

ALMINE RECH

Phyllis Stephens

'The Movement of Material'

January 12 - February 25, 2023



Phyllis Stephens, Work it, 2022 - Quilt with sustainable fabrics - 193 x 149.9 cm; 76 x 59 in / © Phyllis Stephens - Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech - Photo: Phyllis Stephens studio

Almine Rech New York is pleased to present an exhibition of tapestries by Phyllis Stephens. This is Stephens' first solo exhibition with the gallery. Stephens has exhibited with the gallery in three group exhibitions, *Painting Someone in Shanghai*, *Un Hiver à Paris*, in Paris and the August Presentation in Aspen. The exhibition will be on view from January 12 to February 25, 2023.

Almine Rech New York is excited to host the latest series of tapestries, *The Movement of Material*, by esteemed Atlanta-based quilter and visual artist Phyllis Stephens. The first solo exhibition Stephens will be partaking in with Almine Rech, this collection of ten new works radiates a vibrant joyous energy that will undoubtedly leave audiences feeling inspired.

At the core of this exhibition is an appreciation for the energy of dance. The series alludes to the artist's own history and passion for movement. Dancing has been an integral part of her creative process and life, transforming any time and space into one of happiness and inspiration. Reminiscent of family gatherings, time spent with friends, or embracing one's own self, dance transforms an instinctual part of the human experience into a beautiful performance of life itself.

When reflecting on the series of works Stephens commented, "Dance connects you like nothing else can. Dance has power. It has influence. It has structure. It has everything you want in your life to bring happiness and joy and emotions that we don't even recognize. There's nothing like a slow dance, especially if you love that person. There's nothing like hearing your song and being able to dance to it. Most brides remember their wedding dances; the dance with their father as well as the first dance with their new husband. I'm emotionally connected to the power of dance. There is a freedom to it. Like quilt making. If you get a rhythm to it, you make something."

Stephens speaks to the undeniable parallels between dance and her famed practice of quilt-making. There is intricate attention to detail, like each step and beat matched in a choreographed dance. Stephens meticulously sorts and chooses only the best quality hands-painted fabrics, which are artworks in and of themselves, until she discovers the pieces that speak to her and the message of each quilted work. Vivid colors and dynamic patterns add their own rhythm to the composition. The expressions and body language of each subject seem to erupt before our eyes. Through Stephens's signature use of quilting, fabric transforms into movement. These narratives enliven us, speak to our souls, and stir within us the euphoric emotions of dance in bold new ways.

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Unique to this body of work, Stephens does not place her figures solely in the natural environment or on patterned background. These individuals are shown in a mixture of natural and urban settings giving a relevant contemporary atmosphere to the works. In “Work It”, we see two individuals shimmering like neonic city lights striking a pose on the busy streets, showing that everyone has the power to stand out. Conversely, “Upward Bound” expresses the power of dancing alone. Depicted in a bright and vibrant palette of colors and patterns, the dancer’s power emanates against the industrial background, unveiling how believing in ourselves reveals a pathway forward and upward. Then there is “Whirlwind”. Here, Stephens offers a glimpse into the intimate loving moments of parent and child where dancing is full of a pure and innocent laughter.

Whether young or old, we cannot help but succumb to the music that envelopes us, moves our bodies in cheerful expression, and brings us solace in a swaying embrace. Phyllis Stephens’s *The Movement of Material* celebrates the beauty of life through one of the most universal experiences, dance.

- Charles Moore, Writer