

JESSICA STOCKHOLDER

by Terry R. Myers

Door Hinges

KAVI GUPTA GALLERY, CHICAGO | SEPTEMBER 12, 2015 – JANUARY 16, 2016

Rose's Inclination

SMART MUSEUM OF ART, THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
SEPTEMBER 12, 2015 – JUNE 2, 2017

It wasn't a wave of nostalgia that came over me entering Kavi Gupta's gallery for Jessica Stockholder's first solo exhibition in Chicago, probably because I had just had one upon encountering the first part of Stockholder's *A Log or a Freezer* (2015), the largest work of hers (included here, at least), attached to the uppermost corner of the building. Wrapped around the dark gray exterior, a triangle painted with bands of vibrant color, a log, a segment of rope, an orange electrical cord, and two large convex safety mirrors reminded me of the visual dynamics of Fiorucci, the influential Manhattan fashion boutique that closed in 1986, just a few years before I would first encounter Stockholder's work. Thanks to Google, I soon realized that the stylistic connection I had made on site wasn't accurate at all, so it must have been the attitude of Stockholder's bold on-the-street statement that provoked the association. And given all of her new projects on view citywide (including a major work at Expo Chicago, and a long-term installation at a restaurant called mk), some more distinctive than others, I appreciate all the more that she got her new work up and running before it even made it in the door. Stockholder has always made her work *do*; here she let it jump the gun and it paid off.



Installation view: Jessica Stockholder, *Door Hinges*, Kavi Gupta Gallery, Chicago, Sep 12, 2015 – Jan 16, 2016.
Courtesy Kavi Gupta and the artist. Photo: Tim Johnson.

As *A Log or a Freezer* continued through the Gupta's entry hall and then made a right turn into the main exhibition space, it brought to mind *Where it Happened* (1990), Stockholder's first large installation work, shown at American Fine Arts, Co., in New York. As a proclamation of something new that refused to ignore modernist art history (or make it ironic), it was a built and painted thing that was itself made of built and painted things, and, moreover, all of it was resolutely formal without throwing content under the bus (it even had underpants stuffed with newspaper). *A Log or a Freezer* comes across as a clarification of Stockholder's early work: like *Where it Happened*, it employs the tools of the formalist trade (shape, color, line) to create a social sculpture (it even includes a usable walkway made of wood) that has a visual legibility. It starts outside with a log, and it ends inside with a freezer (stuck up on the wall with another piece of rope dangling from it), and in between its formal qualities guide our way.

The Gupta exhibition could have ended there—but in fact, Stockholder was just getting started. Next came a few other works of hers, more self-contained and not as compelling (although I'm sure each of them could come to life given more space), and then three works from a body of work called *Assists*, and then, upstairs, a packed group exhibition organized by Stockholder called *Assisted*. It was all way too much, but I respect that that was the point. Her *Assists* merit a show of their own. Each uses a yellow "LOAD HUGGER" cargo strap to tie a work of hers to a found object: *Assist 1* (2015), for example, straps a Stockholder work to a Smart Car and it's perfect (and smart). Their smartness, however, just hasn't been given the room it needs. The same is true for the group exhibition upstairs: by including so many fantastic and like-minded artists like Kay Rosen and Anthony Caro, as well as seven more of her works, visually it couldn't sustain the clarity of its idea.

And we're still not done. Rather than triggering exhaustion, however, the major work that Stockholder has installed (for nearly two years) in the functional lobby of the Smart Museum, called *Rose's Inclination* (2015), proves that given the space and the situation Stockholder will exceed the challenge and change the way we see. Dominated by large painted areas of bright color on the wall and ceiling (arranged so that the work could incorporate a section of a previous mural by Judy Ledgerwood, leaving it untouched to accentuate its ornamental attraction) and vivid carpet on the floor, it also includes an eclectic selection of household and street lamps, tree branches, yarn, and power cords, along with the furniture provided for the lobby's small café. Voracious yet welcoming (the color is aggressive, yet you can sit at a table and give yourself over to it), somehow upending and grounding all at once (largely because of a red carpet/red wall relationship), high *and* low by making low things high (lamps and an oversized God's eye), and high things low (painting), it is exhilaration embodied. And, by the way, it also starts outside in the courtyard, with several brightly colored triangles painted on the concrete or the landscaping, all pointing the way forward.

Contributor

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Jessica Stockholder, *Rose's Inclination*, 2015. Paint, carpet, fragment of Judy Ledgerwood's painting, branches, rope, Plexiglas, light fixtures, hardware, extension cord, mulch, Smart Museum foyer, courtyard, and sidewalks. Courtesy of the artist, Mitchell-Innes & Nash Gallery, and Kavi Gupta Gallery.