

# Jessica Stockholder

## Cut a rug a round square

Jessica Stockholder shares directly with visitors the inspiration and creative process that led to *Cut a rug a round square*.

The invitation was to curate an exhibition focused on painting, drawing from two collections: Fondazione per l'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea CRT in Turin, and "la Caixa" Foundation in Barcelona. I took my own passions for how meaning evolves in art as a starting point. I am compelled by how form is inextricably tied to both subject and content; and I find enormous meaning in how our apprehension of surface yields information about reality while at the same time generating illusions that are resonant with our capacity for imagination. These interests guided my choices.

As I spent time with both collections, I became focused on those works in which rectilinear and circular forms played pivotal roles, and I started to think about the various ways in which these two basic shapes resonate with the body, how they function to corral content, and how they contribute to marking the edges of artworks.

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Paintings need walls to hang on, and for the last hundred years or so, the 'white cube' has been an assumed context for them. The white walls, and clean geometry of the space being proposed as a neutral container, not unlike a blank piece of paper. The OGR building, itself a skeleton of an industrial building from a former time, is not neutral. Importantly, it also has no built-in lighting system; and paintings need light to be seen. So, I needed to take account of both walls and lighting.

It is always valuable to acknowledge context as the edges between artworks and their surroundings are permeable, with information flowing in all directions. In this case the buildout for the exhibition is not proposed as neutral. It is in concert with the history of the white cube, with the space and history of the OGR, with the artworks themselves, and also with the history of my own artwork.

The first essential elements of the buildout are the triangular wall structures. Being that triangles are fragments of rectilinear forms; they are always full of dynamic energy. Their corners point out past themselves, carrying the eye and attention in three directions. I proposed two clusters of triangular wall structures each related to a shaped piece of color on the floor – one round and the other square. Each island, and each artwork, in the space is lit inside of the otherwise dark building, turning these clusters into Floating islands.

The bright, floating, painted islands of paintings seemed to require a foil of some kind; a need satisfied by the introduction of a facsimile of a wrestling ring. Like the many paintings in the exhibition, and like the walls they hang on, the rink relies on rectilinear form to orchestrate action. The ring's floor offers an opportunity to hold vibrant color as paintings do. In this case a vibrant pink that drips over its edges. In the real dimensional space above the rink's floor one can imagine entangled bodies engaging in intense action akin to the action playing out on the flat surfaces of the paintings hanging on the surrounding walls. Or one can move one's own body into the ring. The floor functions as foreground and background at once. The imagined wrestling bodies are very present! They could be, like the floor, pink; or brown, beige, tan, or yellow. Yves Klein's *Anthropometries* body prints come to mind here. The rink is bounded by a stretchy border. It is as full of theatrical promise and artifice as are the situations we fabricate to facilitate the presentation of paintings.

**“In addition to conventional paintings, the exhibition includes many works that make use of painterly tropes, and objects that may or may not be paintings, depending on how one defines the genre”**

Like the other two floating islands, the rink is also spot lit, seeming to float in the otherwise dark space of OGR.

In addition to conventional paintings, the exhibition includes many works that make use of painterly tropes, and objects that may or may not be paintings, depending on how one defines the genre. As in so many instances in life, the categories we use to classify art objects are often useful abstractions applicable to particular instantiations, but insufficient to address the complexities of all. We engage parallel struggles regarding our use of category when we consider gender, age, race, aggression, wealth, strength, weakness, all of which, at various junctures, escape boundaries of thought when it comes to the particular. In this exhibition I am most interested in considering how painterly qualities and conventions move through the exhibition rather than fitting each work into a category.

While most paintings included in the Western cannon are rectangles, there are also tondos, or round paintings. Robert Mangold's *Curved Plane / Figure XI*, 1995, proposes a half circle as the whole painting. Many, but not all, paintings are framed by the edges of a rectangle. And sometimes a painting asks that we put together a number of rectangles sequentially to create a whole. Clemente's fresco of 1996, Pedro G. Romero's *Sodoma y Gomorra*, from 1989, all work in that way.

A few photographs have slipped in, in deference to their reference to, and appreciation for, their recording of painterly moments. Amendola's photographs of Alberto Burri cutting plastic with a torch in which Burri is drawing a circle in an off the shelf rectangular plane of plastic. This is at once painting and sculpture. Vito Acconci's photo collage of himself performing an action, or drawing with his body on a plane. Uliano Lucas's photo of a Piazza that includes a painted drawing on the ground; in this case the geometry serves to organize public space, and the action within – here a kiss.

Paint itself is a kind of skin. Paint forms a skin on the walls that paintings are hung on as well as on the canvas of the painting. In this way the skins of paint in the exhibition function as both foreground and background.

Taking account of the cavernous brick space of OGR, and thinking about how to create a situation that both speaks to the complexity of what painting is while at the same time allowing the works themselves to be fully empowered, I remembered the staging of space in Lars von Trier's film *Dogville*. In this film a drawing on the floor maps out rooms, making space for our imaginations to fill in the room's physicality as the action in the film plays out over the floor drawing. Here, as in *Dogville*, I treated the floor as an evocative plane out of which the action sprouts.

**“I was struck by the many works in which the circle and the square intersect”**

It is difficult to say whether this exhibition design grew in response to the space of OGR, or if the nature of the two collections gave rise to this treatment. In any case, at first blush, looking through the two collections, I was struck by the many works in which the circle and the square intersect. Often, but not always, these works present literal circles and squares. I began to think of the representation of the human body as a kind of circle inside of the square; and Leonardo DaVinci's *Vitruvian Man* came to mind. Many of the works in this exhibition present circles, triangles, and rectangles as overt imagery. I came to see the imaged human body as a rough kind of circle framed by the rectilinear painting. Klein's *Portrait Relief of Claude Pascal* is a good example. Of course, the blue body in this work can also be seen to be resonant with a rectangular shape; the body can be seen, and understood, with the aid of many different kinds of geometry. Unfortunately, this work on display at Gam in Turin and part of the CRT Collection was not available to include; but thinking about it gave rise to the pink wrestling ring.

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The life of the investigative imagination is instrumental in forming us and the world we share.

I hope that this exhibition provides an opportunity for those who pass through to take pleasure in flights of fancy, and to value their own agency as they take in the extraordinary range of world building encompassed by this collection of works.

A site-specific project by OGR Torino, in collaboration with "la Caixa" Foundation (Barcelona) and Fondazione per l'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea CRT (Turin)