Jessica Stockholder

Pucker
Dieu Donné Lab Grant Program: Jessica Stockholder
Pucker
March 3 - May 14, 2005
Color Degree Zero BY FAYE HIRSCH

Vibrant, pulsating color is the overriding impression conveyed by the several dozen works that Jessica Stockholder made during her Dieu Donné Lab Grant residency. Paper pulp holds hues in a very special way; having the pigment attached onto its very stuff—literally, macerated and reconstituted fabric—the resulting work is saturated with color, which can be so vivid that it conveys the impression of something almost purely optical that hovers in our field of vision. A certain material vagueness in pigmented paper pulp thus seems ideal for Stockholder, who has always enjoyed the erasure of distinctions: between gross matter and art, composition and formlessness, narrative and abstraction, sculpture and painting.

The Dieu Donné works, with their intense palette, provoke all manner of ambiguous readings. In Green Wrinkles, for example (Stockholder’s titles for the Dieu Donné pieces are suitably short and more descriptive than the surreal, poetic titles she gives to her large installations), the embossment of a car floor-mat appears to churn up what was once the wet pulp. The bright green color disguises—though does not obliteratethe castaway mat in giving it new life as an image, and the wrinkles in the paper might be seen, metaphorically, as the seismic registration of this displacement of objet trouvé into art, and its dematerialization into optics. Nearby is a photographic fragment of a red shiny surface catching a glint of sunlight, similarly tracing the movement from one state to another: from something identifiable to something abstract, or from photography, with its seamless relation to a reality that is not present, to a substantive element of the present composition. When we see the whole series, replete with recurring images, we recognize that the red object is a detail of a big plastic tub, but there is nothing in the isolated work that lets us know what it is. In Pink Wrinkles, similarly composed, it is a field of pink that forces these transformations and holds them in suspension.

Stockholder has been a colorist from the start, arguably using color as part of an anti-natural, anti-narrative strategy. To conjure the memory of a Stockholder work is to recall color almost more clearly than anything else, whether the piece is a monoprint, such as those she has made for years at Two Palms Press in New York, or a portable sculpture, such as those she showed last year at her gallery in New York or that appeared in a retrospective of such works organized by the Blaffer Gallery in Houston in 2004,1 or any number of larger installations, indoors and out. Where the contours of her installations can be complex, ill-suited to recollection and even purposefully baffling, the colors register as almost shockingly precise, though the manner in which they

LEFT: Green Wrinkles, 2005, embossed, pigmented abaca/cotton base sheet with archival inkjet print and Duramount R adhesive, 22 x 29-1/2 inches, edition of 15
RIGHT: Pink Wrinkles, 2005, embossed pigmented abaca and linen with archival inkjet print, 30 x 22 inches
appear—as clusters of single-colored items, men’s underpants, for example, to cite a more outlandish choice (Indoor Lighting for my Father, 1988), or as irregular patches painted over disparate surfaces, bridging the divide, say, between fabric and wood, or as broad swaths on surrounding walls—are often no more comprehensible than the shape of the work as a totality.

The somewhat irregular edges of the pulp pieces, as well as actual holes or what simply look like ragged, torn centers, and their complex layering of digital photography, paper, collage, and painted pulp, recall the illusion of formlessness of some of Stockholder’s much larger pieces. There is an indistinctness to them that somehow feels inimical to their bracing particularity of hue. In Tape Measure Square, named for the image of a green tape measure at the center, one must tease out the layers, with the cluster of photographic subjects contrasting with the layers of painted pulp, a watery blue grid in a cloudlike form, laid over the two backing halves, pink and blue. Gash in the Middle contrasts a fancy flocked fabric with the photo of a red water cooler set into a white ground. The edges of the fabric and the white ground meet as a jagged line, so that the green backing paper on which they are couched flashes through like a lightning bolt. Though the elements seem quite specific, each a separate thing, a separate layer, it is difficult to discern where one ends and the other begins. A similar composition is used for Photo Cut Up, in which the large, central photo of colored plastic bowls is set into the paper as a rectangle with zigzag edges, a kind of chasm running down the middle of the work, bifurcated into red and blue. The objects sit in the crack, as it were, the kind of betwixt-and-between that seems to be Stockholder’s favorite artistic position.

Having arrived at the Mill with digital prints of objects she photographed in her yard and studio (bright plastic bowls and containers, a drinking bottle, some gaudy cakes that had seen better times) along with real objects (fabric swatches, the floor mat) she proceeded to collage and emboss them in stretches of pigmented paper pulp, working in collaboration with Paul Wong. Stockholder always works this way, improvising yet deliberately bringing together her disparate materials, refashioning them in relation to a site (whether that be a building, a park or, in the case of her more pictorial works, the confines of an imaginary frame) and keeping them at a certain cool remove, often through the use of color. “I like there to be places,” she has said, “where the material is forgotten; but I also love to force a meeting of abstraction with material or stuff. Color is very good at this, always very ready to assert itself as independent of material.”

One senses that pulp paint offered an opportunity for Stockholder to revel in painting, her original medium. In Blue, for example, she created a kind of diptych, with the clear, blue-lidded plastic water bottle as the
central character on the left, surrounded by little windows of multi-colors, and an extremely painterly abstraction on the right, a miasma of two different blues with a black rectangle emerging from between them. This area is almost old-fashioned in its recollection of Color Field painting. (Stockholder has, in the past, professed her admiration for Clifford Still, recalled as well in the chasm-like, open jagged areas of other pieces in the group.) It's as if the water the bottle rather antiseptically contains has escaped its confines to become a great wave, a different being altogether.

Curiously, from the standpoint of this project, one of Stockholder's very early untitled pieces from 1980 was a collage of found fabrics (along with toilet paper and sequins). It is useful to recall that the paper itself is often made of pulped fabric, bringing the artist full circle. The collaged fabric incorporated in the Dieu Donné pieces can bring along a trace of narrative, never fully fleshed out, of course: Jeans and Cake, for example, with its juxtaposition of pants, pocket torn open, and the disheveled cakes. The jeans and the photo are situated in a greenish yellow field splattered with big stains of color that faintly echo both the tubs (round) and the cakes (sloppy), so that the work becomes redolent of a backyard picnic, informal and bombarding the senses. The mess is deliberate: in one work it looks as though a blue plastic bowl is sliding recklessly across the mustard-colored surface, a blue blot below almost stupidly mimicking it as an abstract mark that then is no longer purely abstract. In another, strips of plaid fabric are laid into the ground as if patching the surface, red swirled with white as if by mistake, the whole a conglomeration of what look like repairs. The cakes, in particular, recur frequently: apparently amusing Stockholder into a kind of hilarity of messiness, as she deployed the pulp painted to echo the sense of smears and spills. It is the heart of historical abstract expressionism as well as reckless eating, an interface between art and the world that suits her well.

NOTES
1 The show was at the Weatherspoon Art Museum of the University of North Carolina at the same time as the paper pulp pieces were being exhibited at Dieu Donné. On the show, see Frances Colpitt, “Jessica Stockholder: A Merging of Mediums,” Art in America, Feb. 2005, pp. 92-97.
LIST OF WORKS PRODUCED DURING THE LAB GRANT RESIDENCY

EDITED WORKS

Green Wrinkles
embossed, pigmented abaca/cotton base sheet with archival inkjet print and Duromount R adhesive, 22 x 29-1/2 inches. Edition of 15

Red Corners
pigmented abaca base sheet with abaca pulp painting, archival inkjet print and Duromount R adhesive, 22 x 30 inches. Edition of 15

Men's Suit

SELECTED UNIQUE WORKS

Blur
pigmented abaca and linen with archival inkjet print, 22 x 30 inches

Tupe Measure Square
pigmented abaca and linen with archival inkjet print, 22 x 30 inches

Gash in the Middle
pigmented abaca and linen with fabric and archival inkjet print, 11 x 14 inches

Pink Wrinkles
embossed pigmented abaca and linen with archival inkjet print, 30 x 22 inches
Collection of Dieu Donné Papermill, Inc.

Photo Cut Up
pigmented abaca and linen with archival inkjet print, 22 x 30 inches

Three Bowls
pigmented abaca and linen with archival inkjet print, 22 x 30 inches

Jeans and Cake
pigmented abaca and linen with fabric and archival inkjet print, 30 x 22 inches

Red Tube + Two
pigmented abaca and linen with archival inkjet print, 30 x 22 inches

Split
pigmented abaca and linen with archival inkjet print, 11 x 14 inches

Cake with Text
pigmented abaca and linen with newspaper and archival inkjet print, 30 x 22 inches
Collection of Dieu Donné Papermill, Inc.

JESSICA STOCKHOLDER [b. 1959, Seattle, WA] began as a painter and developed a body of work, which now also includes sculpture and installation. Stockholder received a BFA from the University of Victoria in British Columbia in 1982 and an MFA in Sculpture from Yale University in 1985. She currently lives in New Haven, CT where she is both a professor and the Director of Graduate Studies in Sculpture at Yale. Stockholder has had many solo exhibitions including several at Gorney Bravin + Lee Gallery, NY as well as at Galerie Rolf Ricke, Cologne; Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris; Nacht St. Stephan, Vienna; The Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen Dusseldorf, Germany; and Rice University Art Gallery, Houston, TX. A career survey exhibition of Stockholder’s work travels to the Blaffer Art Gallery at the University of Houston, TX.; the Weatherspoon Art Gallery; between 2004 and 2006. In addition, she has made many large scale installations including one on the Champs Elysée, Paris, France in 1999 and in the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY Biennial in 1991. Her work is a part of numerous public collections including those of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; Saatchi & Saatchi Collection, London; and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY. This Lab Grant Residency marks her first work in handmade paper.
Founded in 1976, Dieu Donné Papermill, Inc. is a non-profit artist workspace dedicated to the creation, promotion, and preservation of contemporary art using the hand papermaking process. In support of this mission, Dieu Donné collaborates with artists and other partners, presents exhibitions, conducts educational programs, and maintains an archive of paper art.

The Dieu Donné Lab Grant Program, initiated in 2000, provides mid-career artists with a full year residency including twelve days of collaboration on the wet floor at Dieu Donné Papermill. Through this program, Dieu Donné intends to produce exciting new work with artists who have a mature vision and long-standing commitment to artistic practice, thereby raising the profile of hand papermaking as an art making process and breaking new ground in the field. Past participants in the program include Melvin Edwards, Dorothea Rockburne, Jane Hammond, Jim Hodges, Robert Cottingham and Glenn Ligon.

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This is issue number 7 of the Dieu Donné Lab Grant Program publication series documenting Dieu Donné's residency program for mid-career artists.

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ON BACK COVER: Men’s Suit, 2005, pigmented tri-color base sheet (combination of abaca and cotton pulps) with wool fabric, pulp paint, and archival
inkjet print with Duromount R adhesive, 13 x 10-3/4 inches. Edition of 15