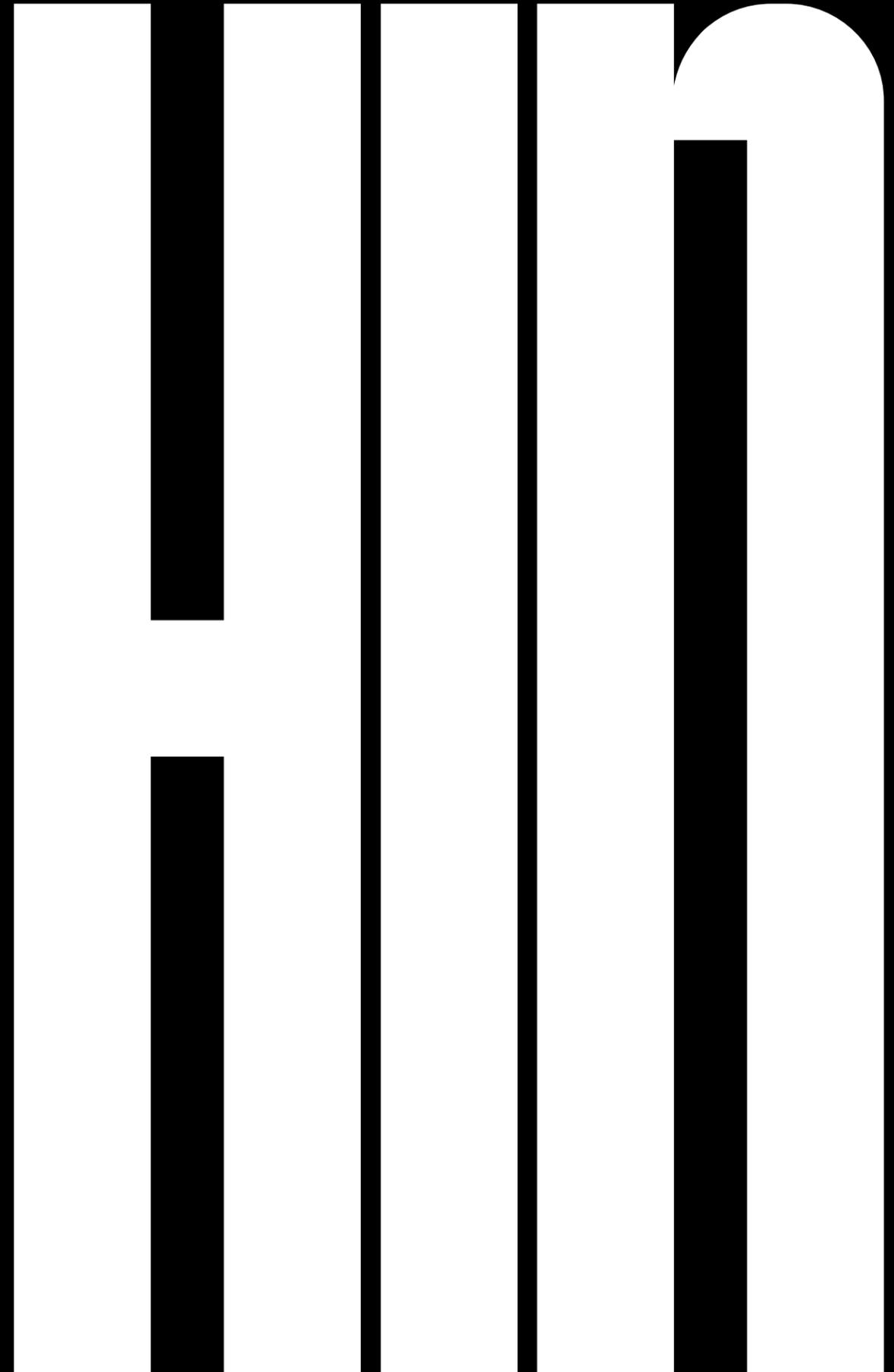




Jessica Stockholder is known for her monumentally scaled, frenetically painted, theatrical installations and self-contained assemblages, which might at first glance appear haphazard but that are actually highly composed expressions of an intellectually engaged formalism. Stephanie Cristello talks to the Chicago-based artist about her carefully calculated aesthetic.



STOCKHOLDER

FRAMES & PICTURE PLANES



ALL IMAGES COURTESY THE ARTIST AND GALERIE NÄCHST ST. STEPHAN ROSEMARIE SCHWARZWÄLDER, VIENNA

The theatre stage, as we know it, is a Western form—the proscenium structure is a narrative frame; a site for performance oriented towards a singular vantage point. In its most basic premise, the construct divides the actors from the spectators. Few pieces of architecture break this form while still maintaining its objectives; I am reminded of the iconic Paolo Soleri Amphitheater in New Mexico, which has been described as communicating the “architecture of drama” as a field or landscape of action. This dual register, of both frame and field, is rarely explored as eloquently as in Chicago-based artist Jessica Stockholder’s practice. Three recent exhibitions explore her relationship to the stage as a platform to be used and negotiated with; *Door Hinges* at Kavi Gupta gallery in Chicago in 2015, *Snug Parting* at Galerie Nächst St. Stephan Rosmarie Schwarzwälder in Vienna and *The Guests All Crowded into the Dining Room* at Mitchell-Innes & Nash in New York in 2016.

For Stockholder, the vantage point of the viewer is both a subject and a context, an interchangeable set of expectations that figure prominently in her work. She accredits this experience to what she calls “a Cubist conceit”, meaning that in both veins of her work—the installations and self-contained assemblages, characterized by an intense and brightly coloured palette that envelops, circumscribes and interjects itself onto everyday materials—their experience in-the-round is one that unfolds at every angle. Viewers navigate the work both as an audience and its actor depending on their position; they are spectators of the frame at one moment, implicated within its borders the next. Stockholder has been quoted as saying: “I don’t think people make anything without assuming some sort of context; the work I make in the studio assumes the white cube as its context.” The white cube, a multidimensional frame in and of itself, is constantly challenged in Stockholder’s work; while it is an essential container for her installations, its typical rules for interaction—distance, sightlines, objectivity—are broken, fragmented and contested.

In every regard, Stockholder’s approach to three-dimensional objects is unyielding; her

Opening page
Sale a Way, 2016
266.7 x 109.2 x 33cm

Previous page and final spread
Lay of the Land (details), 2014
275 x 344 x 350cm

This page
Portrait by Assaf Evron

Opposite page
Detached, 2016
146.1 x 118.1 x 152.4cm

Overleaf, left
Messed on the Beach, 2014
245 x 155 x 20cm

Overleaf, right
In Many Places (detail), 2014
171 x 86 x 51.5cm

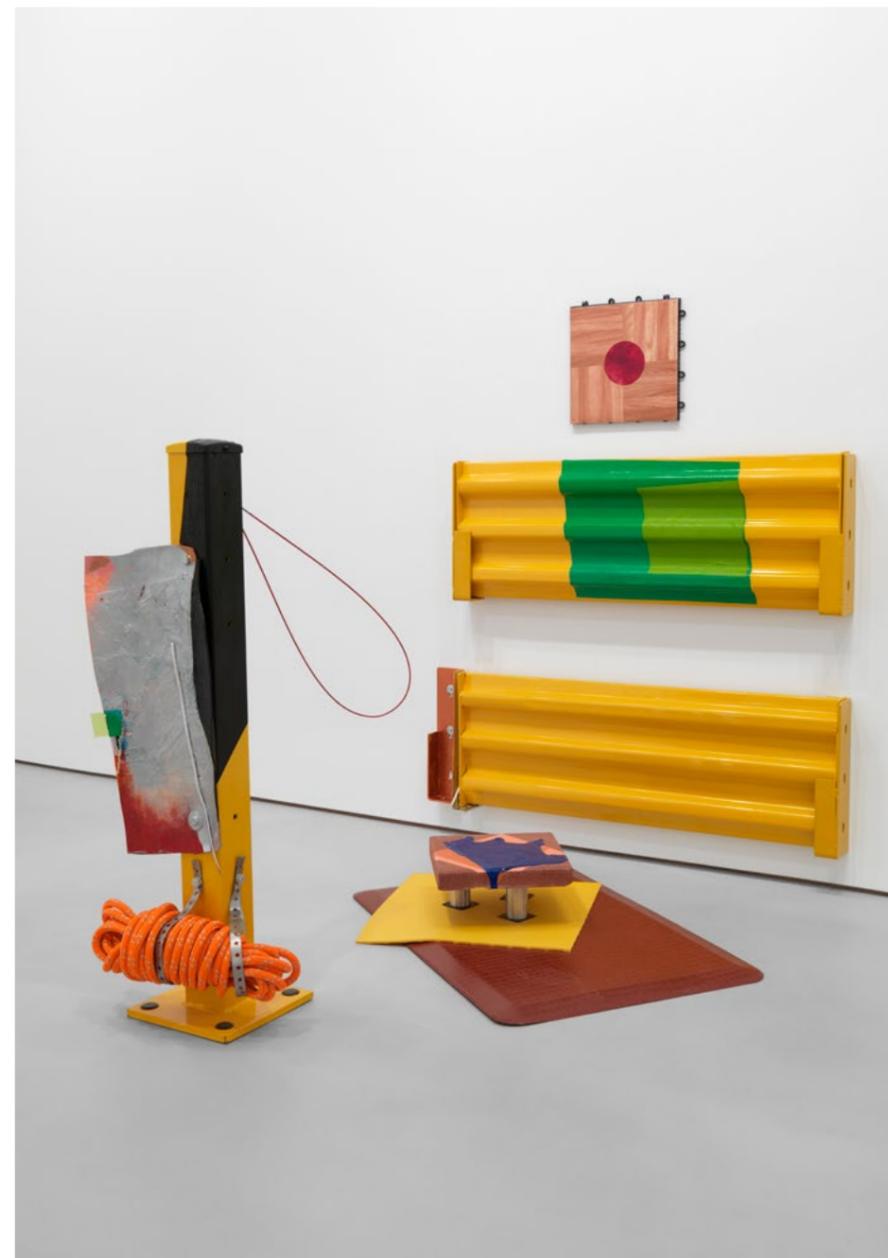


sculptures and installations alike are crudely covered in swaths of vivid paint, rapidly applied onto various readymades that she assembles—tables, chairs, mattresses, lamps, security mirrors, wooden stools, piping, textiles, etc. Stockholder flattens the picture plane of space itself, a type of “rasterized” image that falls apart and snaps back into place as it is viewed in situ. Just as Rosalind Krauss described sculpture as the thing that is not a part of the room, Stockholder uses the term “installation” for the parts of her work that are ephemeral. “Pure installation couldn’t be anywhere else,” she says. “It is particular to light and the proportions of the space; it’s a work that is intrinsically knit to where it exists.”

When we meet, I ask Stockholder about an exhibition of hers that opened in September 2015, *Door Hinges*—the first occasion I had written about her work. My review began with how there is no one word in the English language that rhymes with “orange”. Its closest assonance was the two words within her title; a cobbled-together solution that facilitates a half-rhyme, a less harmonious approximation of the original. The term “door hinge”, which Stockholder uses again during our studio visit to describe her *Assists*—a series of large-scale sculptures strapped onto other objects or architectural elements in order to stand—conceptually mirrors the action of thought required to achieve a solution for the word without a rhyme (the doorway, gateway, entrance), just as “orange” contains its own phenomenology, since it is both a thing (n.) and a colour (adj.). An orange is orange; it explains itself. Stockholder shares the affinity, though admits the primary concern of the title was less about language and more about the situation of how things serve other things. The generality of her use of “things” is purposeful—hinges have no purpose outside of their action. They are built to serve anonymous objects; their only consistency is movement.

The same could be said of Stockholder’s work. Its cohesion is dependent on its visual energy; a force the artist associates to many facets within the pieces included in exhibitions and

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their context. “Altogether, I am interested in how my work is dependent on other things, people, and ideas—not just mine, but everybody’s work,” she says. “I am interested, in a very literal and physical way, in questions of boundary, the line between things, the frame, the edge.” For Stockholder, this manifests itself in what some would consider or label a “curatorial endeavor” within her practice, having included other artists’ work alongside hers in shows since the early 2000s—first at Gorney Bravin + Lee in New York in 2003, in what the artist called the *Living Room Situation* to complement the exhibition, and more recently as part of *Door Hinges*, entitled *ASSISTED*, a group exhibition that occupied the entire second floor space of Kavi Gupta’s Elizabeth Street location.

The inclusion of the work of other artists—Polly Apfelbaum, Anthony Caro, Sol LeWitt, Nancy Lupo and Jo Nigoghossian, to name a few—is most productively thought of when considered in the arrangement of a “permanent collection”. It informs Stockholder’s history. “Elements of [my practice] are dependent on the wall, but also dependent on the thoughts of other people that have been internalized in my work, and which will be internalized differently by the audience of the work,” she says. “I am proposing that these pieces—mine and others—enable dialogue through the objects.” For Stockholder, the context of the gallery space is a shared convention—the inclusion of other artists’ work is another method of adding variation to the expectation of how things and people behave in the white cube, “their work full of content in the same way that the gallery space is full of content in itself”. As viewers expect to see artwork on the wall of a gallery, Stockholder performs this anticipation—her inclusion of pieces by others is not curatorial, but rather abstract in its ability to achieve (and in some sense control) how the formal and conceptual quality of work is judged within its expanded field.

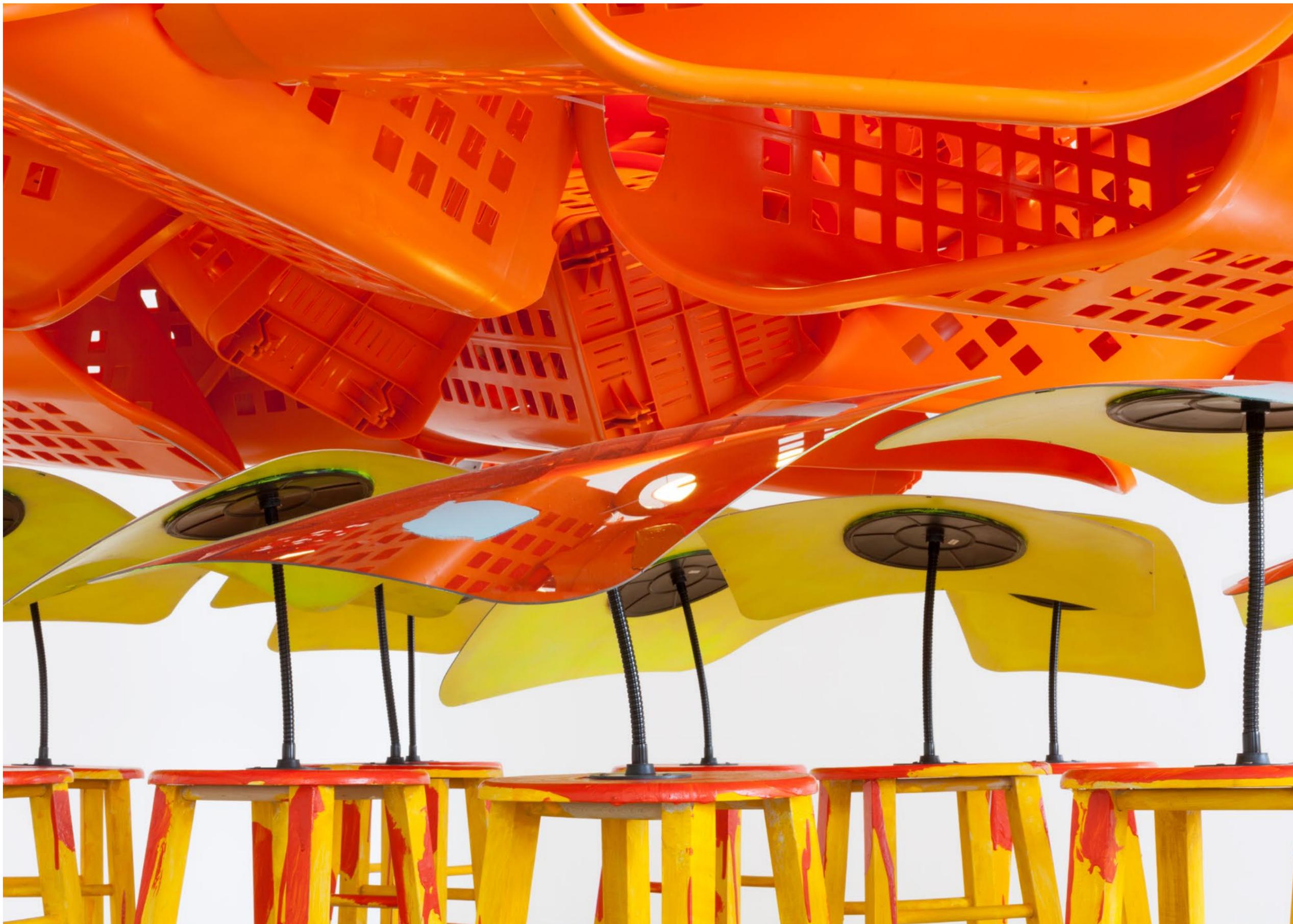
Colour is not easy to intellectualize;



PHOTO © MARKUS WÖRGÖTTE



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this sentiment is an energy also echoed in Stockholder's work, which resists being labelled for its formalist tendencies despite being seemingly disparate in its approach to assemblage. "I am interested in feeling, in motion, in subjectivity, which are hard to put into words," she says. In this sense, Stockholder's work comes off more loudly than the quietness it demands after multiple encounters—where its brazen aesthetic runs the risk of discrediting its careful construction, its relationship to vision (the limitations and triumphs of sight) rewards our engagement as a viewer, while pointing towards the impossibility of omniscience.

The work is conceptual if for no other reason than its completion exists in the viewer's mind, as at any given vantage point the sculptures are seen on the threshold of absoluteness, forced to be finished via imagination. "The mirror's purpose is to complicate our apprehension of the world," says Stockholder of a piece included in her 2016 exhibition at Galerie Nächst St. Stephan Rosmarie Schwarzwälder in Vienna. "I have been thinking about what makes a picture, which is a human invention. Pictures do not exist outside of us—we invented them. In the tradition that I am a part of, it's related to architecture, framing, windows and rectangles."

Indeed, within the language of photography, even the full documentation of Stockholder's work can be considered a detail of the work—impossible to capture due to its ever-transforming appearance that unfolds as one moves around the static object. For Stockholder, whose angles and crevices resist two-dimensional reproduction, this is the essence of image making that her work resists: "Vision is very located; you have two eyes that you can only point in one direction at a time. Picture making arises from that somehow, but the world nevertheless exists all over the place all the time." Born and raised in Vancouver, Canada, she describes her early interactions with Northwest Coast Native Art, whose geometric use of the oval within paintings and totems represents the ocular shape of the eye. The artist brings up this reference when talking about the security mirrors used within her installation at the gallery, likening the intention of both to expand the field of vision, either for spiritual or monitoring means: "You look at them and you see more."

The three conventional definitions of space—fictive, the illusionistic space of painting; abstract, which transcends its representation; and literal, the real, behavioural traits of how our bodies are guided and interact—are all present in Stockholder's work. However, it is her ability to break how the eye has been trained, departing from the proscenium convention of witnessing action, towards creating a standard through which the boundaries of performance and spectatorship no longer carry frontiers, that delivers the biggest impact. Playing field and frame at once, Stockholder orchestrates the dilemmas and realizations of sight, both for and by the eyes of the viewer.