

PRESS RELEASE

Steffani Jemison

Personal

January 18 – February 29, 2020

Opening January 18, 5 - 7 pm

The artist and philosopher Hito Steyerl has a very particular definition for identity: exhaustion in common. She says "for many people and for many reasons and on so many levels, identity is just that: shared exhaustion."

On a good day, I can hold a handstand for about seven seconds. And so it is with a certain sense of authority that I tell you that stasis is not static, but involves incredible effort. And that that effort is sometimes visible, as in running in place, and is other times nearly imperceptible. The thousands of coordinated systems, nervous and bony and muscular, unconscious and intentional, that are required to remain standing on one's hands, stationary, over time, are barely visible at all. A few months ago, a student of the choreographer Steve Paxton reminded me that to become still involves not "stilling," there is no such thing as "stilling," but rather applying an equal and opposite reaction. As we were walking forward, the teacher told us to imagine walking backward until we were walking forward and backward at the same speed, in other words, standing. What an incredible effort it can be, to even stand without support. I want to think of myself like a solar battery, absorbing and amassing energy faster than I can spend it, but the constant motion of my body as it keeps itself upright uses as much as I make. It is hard to amass a reserve of one's own. I think all of us realize that now. [Artists's writing, 2018-2020]

Annet Gelink Gallery proudly presents *Personal*, Steffani Jemison's (1981, Berkeley [CA], USA) first solo exhibition in the Bakery.

Jemison's work encompasses a variety of media, including video, performance and sculpture, and is rooted in research. In her work Jemison addresses African-American culture and vernacular as well as the tensions between the private, social and political spheres through a variety of means, often examining the limits and structures of narrative storytelling and linear time. Her video works are frequently based around early cinematography, assimilating early cinematic tropes and techniques, to question the inherited narratives that form our perception of the world.

On view in The Bakery is Jemison's 2014 video work *Personal*. Commissioned by the Brooklyn Museum, Jemison – herself Brooklyn-based – shot the work in and around the Brooklyn neighbourhood of Bedford-Stuyvesant. Both visually and conceptually *Personal* brings together the separate aspects that mark her work, straddling the ground between the personal and political and the passing of time.

Split into three vignettes, each focusing on an African-American man walking to and fro within the contained spot of the scene, *Personal* references early cinematic works. The three vignettes are presented without order or sequencing, one following the other without visual cue. The shots remain self-contained, honing in on the restrained movements of the protagonists at the various locations: an outdoor athletics and basketball court, Brooklyn's Fulton Park and an unfinished mural depicting both Nelson Mandela and Barack Obama.

With *Personal* Jemison weaves together dissonant layers of time: motions go backwards and forwards, people move in contrasting directions. Throughout, the video appears to be moving in differing directions, morphing time into a disorienting, disjointed reality. Shot around the time of the police killing of Eric Garner, *Personal* explores notions of loitering and waiting around, calling into question the reality of racial progress. Trapped within the loop of the video, the men remain static within their motions.

Coinciding with the Bakery show, Jemison's video work *Similitude* (2019) will be featured in Art Rotterdam Projections from February 5 – 9. *Similitude* sees Jemison drawing on the work of 20th century mime Étienne Decroux to examine modernist mime, mimicry and masking, and the relation between language and gesture in creating and conveying meaning.

Steffani Jemison lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. Recent solo exhibitions and commissioned performances include Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (2019), De Appel (2019), Jeu de Paume (2017), CAPC Bordeaux (2017), MASS MoCA (2017), Nottingham Contemporary (2017), RISD Museum (2015), and the Museum of Modern Art (2015). Solo screening programs include Lincoln Center: Art of the Real (2018) and Gene Siskel Film Center: Conversations at the Edge (2018). Jemison's work is included in the Whitney Biennial 2019 as well as in the touring group exhibition Black Refractions: Highlights from The Studio Museum in Harlem (2019-2020). Other collaborative and group exhibitions include the Drawing Center (2014), the Brooklyn Museum (2014), and the New Museum of Contemporary Art (2011), among many other venues. In collaboration with Justin Hicks, Jemison performs as Mikrokosmos. Mikrokosmos performances have been presented by Western Front, Nottingham Contemporary, MASS MoCA, festival steirischer herbst, and other venues. Jemison's work is part of the collection of a.o.: MOMA (NY, USA); Whitney Museum of American Art (NY, USA); Kadist (Paris, FR); Brooklyn Museum of Art (NY, USA); Studio Museum in Harlem (NY, USA).