

JOAN

Steffani Jemison

End Over End

February 19 – April 30, 2022

JOAN is pleased to present *End Over End*, an exhibition of recent videos and sculptures by Brooklyn-based, multidisciplinary artist, Steffani Jemison. Much of Jemison's work is concerned with histories of Black performance in vernacular traditions such as pantomime and vaudeville, as well as the intersections of these practices with early film history. Drawing on movement research and archival materials, her work bears witness to the ways in which knowledge is held and transferred from body to body, to the present.

Many of the works in this exhibition were conceived during the recent period of pandemic and protest. Two videos, *Toss* (2021) and *In Succession* (2019), which incorporate rhythmic gymnastics and street acrobatics, respectively, are joined by a series of kinetic rock tumbler sculptures and drawings on glass that together consider the conceptual and material implications of the acts of agitation and turning.

In *Toss*, movement has symbolic resonance with concepts of agility, growth, fluency, balance, and resilience. Made in collaboration with Alexis Page, a gymnast who competed on the US national team when she was just thirteen, the video shows Page performing a series of task-based actions common to rhythmic gymnastics and tumbling — a flip, a toss, a spin, a roll, a trap. But instead of typical props, here she substitutes found and everyday objects. Over a lever harp arrangement of "I'm a Little Black Bird" (popularized by Florence Mills), Page voices descriptions of her movements and reflections on the body's many uses and modalities.

Accompanying *Toss* is a series of drawings in acrylic paint on found glass tabletops that channel the embodied patterns of the video's choreography. As Jemison and Page exchanged notes, readings, and personal anecdotes during the making of the video, they developed a common language from which they derived a set of performance notations. In these works, the abstract compositions reflect this process of translation from text to movement to score, building upon an ongoing body of work that alludes to the long history of Black Americans creating private and culturally specific languages and codes.

Another video, *In Succession* (2019), is part of a planned series based on news stories from the early 20th century of everyday people coming together in acrobatic formations to perform astonishing feats. Specifically, this work references a 1931 account of a group of Black men who formed a human pyramid to rescue a white woman from a burning building. Shot during a series of trust-building and improvisational movement workshops that Jemison conducted with a group of street performers, the video slowly

JOAN

pans over its subjects' interlocked limbs and torsos as they perform a choreography of precarity and mutual support.

The three *Tumbler* sculptures arrayed throughout the space also execute a kind of choreographed sequence that unfolds over the course of the exhibition. These rock tumblers gradually transform their contents, which include locally sourced commercial glass, bits of hardware, ceramics, pennies, and shards of a car windshield, at once smoothing or polishing them and degrading their functionality. A selection of these materials prior to tumbling are laid out on a central plinth.

The works in this exhibition pose a set of questions about knowing and being known; acting and being acted upon; and what it means to shift between these modes, as if in constant rotation.

A version of this exhibition, curated by Amara Antilla, was first presented at the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati in 2021.

Steffani Jemison was born in 1981 in Berkeley, CA, and raised in Cincinnati, OH. A professor of Art & Design at Rutgers University, Jemison's first novel will be published by Primary Information later this year. Since 2016, she has been a part of the musical collaborative, Mikrokosmos, with Justin Hicks. Her work has been the subject of solo exhibitions and special projects at the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati (2021); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2019); Nottingham Contemporary (2018); Mass MoCA, North Adams, MA; Jeu de Paume, Paris (both 2017); RISD Museum, Providence (2015); and LAXART, Los Angeles (2013), among other venues. She has also been included in numerous group exhibitions, including Greater New York at MoMA PS1 (2021) and the Whitney Biennial (2019), as well as at venues including the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia (both 2019); the Drawing Center, New York (2015); and the Studio Museum in Harlem (2012). Jemison currently lives and works in Brooklyn.