

STEFFANI
JEMISON

**END
OVER
END**

March 5–August 8, 2021

End Over End

For nearly a decade, Cincinnati-raised, Brooklyn-based artist Steffani Jemison has been deeply invested in examining the ways knowledge is constructed and legitimized. This interest stems from a fascination with frameworks of interpretation and narration, as well as critical theory, and vernacular traditions, including street acrobatics and vaudeville. She explores these concepts through a practice that encompasses sculpture, video, installation, sound, and fiction writing.

This exhibition brings together two videos, alongside a new suite of kinetic sculptural objects and conceptual drawings on glass that unfold as a series of experiments, reflecting Jemison's interest in performance and the politics of embodiment. The exhibition centers around a new video, *Toss* (2021) that captures a woman performing a series of task-based actions informed by rhythmic gymnastics and tumbling. Attentive to the origins of the word *tumble*, which derives from the German term for "to turn" or "reel," Jemison invites a slippage between the double meaning of a single rotation, or *revolution*. The work also refers to the expression, "to *turn* something over in one's mind," or the process of *pondering*.

The video is situated in dialogue with *Escaped Lunatic* (2010–11) — one of Jemison's earliest projects to employ a non-linear narrative structure — alongside several custom-built rock tumblers containing grit, stones, coins, glass, and debris collected from around Cincinnati. In the same manner that the performer manipulates her body through twisting, flipping, and inverting, the tumblers likewise rotate, slowly grinding their raw, angular contents into smooth, clean, polished materials. Together, the objects, drawings, and videos explore the symbolic, expressive, and material implications of the act of "agitation" and "turning."

*Organized by Amara Antilla, Senior Curator,
Contemporary Arts Center*

Steffani Jemison was born in 1981 in Berkeley, CA and raised in Cincinnati. She received her BA from Columbia University (2003) and her MFA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago (2009). 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 LAXART, Los Angeles (2013); RISD Museum, Providence (2015); Mass MoCA, North Adams, MA; Jeu de Paume, Paris (both 2017); Nottingham Contemporary (2018); and the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2019), among others. She has been included in numerous group exhibitions at the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York (2012, 2013, 2016, and 2017); The Drawing Center, New York, NY (2015); Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia (2017); Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; and the Whitney Biennial, New York (both 2019). Her work is currently on view as a part of the traveling exhibition, *Black Refractions: Highlights from the Studio Museum in Harlem* (2019–21). Jemison currently lives and works in Brooklyn.

Ask Yourself

- 1 As you watch the videos, how do you feel? Is it calm, soothing? Is it disorienting? Why? Does this feeling change the longer you watch the video?
- 2 The narrator explains what she's doing as she juggles and tosses different everyday objects. Can you imagine what it's like to handle these materials?
- 3 How do you think the tumblers and the video, *Toss* (2021) relate to one another? Why do we turn objects to look them from different perspectives?
- 4 The rock tumblers take rough, found, and precious objects and rotate them — transforming them all into something that is smooth and polished. What do you think Jemison is saying about transformation? Why do most people prefer things that are smooth and continuous? What might be lost from this refinement?
- 5 The narrator talks about the adjustments she has to make to accommodate each object. How might this symbolize the adjustments you have to make when different obstacles come your way in daily life?



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Steffani Jemison (b. 1981, Berkeley, CA) *Toss*, 2021. HD color video, with sound, 42 min., 20. sec. Courtesy of the artist and Kai Matsumiya, New York.