimes that's more present than other times. “Painterly” makes me think of a kind of abstract expressionism conversation — the “hand,” and its relationship to the indexical.

It seems like a lot of the objects you source and the works you create out of these objects, it's like they're trying to find the abstract of the everyday.

I think that's very nice. I don't think we exist without abstraction. Our thoughts are general. We extrapolate from our experience to have general thoughts and ideas that enable us to talk to one another and make sense of the world. I'm completely interested in that.

What was it like installing this show, “The Guests All Crowded Into the Dining Room”? Is this the first time you've presented installation work in this space?

Well I did a show here when this space was occupied by Gorney Bravin + Lee, called “Table Top Sculpture.” I didn't call it an installation — I called it a “situation.” You walked into and through it to see the rest of the show. I enjoy the blurring of the boundaries — I always make it a little difficult to categorize things. I wouldn't exactly call “The Guests All Crowded Into the

Dining Room” “installation” either. That word “installation” is tricky because you never know what you mean when you say it. In my work I generally reserve the word for the works that are ephemeral, or site-related, site-specific, etc. I tend to make those outside of galleries. Galleries like to have things to sell; they’re a commercial enterprise. And if I’m invited to do something in an alternative space, then there’s more room for the work to be an event-based, singular experience. This harks back to your question about parameters.


As time goes on my relationship to the ephemeral work that I make has become more complex. When you make installations, ephemeral works, events, etc., they can only be seen in one place. If you make something that can be moved around and shown in multiple venues, you have a much bigger audience.

Is that important to you?

I’m not sure how to answer that question. I think it has effect. It’s been interesting to notice. I think a lot of women in particular have made work that’s ephemeral. For me, the ephemeral work has allowed me to develop ideas and experiences that I value and would do all over again. I’ve been able to make really big things in an affordable — that the work doesn’t have to be kept and moved and stored allows me to work with materials and space in ways that are really exciting and that I care about. But I also care about my place in the world and the trajectory of my work. I think about those things.

At the same time, it’s important for me at this juncture to pull the rug out from under myself and allow the work to grow.

Jessica Stockholder at Mitchell-Innes & Nash



Installation view of Jessica Stockholder: *The Guests All Crowded Into the Dining Room* at Mitchell-Innes & Nash

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"The Guests All Crowded Into the Dining Room," 2016

Platform, deck, ramp, railing, wire cable

Deck: 104 by 360 by 51 3/8 in. (89 1/4 in. with railing)

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Jessica Stockholder
"Assist: Smoke and Mirrors," 2016
Unistrut, acrylic paint, blue tarp, copper wire, plastic parts, metal parts, hardware, yellow webbing and winch
96 by 36 by 30 in.
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"Assist #4: Carved Spaces," 2016

Painted steel

87 1/2 by 61 by 64 in.

(Acts as a pedestal for Elisheva Levy's "Flip Flop")

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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

Installed: 57 1/2 by 46 1/2 by 60 in.

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Jessica Stockholder
"Security Detail," 2016

Unistrut, old scrap of tire, wooden stool, hardware, braided metal cable, plastic parts, shoulder bag, acrylic paint, oil paint, roofing tar, two 6 x 6 x 1 inch painted panels
61 1/4 by 15 by 36 in.


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Jessica Stockholder
"Blanketed Crowd Development," 2016
Yellow metal post, yellow tarp, unistrut, black computer bag and strap, sheepskin, acrylic paint, oil paint, fabric, lexal caulking, tree root, hardware
Installed: 96 1/2 by 32 by 29 in.

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Jessica Stockholder

"Shadows Over," 2016

Blue ice cube trays, scallop shells, green plastic bottle, copper wire, wooden pepper mill top, hardware

Sculpture: 6 3/4 by 14 by 10 in.

Sculpture on base: 54 3/4 by 15 by 11 in.

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"Sale A Way," 2016
Rusty hinge, vinyl, acrylic paint, leather, five furniture feet, linoleum, rope, hardware
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