

Jessica Stockholder's Knock-out Installation at MOCA Toronto Upends Expectations

Outside the box.

Writer **Rosie Prata**

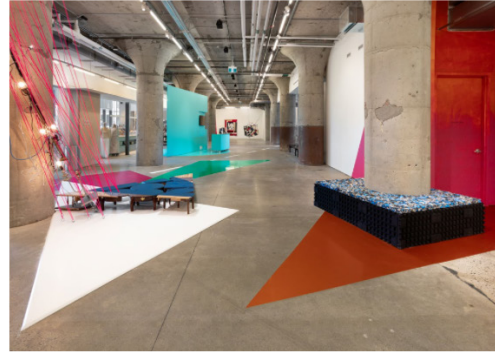


Photo by Elisabeth Hogeman.

Stepping into **Jessica Stockholder's** exhibition on the first floor of the **Museum of Contemporary Art** in Toronto feels like inhabiting a three-dimensional painting. On view until August 3, *The Squared Circle: Ringing*, the internationally acclaimed Canadian American artist's first presentation in her home country in 25 years is an immersive installation consisting of flat and sculptural elements that drape the industrial bones of the museum, a former **car** parts factory, in a technicolour dreamcoat.

From the front entrance to the elevators, a line of white vinyl dashes is applied to the floor between concrete columns to divide the room like a road. Playing with both form and function, the welcome desk is painted vivid printer-cartridge cyan, merging with the purpose-built triangular wall behind it (which serves double duty as signage for other exhibitions and a shelf for books and museum merchandise) and the circular floor decal beneath it.

More circles and triangles, in a bold palette of magenta, yellow, orange, teal, white, black, and blue, bob and weave across the walls and floors in a discordant symphony, occasionally overlapping and knocking into each other like blaring trumpets and crashing cymbals. Enveloped in what Stockholder describes as a "cloud of pink rope," a diagonal line of lamps ascends from a low platform of painted and sawn-off tables all the way up to the ceiling, which exhibits its own permanent installation of exposed pipes and fluorescent tubes that mirror the white-dash pattern on the floor below. That's not officially part of Stockholder's piece, however.



The main event is toward the back of the room: half a wrestling ring, wrapped in bright-yellow, rubber-coated ropes, raised like a stage but devoid of performers (and not to be touched by visitors). "Wrestling ring / Bull ring," "Square / round," reads a shaped text work mounted in vinyl on the wall nearby. "What role do corners play; I wonder. Contestation. The squared circle. Circular rooms just haven't caught on. Ringing in the New Year."

These poetic fragments of thought and word association are on display throughout the room, hidden like clues in a scavenger hunt. One contains words from Joni Mitchell's song "Circle Game" arranged in an inverted triangle. Another is printed across the edge of the wall and floor (kudos to the art installers) and contains the artwork's most explicit decoding. "The power of geometry / the geometry of POWER," it reads. "Staging on the raised platform, above the mass of other bodies, pitted against each other, moving in tandem, imagined worlds come to life on the stage of public opinion."



Stockholder recently relocated to Nanaimo from Chicago, where she spent most of her career, and it's easy to infer political symbolism in the show's centrepiece, with the U.S. president being a WWE Hall of Famer and the theatrical antagonist of a deeply divided nation. The expression "to square a circle" means to attempt the impossible, and agreeing on what is fact and what is fiction nowadays feels like an increasingly disorienting dance.

In the context of Stockholder's exhibition, however, we do encounter coexisting dualities: flatness and volume, logic and lyricism, structure and spontaneity, installation and institution. Stockholder provides a platform for the rest to be worked out, in wars of words or physical skirmishes, in more rounds to come. The thing about circles is that they never end.