

PRESS RELEASE

## ***WAY IN THE MIDDLE OF THE AIR***

STEFFANI JEMISON

29 November 2024 – 18 January 2025

Annet Gelink Gallery is proud to welcome Steffani Jemison for her second solo show at the gallery.



*Who's that yonder dressed in red?  
Way in the middle of the air. \**

Using movement and language as tools for material and spiritual research, Jemison's exhibition features new and recent works exploring the physical and metaphorical phenomena of falling and floating, suspension and support. Drawing from a wide range of historical and cultural resources and references - from geology to interstellar travel - the exhibition invites the viewer to consider how the "leap of faith" operates as an aesthetic, political, linguistic, and spiritual engine.

The exhibition title refers to the traditional African American song "Ezekiel Saw the Wheel," inspired by a prophet's mystical, revelatory vision of a flying chariot. In 1950, science fiction author Ray Bradbury borrowed the phrase "Way in the Middle of the Air" to title a short story about black Americans who secretly built rockets and escaped to Mars - and the white neighbors who tried to stop them. In dialogue with these texts and others, Jemison is fascinated by thinkers working within a black radical tradition in which flight, air, the sky, the stars, and the sea evoke avenues of withdrawal and escape.

In the exhibition's central works, a video and a lenticular print in which tumblers twist, leap, and vault themselves into the air, the artist appeals to our ongoing desire for freedom in the face of impossible conditions. In the video *Bound*, the sky is pictured with the distorted logo of the American trampoline company SkyBound, overlaying the film with a playful lexical contradiction. Narrations from two tumblers describing the experience of flying and a feverish, improvised soundtrack by drummer Brandon "Buz" Donald provide the soundtrack for this show. Together they evoke the kind of careless freedom suggested by flight, enunciated by the glittering night sky from a found cyclorama, a theatrical backdrop against which the video is framed. The lenticular print, a new medium that extends the artist's longstanding exploration of fugitive and elusive images, propels the viewer into a blend of nostalgia and futurism, inviting the viewer to exercise their own sense of agency. The lenticular print and the cyclorama backdrop both highlight the artist's fascination with the history of moving images, perspective, and vision as embodied phenomena.

The drawings in the exhibition connect the image of a wheel 'way in the middle of the air' to Jemison's ongoing exploration of the myth of Icarus. New works in acrylic on brass refer to central African cosmograms, the mysterious language of Hamptonese, and Newton's 'arrow of longing', as the artist searches for signs of revelation and shared political feeling across continents and generations. Etched and painted works on silvered glass evoke images of elusive tumbling, falling, and flying figures, hung using tension-based systems designed by the artist. Some works interact with a steel sculptural intervention in the gallery, scaled to the proportions of a human body. The modular sculpture perhaps evokes a jungle gym, perhaps scaffolding, functioning within her practice as a renewable modular network within which bodies, drawings and objects interact. In her work, Steffani Jemison looks up at the sky and pushes us off into levitation, in dream and hope to lift the weight of gravity that pulls and binds us to the ground.

*\* Ezekiel Saw the Wheel*

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Steffani Jemison (Berkeley, US, 1981) lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. Her work is currently on view at De Balie, Amsterdam, NL (until 18.12.2024); The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, US (until 17.02.2025); the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver, US (until 02.02.2025); the Art Institute of Chicago, US (until 02.12.2024), and CAPC Bordeaux, FR (until 04.05.2025).

In October 2024, Jemison was awarded with the Lafayette Anticipations production grant at Art Basel Paris 2024. Selected recent exhibitions and commissions include: Centre d'art contemporain Genève, CH (2024), MoMA/PS1, Queens, New York, US (2021), the Whitney Biennial, New York, US (2019), Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, NL (2019); De Appel, Amsterdam, NL (2019); Jeu de Paume, Paris, FR (2017); MASS MoCA, North Adams, US (2017); and the Museum of Modern Art, New York, US (2015).

Her work is part of the public collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, US), MoMA (New York, US); the Art Institute of Chicago (Chicago, US), the Whitney Museum of American Art (New York, US); the Hirschhorn Museum (Washington, US), Kadist (Paris, FR); Castello di Rivoli (Turin, IT); Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam, NL), and the Studio Museum in Harlem (New York, US).