

# GREENE NAFTALI

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Steffani Jemison *Bound*

January 26 – March 9, 2024  
8<sup>th</sup> Floor

*My meaning is specific: it is about black people who could fly. That was part of the folklore of my life; flying was one of our gifts...Perhaps it was wishful thinking—escape, death, and all that. But suppose it wasn't. What might it mean? I tried to find out...*

— Toni Morrison in conversation with LeClair, T. (1994)

Bodies in motion form the propulsive core of Steffani Jemison's practice, which she describes as a melding of kinetic and literary disciplines into works of density and unbearable lightness. *Bound*, her second exhibition at Greene Naftali, draws on motifs of the limitless sky and the broader impulse to take to the air, extending her interest in legacies of dispersal and fugitivity in Black cultural traditions. Jemison's work across media has long been concerned with the weight of both physical and social forces, but here defying the gravitational pull is consonant with surrendering to it, envisioning new possibilities for liberation in both suspension and descent.

Perhaps best-known for her hypnotic video portrayals of highly skilled performers, Jemison considers the physical exploits of Chicago-based tumblers who twist, leap, and vault themselves into the air in her latest moving image work. The film lingers on their suspension, often cutting to images of a vast sky overlaid with the distorted logo of the country's largest trampoline company, SkyBound, wading in its contradictory intimations and lexical possibilities. Narrations from two tumblers envisioning the experience of flying and a feverish, improvised soundtrack by drummer Brandon "Buz" Donald, embody the kind of heedless freedom suggested by flight, enunciated by the lush strokes of the night sky from a found theatrical backdrop against which the film is framed.

The bodily transgressions performed by the film's tumblers are further distilled by pipe-and-fitting sculptures that resemble a jungle gym. Hinged to the sculptures and situated across the gallery are drawings on mirrored glass that evoke Jemison's own archives and art historical references, including canonical sources inspired by the myth of Icarus. Here, the story of Icarus, which begins with an incarcerated father and son, dovetails with a wider meditation on an experience of transgression, or as Jemison has argued, "to the tantalizing possibility of escape, individual and collective." In Jemison's retelling, the fall of Icarus is interpreted not only through the lens of failure, but also freedom: "The knowledge that sweet release, albeit temporary, feels worth almost any risk."

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Steffani Jemison (b. 1981) lives and works in New York. A solo exhibition of her work will open in June at Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva. Other solo exhibitions, screenings, and performances include JOAN, Los Angeles (2022); Greene Naftali, New York (2021); Contemporary Art Center, Cincinnati (2021); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2019); Lincoln Center, New York (2018); Jeu de Paume, Paris (2017), CAPC Bordeaux (2017); MASS MoCA, North Adams, Massachusetts (2017); Nottingham Contemporary, United Kingdom (2017); RISD Museum, Providence, Rhode Island (2015); and The Museum of Modern Art, New York (2015). Notable group exhibitions include *Counterpublic*, St. Louis (2023); *A Movement in Every Direction: Legacies of the Great Migration*, organized by the Mississippi Museum of Art and Baltimore Museum of Art (traveling 2022–24); *Greater New York*, MoMA PS1, Long Island City, New York (2021); *Black Refractions: Highlights from The Studio*

*Museum in Harlem* (traveled 2019–21); and the 2019 Whitney Biennial. Jemison is Associate Professor of Art & Design at Rutgers University; her first novel, *A Rock, A River, A Street*, was published by Primary Information in 2022.

Her work is in the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago; Baltimore Museum of Art; Brooklyn Museum, New York; Buffalo AKG Art Museum, New York; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, among others.