

ARTFORUM

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TRYING TO COME UP with a taxonomy for the burgeoning idioms of contemporary sculpture is probably ill advised. But one can't help wishing for a bit of handy nomenclature to categorize the abundance of recent work in which rigorously formal propositions achieve an odd, uneasy *détente* with, well, junk—tchotchkes, cast-offs, discount-bin merchandise. The result of this dynamically unstable alliance—visible in the work of artists as diverse as Jim Lambie, Gedi Sibony, and, perhaps most notably, Rachel Harrison—suggests less a simple rejiggering of old terms, e.g., *assemblage*, than an evolution of syntax in which the Latinate grammar of sculptural abstraction has been adulterated by the pidgin of material culture.

In the absence of a high-concept catchphrase, one can nevertheless point toward an artist whose own practice constitutes both a present-day exemplar of this mode and one of its most significant antecedents. Since the mid-1980s, Jessica Stockholder has been creating large-scale installations in which every-

day objects function as importunate instantiations of the real, punctuating and complicating her resolutely nonreferential pictorial, sculptural, and architectural interventions. Her current show at the Kunsthallen Brandts in Odense, Denmark, includes, among many other components, a fluorescent-yellow locker suspended from the ceiling, an atoll of blue-painted tabletops, strings of foil pans, old fur coats, and three greenhouses, stacked one atop the other—all set against zones of exuberantly colored paint or carpet and partially traversed by a raised wooden ramp. In its careful calibration of strange-bedfellow elements and its vacillation between screwball comedy and the sublime, the exhibition evinces a sensibility that resonates across contemporary sculptural practices yet remains wholly singular—which is to say that the term *Stockholderian*, while an attractive candidate for a broadly applicable descriptor, still denotes an aesthetic that belongs to the artist alone.

—ELIZABETH SCHAMBELAN



Top: Jessica Stockholder, *Bright Longing and Soggy Up the Hill* (foreground) and *White Light Laid Frozen* (background), both 2005. Installation view, Kunsthallen Brandts, Odense, Denmark.
Bottom: Jessica Stockholder, *Bright Longing and Soggy Up the Hill* (details), 2005. Mixed media, dimensions variable.

Jessica Stockholder

TALKS ABOUT HER CURRENT INSTALLATION AT THE KUNSTHALLEN BRANDTS, ODENSE, DENMARK

THERE ARE TWO separate works in the show—*White Light Laid Frozen* and *Bright Longing and Soggy Up the Hill* (both 2005)—filling these two enormous rooms connected by a walkway. One of the rooms is an old textile-factory loft, a beautiful space with windows all around. The other is in a new building that was built as a museum, an entirely different kind of space—there’s no history to it. So I thought to join these two spaces, to make something that moved through them.

When I make what I call an “installation,” for lack of a better term, I don’t like it to be exactly contained by the space it’s in. The work is knit to its container—it can exist only there—but I don’t create environments. The aim is not to have you forget where you are but rather to make you aware of how this thing I’ve made intersects with its surroundings. I’m interested in the relationship between subjective experience and what we perceive as real and physically present. We typically take architecture to be “real” and art to be “fictive,” but architecture is just as fictive as anything I’m making. So when I merge my work with buildings, there is a blurring and a question about what’s real and what’s fictive.

I begin planning an installation by visiting the space, taking photographs, and looking at floor plans. I make sketches and map out ideas. When I’m gathering materials, I make use of happenstance. In this case, I was driven around Odense, where I found a lot of used fur coats (it’s a cold place). I also had this idea about stringing together foil pans and hanging them from the ceiling in a kind of curtain, but I was thinking they were bigger than they actually are. I couldn’t understand the measurements, because everything was written in Danish! I used

them anyway. I never know how a work will end; everything changes according to what’s actually possible. The details are discovered and decided on along the way.

Many things that I use, like fluorescent lights, are ubiquitous in the western world. I can count on their being available. The foil pans in *Bright Longing* . . . reflect the fluorescent tubes that are hung vertically, of which there are more in *White Light* . . . , hung over rows of space heaters. Warmth comes from the heaters, but the light is white and cold. This show is about different kinds of light. There are cold fluorescents and halogens and warm incandescents mixing with natural light (coming in through the windows and skylights) that is always changing. Sometimes the effect is sublime and sometimes stark. So the light throughout is evocative without being hypercontrolled, and there are lots of little reflections, which imbue everything with a certain romanticism—the piece points to light on water, or sunsets.

My work is structured by a kind of hard-edged painting, and a lot of the show is engaged in flat planes of color. The ramp is a purplish ultramarine, and there are big pieces of turquoise or bright pink carpet on the floor. And then there are these volumes filled up with light. At some junctures the work is crisp and clear and minimal. It’s a challenge to find a looser, goopier way for color to operate within that geometry, to have these little moments that are messy, like a mound of fur or a handbag with paint on it. These are precise and small events but startling and painterly and gooeey.

The whole thing is a series of events, a journey. You can’t see it all from one spot, and as you move

through it, the perspective changes and the picture changes. And there are tiny things—a Lego construction or a teddy bear—that are like markers along the way. It’s very much about pathways, though I don’t like to dictate where people go. When you come to the second room, you have a choice: You can walk up onto the ramp or you can walk alongside it. At the opening, which was very formal, with a lot of speeches, nobody was on the ramp. But then it started to get crowded; somebody finally walked on it, and everybody followed.

The installations are rarely permanent. Once the show is over, they’re gone. In this case, I hardly saw the work finished—I left right after the opening. That’s a little too quick. But I developed this process for myself. It’s curious, because my work came out of a desire to challenge commodities and money and ownership. Now this way of working seems to serve the museum system. It’s true that I am not selling commodities, but I am providing a paid service. Museums all over the world are expanding, and they want people like me to provide unique experiences for them. I’ve been thinking about that lately.

I’m interested in creating a physical experience based on form that floats free of orchestrated meaning. Still, art doesn’t happen in a vacuum, just as experience doesn’t happen in a vacuum. But the structure of the experience that I invent intersects with all these things in the world—objects, commodities, pieces of fur, tables, lamps—that are themselves full of form and structure. Each one of us has an internal form and structure, and we intersect with the world too—all the time, in unpredictable ways. How we manage those intersections is how we facilitate living. That’s why the work matters. □