

SEP 29

Portrait of the Artist: Jessica Stockholder

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Jessica Stockholder/Photo: Steven Rosofsky

Jessica Stockholder's work greets me before she does. Colorful and vibrant, it illuminates the dark gray exterior of Kavi Gupta Gallery's Elizabeth Street location. Just inside the doors, Stockholder stands chatting with a group of people. Excusing herself, she shakes my hand and offers me a list of works. "Go have an experience," she says with a twinkle in her eyes.

Bright blocks of paint line the walls and kiss the ceiling, creating a jovial pathway that leads me from the gallery's compressed entrance into its expansive exhibition space. Clinging to the walls and standing freely on the floor, Stockholder's work fills the gallery with a sense of frozen freneticism. Eight large door panels coated in paint, bark, sheepskin, vinyl and copper lean in a jagged row, while elsewhere painted metal structures clamp onto a piano, creating a bright and abstract monument out of an otherwise black and white instrument.



Jessica Stockholder. Installation view, "Door Hinges," 2015/ Photo: Steven Rosofsky

Stockholder joins me in the gallery to walk me through the show. "This piece starts outside, it's called 'A Log or a Freezer'," she says while motioning back toward the entrance and across the front wall, where yellow, red and gray paints swirl upwards toward a large freezer mounted high above our heads. "I've made this type of work for many years," she continues. "It's related to site, and it can't be separated from where it is."

A renowned artist who has been actively exhibiting since the 1980s, Stockholder is best known for her signature abstract sculptures within which she pairs and positions everyday objects and materials with colorful paint to create bold, three-dimensional abstractions that challenge viewers to investigate her work—and the world—from different perspectives. Consistent in concept and always brimming with color, Stockholder's work has placed her on the map as one of the most important contemporary sculptors living today.

As we navigate the gallery, her calm and soft-spoken demeanor creates an intriguing juxtaposition to the outgoing and intrepid nature of the exhibition. Smiling often, she pauses in front of each piece to rest her fingertips lightly on the work as she introduces it. Faint music plays from the stairwell, where a video plays above a Sol LeWitt sculpture. Upstairs, Stockholder has curated an exhibition that pairs her own art with that of sixteen other artists. This fall, her work also appears at EXPO Chicago, the Smart Museum of Art (another site-specific installation) and mk The Restaurant.

"The work is a type of experience, and while I hope people understand it in different complexities, I don't dictate what they should take from it," she tells me. With a twelve-year tenure as Yale University's Director of Graduate Studies in Sculpture and the current Chair of the University of Chicago's Department of Visual Arts, Stockholder wields great academic prowess—yet she repeatedly invites viewers to develop their own interpretations of her sculptures. "I can say whatever I want about the work, but if you don't have a personal experience with it then what I have say is irrelevant." (Maria Girgenti)

This fall, Jessica Stockholder shows works at Kavi Gupta, 219 North Elizabeth, the Smart Museum of Art, 5550 South Greenwood, and mk The Restaurant, 868 North Franklin.

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