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ENTERTAINMENT & ARTS

Review: In this L.A. gallery, one artist puts her ‘Digital Thoughts’ into orbit



Jessica Stockholder’s “Digital Thoughts” installation at the gallery 1301PE in Los Angeles.
(Jessica Stockholder and 1301PE)

By DAVID PAGEL FEB. 22, 2020 | 6:30 AM

Imagine an astronaut on the International Space Station. Then imagine her staying up late, making things with her hands and blocking the video transmissions that allow her colleagues on Earth to monitor her 24/7.

The freedom she feels is palpable as you wander through “Digital Thoughts,” Jessica Stockholder’s laser-sharp exhibition at 1301PE gallery in L.A. Each of Stockholder’s 11 inventive assemblages is out of this world — if not from another planet then at least from far out in space. Some of Stockholder’s constellations of unrelated objects and materials are no bigger than notepads. Some are large, about the size of tents or picnic tables.

Four hang on the wall like paintings. One stands on the floor like an ad hoc end table. Most do both, forming painterly and sculptural hybrids that defy gravity and blur the boundaries between

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2-D images and 3-D objects. Most make an intellectual mess of the idea that art is best when its various media are kept separate — and supposedly equal.



“And Server” by Jessica Stockholder, 2016. Table, garden light fixtures, rope, acrylic and enamel paint, industrial light fixture, plastic parts, hardware, industrial mesh, paper mache, taupe collared power bar, parts from printer and hard drives, 79 inches by 75 inches by 42 inches
(Jessica Stockholder and 1301PE)

The assemblages are made from discarded hardware, bits and pieces of printers, DVD players, hard drives and the shells and guts of CPUs, as well hardware-store hardware, including U-bolts, flashing, industrial mesh, synthetic ropes, buckles and bungee cords. Tables, chairs and stools also appear, along with lamps, light fixtures and fish-eye mirrors. The materials that kids use for arts-and-crafts projects, like papier-mâché, Sculpy and string, are present along with a gobs of thickly slathered acrylic, oil and enamel paint, in a rainbow of super-saturated colors.

The loopy circuit of free associations that Stockholder’s peculiar inventory generates pales in comparison to what she does with the stuff she finds, buys and assembles. Each of the Chicago-based artist’s idiosyncratic amalgams of repurposed parts and misused supplies is so tautly composed — so perfectly balanced and so meticulously calibrated — that it feels as if it’s held together by atomic bonds too powerful to pull apart without causing an explosion.

That centrifugal integrity is what art lovers call formal power, the relational qualities a work has with itself. Today, that’s not a particularly popular way of looking at art. We’re encouraged to see art in relation to its context, its history, the social space that surrounds it.

But Stockholder’s slyly subversive assemblages suggest that the two approaches work in concert, complementing each other and generating unexpected energy.

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“Four Eyes,” made of seven stools and two wall-mounted mirrors, is part of Jessica Stockholder’s installation “Digital Thoughts” at the Los Angeles gallery 1301PE.
(Jessica Stockholder and 1301PE)

“Four Eyes” transforms seven stools and two mirrors into an abstract composition that is as spatially complex — and far more colorful — than anything Picasso did when he and Braque invented Cubism. Similarly, “Rounding the Corner” fuses the freewheeling voraciousness of Rauschenberg’s mixed-media Combines with deliberation and restraint, just about the only qualities missing from the influential artist’s oeuvre.

If Matisse’s cut-paper collages took steroids, they might resemble Stockholder’s optimistic — but far from naive — works. Neither world-weary nor nostalgic, her compressed installations capture the fleeting beauty of the moment, before it disappears.