



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: **Jessica Stockholder**, 2014, pen & ink, graphite, Prismacolor pencil, 18 x 12 in. **Jessica Stockholder**, 2014, pen & ink, 18 x 12 in., courtesy of the collection of Lori Gray

Faversham. **Jessica Stockholder**, 2014, pen & ink, graphite, Prismacolor pencil, 18 x 12 in. **Jo Nigoghossian**, *Sketch for a table sculpture, Chairs holding tables*, 2014, Sharpie on paper, 16

x 20 in. **Jo Nigoghossian**, *Sketch for a table sculpture, Little shapes holding light hors d'oeuvres*, 2014, Sharpie on paper, 16 x 20 in. **Jessica Stockholder**, 2014, pen & ink, 18 x 12 in.

JO NIGOGHOSSIAN + JESSICA STOCKHOLDER =

Observing Objects, Summer 2014

JO: Rings. I've been wearing two rings. The one on the right hand stays on, but is touched a lot by the thumb underneath, nudged, checking it. Two thin gold bands are slit horizontally like a mouth, but they mesh into one at the back, closing the throat. It has been squished out of shape during sleep and squished back into its old shape, differently, because it is soft, because it is real. Real gold. In the middle of the two bands is a stone, a tiny speck of turquoise. It's barely there. It's rarely noticed. It being rarely noticed seems more elegant than the look of it. It makes the finger look longer, but my whole hand looks bigger, giant sometimes. Sometimes sophisticated. Intelligent. The stone is matte and it is the band that catches the light, on its edges. It's been ageless so far. The fixture has a hollow back, a perfect circle, and four claws that crunch around the stone, frame it, present it, direct it. There is a little glue that doesn't do much, a little sloppy. This is the second stone, which is bluer than the first one, which was lost washing glasses. It make me think of ancient Egypt and Indian women's jewelry and Indian girls in England, and their bone structure, the scale of it on their hands and skin tone. Of Pennsylvania, where I got it. The country and country music.

The other ring is heavy and it is domineering. It is solid silver and comes from a place that makes skull rings, but this one is a star. A "starfish." People recognize the starfish partly because of the contours and definition of the legs. I had watched a documentary on the deep sea a couple of weeks before purchasing it, but didn't realize what I was doing with the ring until a few days later. I watched starfish eating a dead seal, secreting their digestive enzymes from their mouths into their stomachs, suctioned on, kind of pulsing, disgusting, amazing. It's on a weird finger, and squeezes the flesh into appearing chubbier. It's forced on in a way. It doesn't really fit the finger. Bold, ridiculous. Idiomatic. Chiseled, the band is thick and two sides of two legs merge into it and the crease fades into smoothness. Each leg has a tented structure; a fine silver line is kept visible going down the middle of each leg. The star part appears studded, studded with silver texture from the original piece of metal, but it is denting that makes the appearance as opposed to additions. Inset in larger dents are black cut stones that aren't onyx, I don't know what they are, it doesn't seem to matter anymore. Each leg holds a different amount of them: 11, 14, 12, 13, 15. It's shaded with these black things with no name. It's got a dull sparkle. Many scratches

on the surface of the outside, and not one inside, just the embossment of "TGF" and some little marks that look like a barcode—four small dots and a tiny rectangle. It's childish. It reminds me of me when I was eleven, when I wore rings on every finger. It looks like a treasure. I'm writing this and I am thinking about André Aciman's writing that I cannot seem to put out of my mind because of how he breaks things down.

JESSICA: I wore a wedding ring for more than twenty-five years and just this year—though my marriage still feels great—the ring no longer felt good. It seemed at odds with the fluid, morphing, always-in-motion nature of my body. I enjoy the timeless abstraction of a circle embodied by the ring more generally, and the way our thinking natures can't help but to insert abstraction into our experience of matter.

I have a pet blue lobster—slowly morphing from my son's care to mine—that lives in an aquarium. The microcosm of the aquarium mirrors mine. I peer in at Lobby and wonder what motivates his quite varied behavior that ranges from hiding away in a dark cave for days on end to dancing with his multitude of legs waving at the "sky" as if to an entity outside the tank. I love his form. He has more appendages—some of which might be called legs—than I can count. He has two large claws, many small claws that seem to operate as hands, antennae, and tiny little waving swimmerets. I marvel at how he manages to make all of these appendages work in concert. I make drawings about his complicated geometry. I love the way he is so precise in his form and so awkward in his movement around the tank. He molts regularly—every few months—and the hard, seemingly stable form of his shell is replaced with a new one. If he loses a claw or an antenna, it will grow back.

I just ordered a book by André Aciman; I've never read him before!

JO: I'm walking away from an install uptown to downtown, boiling alive and having scattered thoughts about transitioning even though I know I don't have to:

Firstly skin and layers, and levels of functioning (molting, if the timing is right: a sign of health, if untimely and unable to keep up with itself) deforming. Bits come off, or stay on too long because the time is wrong. I can't help but picture this happening to the lobster. Forms tweaked and realigned emotionally. And then manicured by the thing itself to make it work. ▶

Then tanks, containment, visibility, choice or whims, thick resistance, slow, the blue, the falls, the streams, the surround, suctioning, bashing, lobster and—lobster rolls, moisture, salt, butter, slightly toasted, warmth, cost, prize, instant.

I'm trying to focus on water, but it's hard. I'm thinking about how it keeps things alive or kills through temperature, flow, or contact.

Water and steel. Submersion, electrocution. Humidity and steel in wooden boxes that become saunas, the rust and never-ending labor to stop it even when you know what you're doing. Sculptures in waves for things above and below sea level, dead or alive, to sit on, think about, use; to grow ... or shrink. The piece of metal that is stuck in a socket in my apartment that I should remove.

I am parched, but won't get in the shade, buy water, or get underground. I keep walking, sweat moving and lodging itself into sockets/the body, soaked up by the fabric, then irritating the skin later (to be picked). The heat's creating an urgency I'm annoyed by, but I'm cut up by some bright printed dresses that change a walk. Looks like a summer wedding, the only thing being itself is the sun.

Msgr. McGolrick Park.

There are many sections and sections of sound. Vehicles are silenced by density, insulation, particles, wind, frosted glass. A hard hat moves along a path, a straw pierces plastic, sip, swallow, exhale, past the sculpture of a man on the first ironclad steamship that looks like a lounging God with a bird head, at an angle, distorted thin spokes transporting a bored hunched mass. Mauled baseball—fluffy edges, loose stitches. Revamped pillars and a cove, balconies and arches with enough space to walk under without feeling compressed. Money and maintenance. A leash cuts up a body. More negative space comes and goes, for lights to pass through, to highlight parts, to point, bounce back against a square in a bigger square with no patch of material unconsidered by another.

JESSICA: I spent the morning talking with people in a small office room just large enough to hold the bodies of us sitting in it. My head and the room filled with ideas embodied by and transferred from one to another with words uttered. Our bodies were more or less forgotten.

Now I'm sitting in my studio—a large room in an older building. The air conditioner is broken. The air is warm and moist, slightly stirred by some slowly moving ceiling fans. Here my attention is focused on the light emanating from a group of lamps that I've painted on. These lamps are a group becoming a whole single object even while the light they emit alters all of the space around them. And some mirrors nearby appear to create deep space while they throw all that light away from themselves. The air, the humming of the building, my breath—all enter as my eyes pick up the light bouncing off surfaces orchestrated to work together.

JO: A lamp in this room doesn't fit on the windowsill well; it's on it because of certain centers and edges, spacing and other priorities. It prevents me from opening a window; it prevents daylight there. On an adjacent wall, three larger, broken neon letters pile on one screw. They're all curly

but one. They were once hung as material to use, but they won't be. Now they just give the wall texture; a bit of glass on the wall. One still holds a couple of protruding electrode feet, with scratchy crimped wires that give detail to the air. Next to them is an aluminum armature for a piece of neon that would be complicated to produce because of the small scale/detail combination. Next to that, a smaller version of the same thing, more difficult, would break many times in its attempts to be made. They are clawlike. On an adjacent wall is another intended to be more flowerlike, but it's a claw, too. A couple months ago I came to terms with everything being a claw. Everything. Or related to hands.

This room has not been a studio for a while; apparently now it's a studio apartment only, but seeing what's been left hanging points to what still needs access: the sort of scary things that will move when they are ready.

JESSICA: This morning our back and forth noticing of objects around us makes me think again about how located each one of us is. We only see in the world what our bodies can interface with—just like my lobster in his tank.

I, like so many of us, spend a great deal of time looking at the world in pictures on this bright shiny flat amazing glass thing I'm looking at right now as I type. My fingers just now are a little sweaty on my keyboard—which I rarely look at. This hardware enabling our conversation mostly recedes far into the background as I attend to the meaning of the words I'm dealing with—or the flat and moving images I call up. Odd that over the past fifteen years or so all of these disparate ways of making meaning has found their way into this very dimensional flat screen!

JO: It's true. When I started this I never thought that what I'd write about would have to be directly in front of me. I wrote something about a chair at a friend's house when I was feeding her cat. It didn't work because when I came back and looked at the note, the chair was missing. I didn't want everything coming from and into one source ... but it does so often. I kept the computer on the other side of the room and started drawing sculptures to make for a large space.

A bird's eye view of a room, with tables around edges and the four corners, coming out slowly, but waiting, taking a break before moving. One is stretched out on the long side of the room, a smaller variation midway between wall and center. The tables are malleable, a scene on mushroom—hard and soft with a shell. Another bulges in a grand piano shape, levels made of thick loose strokes, guts with parts that break and a bony glassy tile, with more detail somewhere that seeps in like the opportunist, the imposter. Long legs and short legs shoved under and out, fed up, but continuing to kick, to work it out. The long table on the edge is low, loungey, once for cocktails. It's got scars, short stubs, a sparkle, a lull, weight, thick glazey skin and a little light coming from underneath the edge. Working in places, slacking off in others. On shifting schedules. One is like a bonfire, a scribbled explosion, with places to perch things, cups that sink under rims, clear areas that hold diced colored liquids. You walk into the room and there is no table for you,

then there is, then there isn't. I flick back to my previous sketches—on the first page I wrote, "If you are at someone else's table, will you be more yourself?" I don't know what that means.

One table is two. Two round endings and a skinny piece of flat joining them, too skinny for use. It's a little too high. A wall from the ground encloses it, traces its shape. You have to get squished into the maze to basically try and sit, but can only stand and slightly bend your knees there. Tiny creatures much smaller than the tables, holding platters with little hors d'oeuvre flecks of light. Serving gestures, overly extended arms—giving and taking; you can only watch.

JESSICA: This is a summer weekend—I like the slowness that comes with this time of year. It happens that I'm sitting on a couch in front of a table—there are a lot of tables in our world! Looking past the table, I look through a window into a small courtyard. This townhouse I live in is one of twenty-six clustered on a block. The masses of the buildings and the space of the yards are played off one another and are in patterned concert with each other. The red brick of the building's walls is flush up against the windowpane; I really love that detail. It makes me aware of the materiality of the glass, lets me appreciate the grit and mass of the bricks, and the outside air feels like it's pushing up against the glass. I feel like my blue lobster gazing out of my tank.

JO: Flush. I've always appreciated that effort. The design, the deliberation. The way the subway windows are clasped between steel frames that clasp inner steel frames, which clasp black rubber that pads them, and then rivets finish off the outer steel frame. To make it streamline. The flush makes something closer. It makes us one layer away as opposed to indentions and protrusions that really turn you away from a space and into another.

Flush is tempting. We challenge ourselves by creating something barely there. Existential while concerned with aesthetics. Outer rather than inner, it makes it obvious that we want and like this material barrier. We don't have to have it. It keeps us private or public, loud or seem silent, provides a choice with design... We entertain ourselves, give ourselves barely nothing and call it something.

What a safe place we've created with the flush, a simple problem to solve, so simple, we know we could remove it completely, but we have excuses for the separation, like rain. It's funny how natural everything becomes, how natural our cities are. Even stores like Strawberry.

JESSICA: I've always enjoyed looking at how distance is measured by objects layered in space marking a foreground, perhaps many middle grounds, and a background. Pictures, or images, in which everything depicted on a flat surface has something in common with the "flush" window you describe. It really is stunning to notice how most of what we look at and experience has so little in common with a flat illusionistic picture plane; how different the world is from our depictions of it.

The view out onto Lake Michigan in Chicago is always a little disconcerting as there is nothing breaking up the view

into the unmarked distance. I just flew today from Chicago to Maine, and thinking about our correspondence I noticed that the topological view is also generally without any middle ground. The East Coast is lovely in that there are so many middle ground markers!

JO: There are the middle grounds we want around. I've been moving in such a way to keep them there... controlling the "levels" of layers to see at given times in certain moods, increasing them, or when I can't deal, just diminishing into finer details of objects. I'm amazed that I don't mind seeing the freeway from my apartment window. I wanted to live by the ocean, and these cars passing this tiny section sound like waves. I've convinced myself.

The freeway is elevated about two stories high, and I am the ground-floor corner. Things pass above, linger below. There is the strong suggestion of a horizon line somewhere down that road—and it pulls.

These feelings of images blow things in and out of proportion. Proportion and position is the most distorted thing in an image and is one of the most challenging things to work with and put back into real space again.

I watched a magician for a couple minutes as a couple friends and I walked through Washington Square Park yesterday. The magician was floating a lit cigarette in front of himself and kept moving his hands around it to show there were no strings. Then he'd rummage in an audience member's pockets, and after pulling out a cell phone or something, he'd pull out the lit cigarette. The stranger would let the magician put his hand in his pocket. That struck me, how this magician's hand can seem faster than our eyes; it always impresses me—even though we see, we think we don't see. He kept saying things to people with their arms crossed; saying something confusing "about" their arms being crossed and would then tap them—the distraction mixed with no trick; the confusion. None of us really wondered what the thing was that didn't do anything. It just made me think how distracting the entire park was; there was a grand piano on one path, for example. Our attention so dispersed. I was thinking about where I was going next, what my friends might want to do, what to say to my friends, if I should listen to my body, the chill in the air, and how isolated you have to be to practice sleight of hand.

JESSICA: I am not so focused on sleight of hand; it leaves me dangling a little. Though I imagine that every now and then I must employ some sleight of hand. I'm more focused on the immediacy of experience and how the experience of looking is aligned with, or at odds with, the experience of the moving body. How quickly the eyes move in relation to the generally slower movement of the rest of the body. How we can take in enormous swaths of the world with our eyes in a flash that take our lumbering bodies minutes, hours, or even days to explore. Of course the moving body gathers very different information than do the eyes. And the point from which the eyes view makes all the difference in the world!

My pet blue lobster passed away recently. Sad to see him go. ==