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Inventory

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Abstract

This thesis dossier is divided into the following sections: the first is an extended artist statement that elucidates the research that orbits my visual practice, involving theories of material complicity, Object Oriented Ontology, Thing Theory, and material culture. The second section is a portfolio of photographic documentation of artworks made during my MFA candidacy, focusing primarily on works from the last 15 months. The third section is a case study exploring the expanded sculpture practice of Jessica Stockholder, whose work liberates everyday objects in an especially affective approach to installation.

Keywords

Material complicity, Jessica Stockholder, Helen Marten, Object Oriented Ontology, Thing Theory, Material culture, Expanded sculpture, Storage
Summary for Lay Audience

This thesis dossier elucidates and contextualizes the visual research I have conducted over the past two years at the University of Western Ontario. It is divided into three sections: an extended artist statement, a portfolio of photographic documentation of my artwork, and a case study of the artwork of Jessica Stockholder. The overall goal of this dossier is to explore the cultural relevance of found-object assemblage and installation practices moving into the future.
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Introduction

Your dish rack is molded from one or two solid pieces of off-white plastic. You look at your dish rack every day, if only for a few moments. You know what your dish rack does for you: it supplies an ergonomic space for your dishes to dry after you’ve washed them. What is of particular interest to me is how you would evaluate your relationship with your dish rack. It is obvious that our interactions with everyday objects are almost always dictated by what they can do for us, and that tends to be where the evaluation of these relationships ends.

This dossier, in tandem with the thesis exhibition *Inventory*, examines a potential alternative to these interactions that are based solely on use-value. I demonstrate this in my practice primarily through the collection and presentation of defunctionalized everyday objects, turned to bricolaged assemblages. My art practice also relies on theoretical research as shown in this thesis dossier. This dossier is comprised of three sections: a comprehensive artist statement, photographic documentation of the artwork I have produced throughout the duration of the MFA program, and a case study on the artwork of Jessica Stockholder.

The comprehensive artist statement explores the theories that help to substantiate my visual research, including material complicity as defined by curator Petra Lange-Berndt, Object Oriented Ontology as theorized by contemporary philosopher Graham Harman, Thing Theory as defined by theorists Bill Brown and Elizabeth Grosz, and Marxist material culture as meditated upon by artist and critic Boris Arvatov. In this section I also delve into my artistic methodologies as they work to interact with these discourses: I primarily reference artist Helen Marten’s “space lamination” as well as pragmatic storage practices.
The section of documentation provides an overview of the work I have completed throughout the duration of the MFA program. I have included work only from the spring of 2018 to present, as in that time frame my practice and research drastically changed direction to the focus of this thesis dossier. I have chosen to include mostly installation shots, as I have found that the individual sculptures therein are not effectively shown in isolation, but as an aggregate. I believe this documentation best represents my current visual practice and research interests as I move forward beyond the MFA program.

My case study focuses on the expanded sculpture practice of artist Jessica Stockholder. I explore her work in relation to the concept of “object liberation,” which allows her work to effectively hover between the real and the fantastic. I look into the ways in which she is able to liberate objects from their bounds to the mundane: her intuitive compositional arrangements, her use of colour as a performance of Duchamp’s “infra-thin,” and the lamination of space as it relates to the precedent of installation art. I argue that these maneuvers generate a level of affect in viewers that other installation practices of past and present seem unable to do. I expand on this through a brief study of the contemporary collective VSVSVS.
Comprehensive Artist Statement

Introduction

My primary interest as an artist is to encourage an active, ongoing, and therefore constantly re-evaluated relationship with the ubiquitous objects that are often overlooked as a regular part of living. I am developing strategies to remind my audience that these objects are active participants in their lives, by pointing to specific instances wherein we tend to disallow objects from speaking for themselves. Ultimately, I aim to help re-acquaint human beings with the importance of the building blocks of their surroundings, those mundane objects that populate our lives.

Through an embodied interaction with sculptural installations, viewers encounter objects that have been both defunctionalized, and re-fuctionalized as art objects. I hope to interrupt the continuum of everyday object functionality both inside and outside the art field, revealing a new double agency peripheralized from the bounds of everyday function. My work is largely a hopeful proposition that we might begin to develop a more sincere relationship with objects that does not solely depend on their use-value, but instead acknowledges the reciprocal contributions that objects make to shape and inform our conditions of living.

I will be using three terms often: materials, objects, and things. For clarity, I will define each term, in turn, as it serves my practice in this chapter. The first section of the chapter will focus on the independent vitality of materials as defined primarily by curator and writer Petra Lange-Berndt, and my own artistic use of “finished objects” as materials themselves as a possible strategy to maintaining an active and fluctuating relationship with objects.
The second section will subsequently focus on how these materials morph and combine into sculptures in my art practice, using contemporary philosopher Graham Harman’s theory of Object Oriented Ontology (OOO) as a rough framework. Since I will only be using select tenets of OOO, I aim to define how my conception of the object intersects and departs from Harman’s, and why using certain pillars of thought—and discarding others—proves catalytic in a contemporary installation practice heavily concerned with objects and objecthood.

The third section will contend with the threshold at which these objects become things, and how the intermingling of thingness in the field of sculpture affects human interaction with objects outside the field. I will use the theories of Bill Brown and Elizabeth Grosz to inform my usage of “the thing” and “thingness.”

The fourth section will explore the methodologies I employ in my artistic practice as strategies toward an expanded consideration of objects both inside and outside the art context. Of these methodologies, “lamination” as defined by artist Helen Marten and “storage aesthetics” as shaped primarily through my experience and perceptions of practical storage in everyday life, as well as the exhibition *Deep Storage*, are most important.

The final section will attempt to clarify the social implications of prioritizing reciprocity in human/object relations. For this, I will refer to Boris Arvatov’s meditations on Marxist theories of material culture.
Raw Materials and Object-Materials

In the wake of material democratization in postmodern times, art critic and philosopher Boris Groys has noted, “we know that everything can be an artwork. Or rather, everything can be turned into an artwork by an artist.”\(^1\) So what does this mean for the art material? The term material is now open-ended in nature; contemporary art practices often employ the use of “materials” that upend the modern conception of what denotes a material (paint, clay, canvas, paper, etc. are no longer boundaries). In contemporary praxis, materials can range in scope from domestic objects to poems to plywood.

In an attempt to return to the physical, Petra Lange-Berndt asks, what conditions do materials signify in real-time? She conceives of them as such: “Material generally denotes substances that will be further processed, it points to the forces of production at the time … Thus, to address processes of making is still associated with formalism, while materials are thought of in terms of concrete, direct and inert physicality, carrying imprinted messages.”\(^2\)

Lange-Berndt makes sure to differentiate between processes of making and materialism here, wherein the former is still concerned with modernist ideals of transcendence—that the artist is still some sort of magic-maker who is able to activate otherwise limp materials. The distinction of “carrying imprinted messages” is important when considering the artist who collects everyday objects for use as raw materials. Talking about artist Joseph Beuys, curator Ingrid Schaffner describes the presence of material complicity in other words: “the simplicity of the chosen materials was part of an artistic strategy that did not unfold its assertive utopia through

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heightening their impressive qualities … but through the paradoxical and sudden charge of minor significance into high significance.” ³ The paradoxical shift here is the artist’s high regard of the material as he collects and works with it, and stands in opposition to the alternative tendency of regarding an object or material as having the capacity to encompass a projected concept, which can only be unleashed by the magical hand of the human being. Schaffner goes on to say, “[the objects’] significance … is that [they] do not seem endowed with any additional ‘significance’ whatsoever.” ⁴

For the purposes of my art practice, I define materials as objects or substances which are subject to change, regardless of whether or not that change is applied toward the endgame of an art piece or some practical object-making in everyday life. Alongside the broader term “material,” I define “raw-material” and “object-material” more specifically. While both fall under the blanket term of material, “object-material” denotes an object that has already been totalized, which I repurpose as a material in my practice. ⁵ Object-materials include things like lamps, tables, wall hooks, toys, or baskets. “Raw-material” denotes a substance at an unprocessed state relative to its potential to be a totalized object. Raw materials may include things like plywood, rocks, drywall, a sheet of acrylic plastic, or paper.

Object-materials have the same potentiality for an artistic endgame as raw materials do, and I employ them just as often in my work. I draw from the domestic spheres, the interior and

³ Ingrid Schaffner and Matthias Winzen, Deep Storage: Collecting, Storing, and Archiving in Art (Munich: Prestel, 1999), 29.

⁴ Schaffner and Winzen, Deep Storage, 29.

⁵ I define “totalized object” as an object which is widely recognized as having been already primarily created for a relatively fixed purpose.
exterior spaces of everyday living, and use the artifacts of both leisurely and utilitarian mundane activities. This often amounts to a subconscious focus on the familiar, the comfortable and recognizable objects of the prosaic. These are the objects we see every day, yet are often underconsidered as they are ubiquitous tools of human existence. I propose that object-materials have an equal amount of malleability as raw-materials. If an everyday object has all the potentiality to become an object-material at any given time at the hand of an artist, it might carry an imprint of a more intimate relationship between humans and objects as well as humans and materials. Thus, hypothetically, if an object is able to remain in flux between the object-zone (where it is totalized) and the material-zone (where it is malleable for further processing), it remains active for us and for itself.

The typical lifespan of a totalized object is as follows: the object is created and designed to fulfill a specific purpose. The object lives out this purpose to some extent by either carrying out its duty successfully or at the very least existing as a recognizably useful object. The object is then eventually discarded, stored or passed over once its usefulness has diminished. I would suggest that the artist who utilizes this now “dysfunctional” object as a material toward an artistic endgame adds a new step to this lifespan: the object may now open back up for re-interpretation and the human/object relationship is extended. This sustained production may amount to a practical iteration of a less dominative relationship between the artist and the object, or the artist and the material—these may be a nascent form of a sincere refiguring of humans’ relationship with the non-living.

Lange-Berndt suggests that in order to truly point to the material and acknowledge its
importance—not only in art practice but also in life—you must be complicit with it. The process of material complicity involves not only considering the material in all of the facets of its context in the present moment, but also its livelihood in other realms, its history and conditions of existence.  

Let me then explore the livelihood of one of my most often used materials: plastic. Plastic appears in my assemblages often, whether it is in a relatively raw state as a sheet of acrylic to be further machined, or salvaged pieces of already-manufactured objects. Because of its resistance to fit neatly into the categories of raw-material or object-material, it may be useful to study plastic to find the real-time effects of this material choice in my work. Referring back to Lange-Berndt’s definition of materials, what does plastic as a material reveal as its imprinted message? Theorist Roland Barthes describes plastic as a “magical substance which consents to be prosaic.” Unlike other materials (regardless of their overwhelming presence in the everyday), plastic continues to be an active participant in its own existence as a mundane substance—it completely thrives off of banality. Plastic, in both its simplest and most complex iterations, points directly to the everyday. Barthes fits plastic into the category of “imitation material”: a material designed to cheaply mimic a more valuable material: “Until now imitation materials have always … aimed at reproducing cheaply the rarest substances, diamonds, silk … Plastic has climbed down, it is a household material …for the first time, artifice aims at something common, not rare.” Plastic marks all that we are capable of doing to and with materials; its forms are absolutely limitless. This means that its unwillingness to escape everyday-ism glues plastic to us in an affectual way. We are never able, even for a moment, to escape our attachment to it as a

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6 Lange-Berndt, Materiality, 16.


8 Barthes, Materiality, 174.
real, tactile, material, referential to nothing outside itself. In this way, regardless of if it is in a raw state or if it has already been manufactured into some object, plastic is the ultimate material: it forces a correlation between itself and the human being that is unwilling to escape the everyday. In this way, all of my materials aim to be a little bit like plastic. Most of them are left entirely recognizable as everyday objects once they reach the sculpture field; they are in no way molded like raw matter toward some notion of apex material value. These object-materials are only able to reference themselves and the spectrum of contexts within which they exist otherwise.

Objects always have the potential to be considered materials, so using an object as a material toward an artistic endgame allows that object to remain active past the point of typical totalization. This sustained production promotes an always-fluctuating relationship between the artist and those everyday objects. I am caught up in materials because their relationships remain ostensible and available in my work.

The Object and its Orientation

Graham Harman’s OOO defines objects as “unified realities—physical or otherwise—that cannot fully be reduced either downwards to their pieces or upwards to their effects.” In an issue of Art Review published in 2014, he writes that there are two basic kinds of human knowledge about what something is: “what something is made of, or [a description of] its effects.” The former is an example of reducing an object downward, the latter of reducing an object upward. For Harman, the more likely danger in the arts is the upward reduction that defines objects entirely by their effects. The risk in this scenario is stagnation: “it is dubious to
claim that objects are utterly defined by their context, without any unexpressed private surplus. To defend this view is to commit oneself to a world in which everything is already all that it can be.”

I have already proposed the fluctuation between objects and materials as a thinking-tool to sustain an active production-based relationship between humans and objects. As Harman explains, the reduction of objects to their effects glues objects to their effectual contexts, disallowing a conception of objects outside of those contexts and promoting a stagnated witness-based relationship between humans and objects (that often relies on the objects’ use-value to humans). An example of this might be seen in an art piece that presents a computer to symbolize information, reducing the computer to the effectual context of conveying information to human beings and prohibiting the speculation of its other qualities. Where the raw-material/object-material continuum allows the human/object relationship to remain active in the production stage, OOO might be the key to allowing it to remain active in the witnessing stage.

When we talk about OOO, we are contending with a de-centralizing of human perception as it pertains to our incapability of witnessing the wholeness of the independent qualities of objects. For my practice, this serves as a framework within which we as viewers can talk about

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10 The object/material continuum supports a sustained production-based relationship because it concerns the producing artist’s relationship with the object-material.

11 Using OOO to reveal the object’s stockpile of self-contained qualities would, on the other hand, sustain a more complex witness-based relationship between humans and objects because it concerns how the viewer interacts with the art object after it has been treated by the artist in the production stage.
the object outside of our usual interactions with (and therefore perceptions of) the object.

Accepting that the object has a stockpile of self-contained qualities that do not exist solely to impact human beings may be a productive foundation upon which we can build new conceptions of objecthood. This new foundation could potentially bolster a sustained witnessing of objects both inside the art field and outside of it.

Harman’s theory expands to include non-traditional objects (like a nation-state, a song, a poem, a corporation, a desire), but for my own purposes, I would like to cap the term “object” at that which can be tangibly encountered in space, that which is made up of materials and exists in a more or less fixed state (having been, at one time, “completed”). Although I consider the objects in my own work to be object-materials, the material/object continuum exists as a potentiality (as in, all objects have the potential to become materials if they remain in flux to some end other than their original objecthood). The term “object” can still be defined against the term “material,” where an object is complete and a material is subject to change. This subcategory includes objects like: a table, a window, a traffic sign, a bridge, a buoy, a wheel, or any other object that is considered independently, ahead of the sum of its materials. This is my main departure from OOO: my intention is not to objectify all phenomena that have the potential to be under- or over-determined, but to attempt to raise the status of the physical object to that which might have some self-contained importance that impacts its existence outside of our human interactions with it.

I would argue that not only are we producing objects that we cannot keep up with, but also the vitality of these objects is drained when we depend on them solely for their servitude to
human abilities. For example, artist Judith Hopf, in her written piece for e-flux magazine entitled “Contrat entre les hommes et l’ordinateur,” suggests computers retain no life outside of their use as a human extension, which may account for some of this feeling of enslavement. 12What are we if we cannot use these machines to bolster our own inherent abilities? The alternative to this system involves allowing the machine, to some degree, to be an independent agent. If, in witnessing the defunctionalized object in the art field, we are able to remove the stress of performance from our relationship with the object, perhaps our ties to the object might be left open and malleable. If our relationship is open and malleable, there is room for constant reevaluation of that relationship—it becomes momentary and yet continuous. In a world where we have a deeper, more equalized relationship with objects, there is room to take account of the objects we continue to produce and work with. This might lead to less overproduction, more responsibility toward objects, and perhaps a genuine closing of the chasm between human beings and their inhabited everyday life of objects.

The Elusive Thing

We have determined that it is possible to construct and present objects in a way that decentralizes their use-value to human beings, and therefore opens up new and flexible possibilities for the human/object relationship. Therefore, the slide cannot be slid down, the pegboard cannot be used to hang tools, the utility hooks cannot be used to put away a bicycle, and the lamp cannot illuminate. Thus, an object that is no longer useful to human beings as an extension of their abilities can maintain its own, elusive vitality, and a porous body can sensually experience this new vitalization. So what is this object now that it maintains all of its potential

energy by becoming “useless”? Critical theorist Bill Brown might refer to this object as a “thing”:

We look through objects because there are codes by which our interpretive attention makes them meaningful, because there is a discourse of objectivity that allows us to use them as facts. A thing, in contrast, can hardly function as a window—we begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us.  

“Looking through the object” refers to our tendency to use objects as symbols, to force them to speak about things outside themselves as totems: the computer symbolizes information, the ball symbolizes childhood, the scaffolding symbolizes a framework. The “thingness” of the object forces us to recognize the many types of relationships we have with objects. Brown suggests further that if the thing ceases to do what makes it characterizable as an object (often, if not always, its function for humans), it becomes much harder to claim the true nature of a ‘thing.’ He continues, “we look through objects (to see what they disclose about history, society, nature, or culture—above all what they disclose about us), but we only catch a glimpse of things.” We can only catch a glimpse of things because their defunctionalization jars us out of our usual interpretation of the thing—if there is no longer anything available for comprehension past the point of encounter, the thing is unable to work for us. In this way, the thing retains a momentary and ephemeral relationship with a sensing body, never able to rest comfortably in assumption.

Philosopher and theorist Elizabeth Grosz draws attention to the history of the thing: from Descartes to Kant, the thing was conceived as the mirror of what humans are not. She proposes an alternative to this definition: “I am seeking an altogether different lineage, one in which the

thing is not conceived as the other…but as the condition and the resource for the subject’s being and enduring.”¹⁵ I find this reconsideration of the thing particularly powerful; even Brown denotes the thing as ultimately unknowable. As opposed to understanding the “thing” as a repository of unknowable ontologies, I would like to propose the thing as the most truthful expression of our culture and conditions of living. The thing can reveal to us simply by being inaccessible, and the highest degree of truth may potentially live in the moment when the human being realizes they are unable to instantly characterize the thing. The liminality here between understanding and unknowing acts as a strength and reflects a level of knowledge that cannot be bluffed, however difficult it is to articulate. In this way, this interaction is common and yet completely new and therefore cataclysmic for whatever sensing body with which it is presently interacting.

Brown and Grosz give credence to the notion that objects can, and do, have potentialities outside of our utilization of them. This accounts for the strangeness one might feel when encountering the thing outside of its utilitarian context, and perhaps this strangeness leaves an accumulating imprint on the sensing body as it goes on to have interactions with non-thing objects. ¹⁵

**Art Methodologies: Laminated Storage Spaces**

The benefit of attempting to maintain an active relationship with objects both in the production stage (as an artist de-totalizing those objects as materials) as well as the witnessing stage (as a viewer witnessing the defunctionalized object as a sculpture in an art context) is that it

helps to foster a closeness that cannot be achieved in a typical human use-value appraisal of objects. My task as an artist now, is to distil my methodologies so as to promote this type of sustained relationship.

Artist Helen Marten describes a hybrid treatment of space wherein “all elements of the embodied experience are flattened into one layer of experience.”\(^{16}\) She names the term “lamination”; just as several pieces of paper can be laminated together, two-dimensional and three-dimensional space can be similarly joined simultaneously. I will expand on this concept as it applies to traditional treatments of space in installation in my second chapter, but for my own purposes, lamination provides an opportunity to stage an environment that grants a new and dynamic form of agency to the objects I place into the sculpture field. In my work, lamination is most effectively achieved through the manipulation of colour and consideration of the linear quality in the objects’ forms. The colours that appear most frequently in my sculptures are flat, bright and primary. They manifest in one of two ways: either through my application of paint, or as inherent colours to the objects themselves. The brightness of the objects recalls colours one might find in everyday life, but in an exaggerated and hyperbolic manner. This triggers some reminder of prosaicism, but exaggerates it to a fantastic level that tends to flatten the objects into a two-dimensional, sensational experience. From farther back, a viewer might experience an assemblage as a flat image, and upon moving around it in space, as a three-dimensional arrangement of objects. A similar focus on exaggeration informs my choice of objects. I often prefer to work with objects that retain a distinct three-dimensional quality (whether that is through implied weight, or the amount of visual or literal space they take up), but also contain

\(^{16}\) Helen Marten, Beatrix Ruf, Tom Eccles, Polly Staple, and Suzanne Schmidt, Helen Marten (Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2013), 62.
attributes that recall two-dimensional gestures. For example, a 2x4’ plastic pegboard might be large and heavy, carrying with it all the materiality that a large chunk of plastic does, but it can easily be momentarily laminated into a flat rectangle with several hundred circles drawn on.

Viewers typically experience lamination as a constant shifting back-and-forth of two and three-dimensional space. If in one instance an assemblage of objects is flattened into an image, it becomes more easily digestible, comprehensible, and can even further withdraw the objects therein from human use-value. The inherent use-value of objects depicted in an image is much less than that of objects in occupational space—what good is a photo of a hammer at driving a nail? In the next instance, as these images begin to re-disperse into three-dimensional objects, they may begin to remind the viewer of their prevalence in everyday life. The previously nullified use-value of these objects carries forward, if only partially, into everyday consideration of the objects outside of the sculpture field. Lamination, then, is a tool that might help us destabilize our need to prioritize what objects are able to do for us, and allow a more momentary sensory porosity in our interactions with objects on a regular basis.

Alongside lamination, I also utilize the aesthetics of storage in my practice. Deploying storage aesthetics in artwork is not without precedent, and in this section I will mainly refer to the exhibition titled Deep Storage, held at P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York in 1998. Deep Storage takes into consideration both the act of artistic collecting and presenting inventories, as well as the practical considerations of storing artwork. According to Ingrid Schaffner, “[The works in this exhibition] conjure three sites: the storeroom/museum, the
archive/library and the artist’s studio, an intersection of both.” Though this exhibition text focuses on the dynamics of art-centric storage specifically, I find there are applicable parallels to the pragmatic storage practices of everyday life that I reference in my own work. Art Historian Matthias Winzen suggests that “while a conventional collection unfolds, adds to, and completes the subject of a given collection … artistic collecting is relatively open-ended, less goal-oriented.” This seemingly aimless strategy intertwined in art-centric collection (Winzen is referring specifically to the act of collecting as an extension of the artist’s practice) seems to echo the pattern of consumer collecting; how often do we find that the contents of our garage or basement storage room expand on any one topic? More often in these spaces, we are confronted with a seemingly meaningless mish-mash of items that have been incidentally collected over time, perhaps connected loosely by themes pertaining to their use-value.

Practical storage denotes a problematic relationship between human and object, where responsibility over the object being stored can be relinquished for an indeterminate amount of time. I assert that the practical act of storing an object suspends that object in animation; it does not relinquish ownership or responsibility over that object, but it does temporarily forfeit the object’s ability to act in a relationship with a person. Storage is often seen as a temporary absolver of consumer guilt, and usually does not account for the physicality of the objects therein until they must become garbage. This creates a scenario where the objects being stored are invisible, useless, yet continue to accumulate until a threshold is reached where they must be contended with en masse.

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18 Schaffner and Winzen, *Deep Storage*, 22.
I employ a distinct storage vocabulary when considering the assemblage of my sculptures, which often includes stacking, leaning, upturning, or bundling. These are actions that prioritize the efficiency of space usage over viewership, which is typical in practical storage endeavors. When I present my sculptures using these storage vocabularies, they are somewhat unavailable; they are removed from complete accessibility because they are sandwiched among each other in a way that disallows the typical availability of a sculpture presented in the round. This asserts an interesting brand of agency for the sculptures; they are able to deny the viewer total visual ownership over them, while existing within a display method that is not uncommon in everyday life. This creates the sense that these are natural positions, though they are quite intentionally disruptive in the art context.

The key differences between my deployment of storage aesthetics and practical instances of storage are: first, I “store” sculptures that are made out of defunctionalized objects (that, intentionally, are often found in storage), and second, my sculptures are staged as if being stored for a spectating audience. In practical storage, objects are paused in motion and closed off from human interaction, whereas in my assemblages, objects are being spectated while they inhabit this realm of interrupted performance. Alongside the fact that these sculptures are defunctionalized objects, this spectatorship is key in unleashing the objects’ potential because we as an audience are being coerced into speculating on all the things these objects could be capable of, were they not assembled as sculptures and suspended “in storage.” By allowing a spectatorship into a storage space of already defunctionalized items, I aim to highlight the
importance of that intermediate time period. Where the object was once suspended in animation, invisible and useless, it is now extremely seen and perhaps appreciated for that same uselessness.

Though I reference aspects of practical storage in the assemblage of my work, I aim to retain a certain boundary between sculptures that suggests an intentionality beyond simply condensing stored objects as much as possible. Beyond giving the sculptures “breathing room,” this tactic allows the works to retain an ostensible level of interaction with one another. Though the sculptures are busy retaining their independent qualities, we as an audience should still remember the potentiality of these objects to release those qualities at an unknown time.

**Conclusion**

I believe that multiplying the qualities of objects—completely independent from their capability to extend the abilities of human beings—is integral to any hope that we can bridge the chasm between people and our everyday surroundings. I have discussed the steps I take in my artistic practice to promote the idea that defunctionalized objects have the potential to reveal truths about our everyday lives. I maintain a high degree of material complicity, accepting the independent vitality of totalized objects as I work with them as materials, as well as laminating the ensuing sculptures into two-dimensional space and employing practical storage aesthetics as I assemble them for my viewers.

My intention as an artist is to bridge the chasm between human beings and the everyday life of objects they inhabit, the ultimate goal of which is socially murky. However, Marxist studies of material culture may elucidate some of the potential implications of this intention.
According to artist and critic Boris Arvatov, “The material culture of a society is the universal system of Things, i.e., the socially expedient material forms created by humanity through the transformation of so-called natural forms.” He asserts that everyday life in any society is formed both by material production and consumption, and “the relation of the individual and the collective to the Thing is the most fundamental and important, the most defining of the social relations.” Arvatov proposes that the rift between people and the objects that surround them has been caused by the organization of capitalist society and the subsequent lack of contact the bourgeoisie has historically had with the production of material values. With this lack of contact came a gradual alienation of material production from everyday life. The material object thus manifested in one of two possible ways: as the object on the market, or as the object in private everyday life. This phenomenon marks no subsequent overlap between the realities of production and the finished product; the owned objects of the bourgeoisie thus simultaneously become symptoms of and active upholders of class differentiation.

This isolated material culture causes the object to seem dead; it eliminates its potentiality in order to position it as either an a-material commodity solely for exchange value, or an ineffectual adornment of everyday life. The object’s surplus is closed off in favor of allocating profits or status appropriate to the capitalist system. Arvatov argues that in order to promote the dissolution of such cartoonishly distinguished classes as are present in capitalist society, the

19 The term “thing” here is translated from an expansive Russian definition; “thing” can be approximated to the expansive English use of “object.” Boris Arvatov and Christina Kiaer, "Everyday Life and the Culture of the Thing (Toward the Formulation of the Question)," October 81 (1997): 120. doi:10.2307/779022.

20 Arvatov and Kiaer, “Everyday Life and the Culture of the Thing,” 120.

object cannot be regarded as dead or stagnant. Instead, people should be able to see their
everyday life and culture reflected in objects through reciprocal interactions. It is important to
distinguish that Arvatov envisions this via recognizing the dynamic utility of objects, whereas I
am lobbying for a consideration of objects outside of their use-value to human beings. Despite
Arvatov’s prioritization of object utility, his resistance toward prioritizing the ideological value
of objects runs parallel to the interpretation of thing theory that I utilize in my work.\(^{22}\)

I propose that in my art practice, making room for the object’s potentiality positions it as
vital and symptomatic of our everyday conditions of living. I hope that reciprocal interactions
with defunctionalized art objects may carry over into interactions with their still-utilitarian
cousins outside of the art field, causing an expanded consideration of objects in all spheres of
life. Through a closer relationship with objects that acknowledges their private contributions to
everyday life, my work attempts to promote a way of living that does not exploit objects into
building social rifts between production and consumption.

\(^{22}\) According to Arvatov, when the object is encapsulated as an a-material value, it is being
considered purely ideologically, as representing class-status.
Arvatov and Kiaer, “Everyday Life and the Culture of the Thing,” 123.


Three installation views of various untitled sculptures stored together, 2019.
Materials include: a satellite dish, leather, a CRT monitor, wires, electrical tape, an office chair, duct tape, laundry tubs, bungee cords, an artificial tree, particle board, Plexiglas, bolts, nuts, a plastic tub, a foam roller, under-carpet foam, a slide, metal tubes, milk crates, bamboo, a wet floor sign, rope, an end table, vinyl appliqué, thermoplastic, a step stool, and paint. Dimensions variable.

These installation views feature a partially obscured look at an aggregate of most of the sculptures I completed by the final critique of my second year in the MFA program (April 2019). These works were installed in a small, unused personal studio within the larger drawing studio at Western University. The concept behind this installation was to somewhat mimic the way space efficiency is prioritized in practical storage endeavors, as opposed to traditional sculpture presentation. Viewers had to peek in through the narrow doorway and were only able to step approximately three to four feet inside the small room.
Installation view of two slat fixtures, partially obscured by various untitled sculptures. 2019. MDF, paint. 2.5 x 3.5’ each.

This image features the same installation from the above images but focuses on the two slat fixtures on the wall. Both of the fixtures were made from scratch by me and serve to reference fixtures associated with commercial storage endeavors.

These works stand out from the rest of the sculptures in the above images because they are not made from object-materials, but are instead made from what viewers might think of as raw-materials (MDF, paint). Because they function purely aesthetically (there is nothing hung on them), they exist in a similar way as the other sculptures in the room. The difference between them is that the slat fixtures have been defunctionalized before they even had the chance to be functional in the first place. Further, and similar to the shelving fixtures featured in the images to follow, these works were built with the gallery space in mind; their size, shape and colours disallow these fixtures from being useful in almost any other space. In tailoring these works for the gallery space, I hope to bridge my practical storage conversation into one that talks about the gallery space as a transient storage facility.

The sculptures I have made during the second half of my MFA program are not designed to stand alone, but rather among their accompanying sculptures in aggregate. The reason I have chosen to show select works in isolation in the following six images is to give a better sense of their aesthetic details and the choices I have made to interrupt their functionality.
Slide, plywood, Astroturf, tile, paint.
Two installation views of untitled sculptures as seen in the exhibition 'selsun blue', 2019. Astroturf, rope, sleeping bag, tiles, bicycle pedal, chair armature, wet floor sign, vinyl, paint.
Five installation views of various untitled sculptures as seen in the exhibition ‘The gallery is a sort of facility’, 2019.

Materials include plywood, 2x4s, artificial plants, plaster, a side table, vinyl appliqué, milk crates, a bucket, a steering wheel, a bungee cord, a scallop shell, a face cloth, a lamp shade, baskets, gloves, a plastic jug, duct tape, a lamp, a sleeping bag, Astroturf, rope, a wet floor sign, vinyl, pool noodles, a beach ball, a remote control, Plexiglas, a headboard, vents, particle board and paint.

These images feature two shelving units, which, similar to the slat walls in the preceding documentation, were fabricated entirely from raw-materials (2x4s, plywood). I built these shelves to the specifications of the McIntosh gallery, where I am holding my thesis exhibition. Here they are shown at a solo exhibition held at Satellite Project Space in London, Ontario. Pictured also are some newer sculptures completed during the summer of 2019.
Case Study

Jessica Stockholder

Wide Eyes Smeared Here, Dear at the Musée d’Art Moderne, Saint Étienne Métropole
June 23 – September 30, 2012

Introduction

Wide Eyes Smeared Here, Dear is an installation by Jessica Stockholder originally completed in 2009 for the group show Embrace! at the Denver Art Museum. It was again rendered at the Musée d’Art Moderne, Saint Étienne Métropole in 2012 as a solo show amongst some of her other works, and was curated by its executive director Lóránd Hegyi. Wide Eyes Smeared Here, Dear is comprised mainly of everyday objects such as: a swing set, curtain rods, black velvet curtain panels, a pink velvet curtain panel, a photo print with paint collage on Plexiglas, a painted legless armchair, green Astroturf blocks, a block of plastic novelties cast in acrylic, a fake rock with acrylic paint, yellow, orange, red, purple, pink, lavender, and clear plastic kitchen wares, blue heavy duty plastic clamps, a blob of red acrylic paint, an orange plush carpet, recycled white clothing, clear plastic shower curtains, brass grommets, a floodlight, and a yellow electrical cord. As exemplified by this list of familiar materials—we find we are in the midst of our own life objects and relations. Jessica Stockholder maintains the wholeness of the objects’ recognizability in her sculptures and can thereby employ and exploit our half-retention of the everyday meaning and nature of these objects when she places them in the field of her work.23 This leaves the other half of her gesture, as an artist, to be categorized. Stockholder

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23 Rosalind Krauss coined the term “expanded field” as it pertains to the placement of art objects in space. This was done in an attempt to articulate the wavering outline of sculpture that developed in the wake of work that could no longer be defined as such by its placement on a plinth in a white room. The Minimal works that Krauss points to demand that we create a new level of abstraction in mind in order to understand such works as separate from their locations.
begins with the stuff of the everyday—but something happens when she recontextualizes these objects into her work. Something unfamiliar is going on with these familiar objects as art materials.

For the purposes of this case study, I will refer to this recontextualization as “object liberation.” Object liberation occurs when the usage of an object obscures its intended usage (prescribed by human beings) to total unimportance; a dining chair that is de-legged and used as a conduit for a swath of green, never to be sat on, is liberated from its duties as a dining chair, because it is no longer able to carry them out (Fig 1). Liberation can be achieved not only through the physical alteration of objects, but also simply by their placement in the field of sculpture (and therefore outside of the realm of the everyday). Stockholder liberates these objects by undermining their normal definitions and functions by partially removing them from the everyday context. She also liberates by re-making the objects, through painterly treatments and various bricolage techniques such as placing, stacking, affixing and combining. Using a variety of these maneuvers, her work hovers and occupies the half-movement space between the mundane and the fantastic. Of these emancipatory maneuvers, the ones on which I will focus my attention primarily include: the intuitive compositional arrangement of objects; the use of colour as a performance of the infra-thin; and, the lamination of space. I will argue that these maneuvers ultimately generate a level of affect in the viewer that has not previously been achieved in the


24 Object liberation is similar to “thingness,” in that it expands interactions with the object beyond its typical use-value to human beings. However, since Stockholder is not purposely interacting with thing theory, I have expanded the phenomenon for the purposes of this study.
precedence of installation art, and continues to be under-utilized in contemporary installation practices. I will begin by focusing on Stockholder’s source materials—the objects that surround our everyday lives.

**Object Knowledge**

Stockholder’s work hovers between fantasy and reality so delicately that a viewer does not need to sacrifice their comfort or security to immerse themselves into a newly fantastic, dreamlike landscape of the familiar unbound. This is due largely to Stockholder’s half-dedication to the veritas of the mundane. This dedication is exemplified most effectively in her choice of objects: Stockholder’s objects are those that are very often overlooked, and yet are simultaneously found everywhere—everyday—all around us: the stuff of hardware stores, backyards, basement storage rooms, kitchens, parks or laundromats. They are often overlooked because they do not assert themselves as individually important outside of their assigned usage, which blends seamlessly into the needs of everyday life. When these objects get “liberated” by the needs of sculpture, they become ostensibly strange to encounter. This is due to the uncanniness of their existence in the art field—outside the realm of the everyday.

So how does Stockholder use the objects of the mundane to arrive at the fantastic? This seems like a process doomed to an oxymoronic result. Helen Marten’s perspective on domestic space as a potentially hybridized field may assist in answering this question. Marten muses that hybridization can only occur from the known—if we begin with what is most familiar, in theory we can use the everyday (the known) as a building block in the creation of a hybridized field.²⁵

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²⁵ Helen Marten, Beatrix Ruf, Tom Eccles, Polly Staple, and Suzanne Schmidt. *Helen*
In Marten’s case, this means objects found within the domestic environment; however, the theory can be expanded beyond the home to any overlooked object. The hybrid field, then, is an act of de-totalization. Marten goes on to say, “Things don’t become frightening until we name them enough to totalize them and abstract them from any locatable origin.”

By placing these objects in the field of sculpture, Stockholder takes the totalized-by-language objects of life and de-assigns their usage enough to jar them out of their perceptual constraints. This is a relieving and unburdening motion for both the objects as well as the person who experiences these objects on a daily basis (whether consciously or unconsciously). Freshly unburdened, these building blocks of the everyday are free to become fantastic in and of themselves, regardless of their treatment or placement in the field.

We must acknowledge that, however free the objects become for movement, they are not placed in the field without consideration. When asked about the logic behind her compositional choices, Stockholder claims, “[During] the design stage … the intuitions, ideas and ingredients that go into [the work] seem to organize. As if the work grew like a plant, or a tree, in a kind of organic formalism.” This “organic formalism” may also theoretically encompass Stockholder’s half-retention of the mundane. Stockholder’s ability to marry compositions turns “everyday formalism” into “formalism of the everyday.” Her compositions are informed whether directly or indirectly by the natural occurrence of object arrangements outside the field of sculpture, and her semi-suprematist decontextualization destroys the boundaries of everyday objecthood and

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26 Marten et al., Helen Marten, 62.

creates a new blank field where anything can work together. This manifests in arrangements that look relatively familiar, but are jumbled in a way that retains a formal logic independent from real life. When we are confronted by a several-foot-tall pile of multicoloured plastic kitchenware, we are perhaps at first reminded of a smaller pile found in the kitchen (Fig 1). It is this initial recognition that eases us into Stockholder’s choice to hyperbolize the pile into a rainbow-coloured monument.

Hyperbole functions here as an exaggeration not only of size, but of importance; when the kitchenware becomes monumental, we are forced to experience it in a new and exciting way. This choice is important: Stockholder does not fully defunctionalize the kitchenware, she simply defers its meaning, temporarily assigns it to a peripheral space so that we as viewers may consider a wider field of meaning, functionality and aesthetic.

Wide Eyes Smeared Here, Dear as well as much of Stockholder’s oeuvre “build[s] a new machine out of mispronounced functions.” The original functions of the source objects are rendered unimportant and are often not being accomplished as usual. Considering this concept in the wake of artists like Duchamp who sought to destabilize the meaning of objects, we see that the only necessary function of Stockholder’s new machines is to shift focus from the old ones (of

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28 Pascal Pique comments that the ghost of Malevich is visible in Stockholder’s work: “Semi-suprematist” refers to Stockholder’s treatment of everyday objects as formal building blocks, much like the basic geometric forms utilized in Russian Suprematism. Madoff and Pique, Jessica Stockholder, 41.

29 Madoff and Pique, Jessica Stockholder, 41.
everyday life). There is a useful example of this in the “swing set” with white linens clamped to it (Fig 2). This configuration closely mimics the way a clothesline might accomplish the drying of clothes. The field does not need dry linens, it just needs to present a mechanism that could, in theory, dry linens. The viewer is momentarily removed from the notion of a clothes line, but the fact that it could be a clothes line lingers in the back of the mind and is not hard to relocate as an anchor of reality as needed.

Object assignment, or the everyday meaning and impression of objects, is important to consider when thinking about how Stockholder stages her sculptures. Where object liberation is the destabilization of the everyday meaning of objects, object assignment is the initial force that is being destabilized. In seeing and comprehending objects in the realm of everyday life, we are subconsciously obeying the notion of object assignment. “In Stockholder’s work, [object] assignment concerns the effect on the phenomenological body … and the thinking body.”

Object assignment constitutes the use of both of these two bodies, where Stockholder’s work is a thin membrane that joins them. This is because when we see the object, we automatically think about what it usually does, and then we are forced to perceive it as doing something completely different, at least for a moment. Because we can rest here, in the middle of our phenomenological and thinking bodies, there develops a satisfying justification period when either body is able to fill in where the other may leave a gap in comprehension. This is an effect that generates affect in the viewer—the momentary consideration of the liminal space between the phenomenological and thinking body draws attention to either one in a way that can only be

30 Madoff and Pique, Jessica Stockholder, 20.

31 Madoff and Pique, Jessica Stockholder, 19.
done by considering its counterpart. Stockholder’s re-staged objects force a deeper connection with both of these methods of human understanding.

**Colour as a Performance of the Infra-thin**

Looking at Stockholder’s work, it is clear that colour has a primary role in many of her aesthetic decisions, even to the point of undermining her choice of source objects. How can colour undermine an object, especially if that object has been fabricated or altered specifically for use in the sculpture field? About *Wide Eyes Smeared Here, Dear*, Pascal Pique writes, “[m]ost of the objects seem to be there for their colour, whether they are in their original colours or have been painted over … Rarely in operation or presented for their use value, the objects are rather like their own ghosts.”

In Stockholder’s work, colour has the ability to upstage its substrate, whether the colour has been applied by the artist or is an inherent property of the object. Colour is the main characteristic of the objects, thus “ghosting” any other object attributes (like everyday function). In this way, colour interrupts the objects themselves, temporarily jarring our knowledge of them. The term “ghost” suggests that there is still a remaining trace; the objects’ other attributes have not gone away completely. Because the objects are still ostensibly recognizable outside of their new colour properties, this can also be classified as another half-motion away from the everyday.

Like all of Stockholder’s sculptures, *Wide Eyes Smeared Here, Dear* is home to dozens of highly saturated, intense colours. These colours can be separated into two general sources:

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brightly coloured pigments that are applied to surfaces in painted swathes; and brightly coloured manufactured objects. Stockholder’s choice to include both of these types of colour is interesting; some objects have not been altered in any way prior to their placement in the field. For example, the Astroturf placed on the floor next to the legless armchair is a bright and saturated green, not unlike it would appear on a mini-golf course (Fig 1). The viewer has to negotiate that while the Astroturf exists exactly how it would in the world, it sits just beside a manufactured rock covered in orange and yellow paint; the rock, of course, is not how a rock would appear in nature. The viewer must rest in the liminal space between reality and fantasy in order to comfortably view these two objects side by side, to negotiate the field in which the objects live together.

How can we approach the potential affect of the inclusion of these two categories of colour? Let us take a simplified definition of Duchamp’s infra-thin from Dan Devening, curator of the 2004 show by the same name at the Gahlberg Gallery: In its most simplistic form, infra-thin is a kind of immeasurable difference or separation between two things; according to Duchamp, this partition is invisible and intangible, but otherwise manifestly present. According to Duchamp, infra-thin is present in the transparency of the Large Glass; it can be found when pondering the difference between a common bottle rack and Duchamp’s readymade artwork Bottle Rack; infra-thin is illustrated in the microscopic discrepancies in casts from identical molds.\footnote{Dan Devening, \textit{Infra-Thin: A Curated Project by Dan Devening} (Glen Ellyn, IL: College of Dupage, 2004), 3.}

It may be useful to use Duchamp’s infra-thin to illuminate this discrepancy in reality. As
a consolidating example, the infra-thin might explain the difference between a chair that has been painted green and a chair that is green. The physical differences between these two hypothetical objects may not be visible, for the chair painted green may have been painted convincingly and the green chair may have been shoddily factory-produced. However, the infra-thin between the two is manifestly present, for one object has been somewhat overwritten and one has been left unchanged. As is exemplified by these two types of chairs, Stockholder’s colour acts as another invisible transformation of objecthood, as a performance of the infra-thin. It is within this momentary transfer that affect may be experienced by the viewer. The prompt to wonder about the nature of the object’s colour summons a deeper category of attention to the object itself.

If we are contending with an intangible transformation of objecthood through colour, it is important to ask what this transformation is doing to our perception of the objects, and therefore what the subsequent affect actually is. The answer might be found in Stockholder’s choice of palette. According to Sarah Ahmed, happiness is to be happy about something, and being happy about something makes that thing “good.” Happiness is a promise that directs us towards certain objects, which then circulate as social goods. As a result, because we avoid things that we do not want, we can say that happiness is an orientation toward objects we come into contact with on a regular basis. We therefore tend to most often see the objects we like. Ahmed is referring to happy affect as the direct result of a set of familiarities. In this context, the term “object” can refer to a number of things that perform as objects, outside of literal objecthood—this may include a number of liminally physical things, such as colour (which performs as both a literal

and intangible object in Stockholder’s work). Therefore, happiness can theoretically be generated through a familiar set of colours, such as Stockholder’s highly saturated primary palette. These colours are very rarely dulled, muted or diluted; each one demands as much attention as the one adjacent. They are familiar and often seen in the manufacturing of countless facets of our everyday lives: children’s toys, billboard advertisements, plastic housewares, safety equipment. If Stockholder’s infra-thin colours act as a momentary transformation of objecthood, and that transformation amounts to a normalization of brightly saturated colours, then it can be argued that the infra-thin acts as a device that decants happiness into the otherwise dull objects of the everyday. This is accomplished through both categories of colorization: the first being that bright “in situ” colours are emphasized as fantastic, and the second being that objects with inherently dull colours are replaced or covered with bright colours.

Laminated Space

Stockholder avoids the term “installation” when referring to her work, favoring terms like “situation” or “expanded sculpture.” This is usually in response to the narrow definitions of space that installation often evokes. Miwon Kwon writes, “It has become commonplace in recent years to locate the origin of installation art… to either Happenings or Minimalism.” The commonality between these two movements is the treatment of space as literal, embodied, behavioral, phenomenological and primary. Consequently, the majority of installation art


prioritizes this treatment of space. Herein lies the distinction between Stockholder’s work and installation: while her work does assert its occupational space as embodied by forcing the body to interact with it in a multitude of ways simultaneously (as an actor in a scene or a spectator in a white cube, for example), what is most interesting about Stockholder’s treatment of space is that, in contrast, it is also simultaneously fictive and pictorial. She treats objects like formal elements in a painting, which adds an undeniable element of pleasure to the embodied experience. We as viewers are not asked to reflect on this formal treatment of space, only to witness and be moved in a dreamlike state; we are constantly moving back and forth between formal appreciation and embodied experience. For example, the vantage point from which a viewer looks at *Wide Eyes Smeared Here, Dear* in Figure 2 completely flattens the piece. The viewer is distanced from the work to such a degree that they can witness the piece in two dimensions; the work is split into several smaller painterly compositions. The plastic monument is spot lit and sits in front of the orange wall panel, shortening the distance from the monument to the wall. The inclusion of the photo-paint collage to its left underscores the sculptural gestures as painterly, flattening the entire composition. Upon moving closer, the compositional elements begin to separate into sculptures as the viewer moves around them in space. The familiarity of the objects also serves to reinforce them as being in 1:1 scale with the viewer as they recall seeing them outside the sculpture field.

Helen Marten uses the term “lamination” to explain this idea—all elements of the embodied experience are flattened into one layer of experience or perception.37 “Laminated Space” therefore constitutes a multidimensional embodied experience: each element in real space remains ostensibly unchanged, but is being compressed into a composition that can exist purely

37 Marten et al., *Helen Marten*, 62.
two-dimensionally as a separate and framed entity. About the spacial quality of her work, Stockholder comments,

Standing in front of one of my pieces, its size is important in relationship to your size, you feel how heavy it is or what the light is like in the room, and all that kind of information is seen in relation to the pictorial structure in the work. The thing cues you to measure one side against the other, trying to balance it as you would a picture, and for me, looking at things in a pictorial way includes a distancing where the thing that’s pictured is far away and a little static… I place the pictorial in a context where it’s always being poked at. The picture never stands, it’s always getting the rug pulled out from under it.38

What about this liminal treatment of space generates positive affect for the viewer? I have spoken about Ahmed’s theory of using familiarity as a positive affect generator, but if Stockholder employs a number of strategies to liberate (and therefore change the perception) of everyday objects, what does that do to this affect? Ironically, her emancipatory maneuvers often amount to the staging, spotlighting, elevation and over-exaggeration of the importance of everyday objects. The pile of kitchenware becomes a monument, the swing set turns into a giant clothesline, the white shirt becomes a mutant linen. Ahmed might describe Stockholder’s object liberation as the “passing around” of happy objects: “After all, the word ‘passing’ can mean not only ‘to send over,’ or ‘to transmit,’ but also to transform objects by a ‘sleight of hand.’ Like the game telephone, what passes between proximate bodies might be affective precisely because it deviates and even perverts what was sent out.”39 This perversion ultimately serves to emphasize the actions of the everyday, and therefore makes small movements as significant as they can hope to be. The viewer can at once traditionally spectate the piece while also becoming the lead


actor in its stage play, an emboldening yet still comfortable idea when the piece so closely mimics the viewer’s real life.

**Contemporary Installation Practices**

In order to contextualize the importance of her work for the contemporary audience, let us take as a counter-example of popular contemporary installation art, the Toronto collective VSVSVS. There are stark similarities between the two; however, their differences are significant and mark an important historical shift in contemporary installation art, the problems with which might be solved by Stockholder’s approaches. Terence Dick, Toronto writer and editor of *Akimblog* describes VSVSVS as trying to “heighten the visitor’s awareness of the aesthetic potential in bowls, plants, dishes, and artfully designed containers.” 40 He notes their attempts to socially and actively “artify” life, to delight in the materiality of things. Their work is decidedly DIY; it works with what it has at its disposal in a slapdash attempt to aestheticize living. Looking at their 2015 installation at Mercer Union, it is not difficult to spot connections between VSVSVS’ clubhouse-like configuration and one of Stockholder’s “stages” (seen in most of her recent exhibitions like *Relational Aesthetics* at the Contemporary, Austin) (Fig 3, 4). In Stockholder’s case, we see a climbable structure upon which we can achieve a new vantage point to consider her other works (as well as the work of others, if she chooses). In the case of VSVSVS, we see a climbable structure, which we can use to reconsider the objects and systems hiding within. Both offer an uncanny inhabitable area we must use to consider its neighboring

objects differently than we might in real life, in some way or another. In both shows we see the mixing up and changing of the impressions of everyday objects on a viewership. RM Vaughan of art criticism publication *MOMUS* remarks, “The fun of a VSVSVS show is equivalent to the fun of playing with a Lego set or a random pile of toys, of making new worlds from the overlooked and the everyday.” Both VSVSVS and Stockholder use object assignment destabilization tactics, like hybridization through recontextualization, to free up everyday objects for new possible perceptual consideration. Both start with objects of the everyday, and end up somehow, magically, with something hybrid, something strange yet familiar. I would approximate the tactics of this collective to Stockholder’s; we are looking at another case of object liberation, albeit with slightly different aims.

The key difference between a practice like Stockholder’s and that of VSVSVS might be found in the way they approach accessibility. In a very recent article by Lee Henderson at *MOMUS*, the writer finds words to describe the shift in the installation practices of contemporary Canadian collectives in the term “New Hoser Aesthetics.” According to Henderson, “Increasingly, there is a turn within Canadian art—especially among collectives like VSVSVS, The Cedar Tavern Signers, Duke and Battersby, and Instant Coffee—towards the use of ready or familiar materials and signifiers arranged in a way that allows a viewer some navigability therein.” We can see this in the familiar list of materials of such collectives (in the case of VSVSVS’ *Not together, but alongside*, at Mercer Union, disembodied plush toys, plywood,

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bathroom tile, house plants, LED fixtures, ladders, etc.). According to Henderson, when these items are removed from daily life and reformatted for the gallery, although they might still signify aspects of the domestic and mundane, their gallery-mediated-materiality filters these associations. In accordance with the post-modern trend of using materials as an index for worldly phenomena, collectives like VSVSVS may be using this object liberation to foster a degree of familiarity in order to use that comfort to specifically destabilize norms and expectations of everyday life. What does this mean for the state of contemporary installation practice? “Set against a broader art historical backdrop, the New Hoser Aesthetics strikes a bargain between an affable postmodernism and a conciliatory modernism.”

Collectives like VSVSVS acknowledge that their post-industrial material lists are disjointed, and so, they still alter the materials for the contemporary gallery audience; polishing edges and cleaning up sawdust in an attempt to catch a bit of the material transcendence promised by modern formality.

Jessica Stockholder utilizes similar post-industrial materials as well as a distinct lightheartedness of subject matter. Why does her work seem to slip so effortlessly into an institutional framework, without a hint of irony or aloofness? The answer might be found in her space lamination. We see that this New Hoser aesthetic depends heavily on relatability through experiential space construction; it relies on its viewership’s ability to inhabit semi-familiar arenas of life while also maintaining the right to mess up those spaces’ common associations. I have spoken about Stockholder’s multiple simultaneous treatments of space (embodied and phenomenological, yet flat and pictorial) through lamination, but it is important to outline exactly what labor that latter treatment of space is carrying out for her materials. Her formally appreciative flattening of space not only shifts focus somewhat backward to modernist ideals, it

\[\text{43 Henderson, “”Accessibility’ and the New Hoser Aesthetics.”}\]
also removes emphasis from extra-sculptural phenomena; it takes a major weight off of objects as a material index. In New Hoser aesthetics, it is true that the objects become unbound from the everyday, but they also get re-assigned with an index of new concerns. In the case of VSVSVS, the ladder is necessary for accessing a deregulated space; the use of plywood is a stand-in for class relations in an overpopulated city. Stockholder’s work manages to stealthily avoid this index, and the work remains about itself, free from virtually all responsibility outside of the sculpture field.

**Conclusion**

When considering Stockholder’s work in the wake of installation art as well as moving forward into post-modernism, what is most affective is her deviant choice to remain floating between worlds. Space must be negotiated as realistic as well as beautifully and formally fictive. Her objects retain partial recognizability, but their assignment is betrayed when they are recontextualized into the field. Colour is employed both as a realistic tableau of the fantastic elements of the everyday and as a dreamlike improvement upon it. Every one of Stockholder’s objects is simultaneously flattened into a digestible formal decision as well as is opened up for a limitless elevation of importance. It is precisely through the retention and lamination of the everyday world that overlooked objects may become bright, immediate and excitingly affective without the additional burden of extra-sculptural phenomena.


[http://akimbo.ca/akimblog/?id=1023](http://akimbo.ca/akimblog/?id=1023).


Figures List


Fig 4. VSVVS, *Not together, but alongside, Installation View*, 2015. Image courtesy of VSVVS.
Curriculum Vitae

**Education**
University of Western Ontario
2017- 2019   MFA Candidate
McMaster University
2012-2016   BFA Honors

**Solo Exhibitions**
2019   *Inventory*, McIntosh Gallery, London ON
2019   *The gallery is a sort of facility*, Satellite Project Space, London ON

**Select Group Exhibitions**
2019   *The Board Room*, Forest City Gallery, London ON*
*non-compensated board participation; Examination of non-profit artist-run culture in Canada. Artist: Patrick Cruz
2019   *selsun blue*, ArtLab, London ON
2018   *not bad, considering*, ArtLab, London ON
2018   *Video Rental Store*, SAW Video's Knot, Ottawa ON
2018   INWARD < - > OUTWARD, ArtLab, London ON
2017   *Common Goods*, Forest City Gallery, London ON
2017   *THE SNAKE PIT*, Hotel Hamilton, Hamilton ON
2017   *HUSH*, The Baltimore House, Hamilton ON
2016   *SWARM*, Hamilton Artists Inc., Hamilton ON
2016   *Moonglade*, Art Gallery of Burlington, Burlington ON
2016   *SPIDERWEBNET*, Fitzhenry Atrium, Hamilton ON
2016   *Exit Strategy*, McMaster Museum of Art, Hamilton ON
2016   *Ignition*, Hamilton Artists Inc., Hamilton ON
2015   *Emerging Artists Exhibition*, Carnegie Gallery, Dundas ON
2015   *SWARM*, Hamilton Artists Inc., Hamilton ON
2015   *Relapse, Remiss*, Mulberry Café, Hamilton ON
2015   *FAIL*, Hamilton Artists Inc., Hamilton ON
2015   *Zeno’s Paradox*, The Spice Factory, Hamilton ON
2014  *SWARM*, Hamilton Artists Inc., Hamilton ON

**Screenings**
2017  PHOTOPHOBIA, Art Gallery of Hamilton, Hamilton ON

**Artist Talks**
2017  *Cotton Factory Residency* Artist Talk Series, The Cotton Factory, Hamilton ON
2016  *Exit Strategy* Artist Talk Series, McMaster Museum of Art, Hamilton, ON
2016  *Inc Spots*, Hamilton Artists Inc., Hamilton, ON

**Related Experience**
2018- Present  Gallery Preparator at SATELLiTE Project Space, London ON
2018  Communications and Programming Assistant at TAP Centre for Creativity, London ON
2018-2019  T.A. at Western University – VA 1025 (visual arts studio year 1)
2017-2018  T.A. at Western University – VA 1020 (visual arts foundations)
2017  Interim Arts and Tech Admin at Factory Media Center, Hamilton ON
2014-2015  T.A. at McMaster University – 2DG3 AND 2PG3 (second year drawing and painting)

**Board/Association Affiliation**
2018- Present  Programming Chair of the Board of Directors, Forest City Gallery, London ON
2018-2019  Chair of the Visual Arts Graduate Student Association, University of Western Ontario

**Articles, Reviews and Publication**

**Achievements and Awards**

2018, 2019  Western Graduate Research Scholarship, University of Western Ontario

2017  Dean's Entrance Scholarship, University of Western Ontario
      Chair's Entrance Scholarship, University of Western Ontario

2016  Ignition Award for Distinction in the McMaster Studio Arts Program

2015  University Senate Scholarship, McMaster University

2014  University Senate Scholarship, McMaster University