

Artist Profile – Steffani Jemison

b. 1981 Berkeley, CA; lives and works in Brooklyn, NY

When Jemison was a child she attended summer camp at the Carnegie Museum of Art, where she learned she was interested in writing about art. Jemison attended Columbia University where she received her BA in Comparative Literature and later attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago where she received her MFA. Later, Jemison taught at Rutgers University, Parsons The New School for Design, and at the Art Institute of Chicago. In 2013 she was awarded the Tiffany Foundation Biennial Award, in 2014 the Art Matters Award, and in 2017 the Radcliffe Fellowship at Harvard University. Jemison started a project titled *Future Plan and Program* which publishes literary works by artist of color, her goal is to continue her artistic interest in reading while also making books that are available to a wide community.

Being interested in literature, Jemison often incorporates fiction and other writings into her works; she has been known to combine reading groups in her performance pieces. Jemison is also interested in comparing historical and contemporary moments as well as focusing on movements of actors and the political implications of said movements. Jemison works with many different mediums, the most common being performance pieces, mixed media installations, and video art. Her mixed media pieces often include a combination of a photography process and painting. Common themes that arise in Jemison's work include progress, black history, culture, language, music, politics of narrative description, and tensions between improvisation, repetition, and fugitivity.

Jemison's performance art focuses on the ideas of reading and music. For her performance piece *Promise Machine*, she put together a reading group comprised of members of Harlem-based community organizations to discuss black American literary and political visions of an ideal society. After the group comes together to have their discussion, Jemison creates a new musical performance that incorporates text from the reading group.

In Jemison's mixed media art, she uses a lot of repetition and makes references to literary subjects. She commonly uses large, clear inkjet prints that she then goes over with acrylic paint. There are no bright colors used, her palette is limited to white, black, and brown for the majority of her work.

Jemison's video art is meant to discuss time, she uses the frames to represent how things are temporary and brings up historical ideas that make viewers think of past and present times. Her videos also bring up race and the issue of racism today; she uses mainly black subjects and has included a scene of police brutality. Jemison's videos include a lot of action and movement, there is always an action that is focused on like police being violent, a man falling out of a tree, or a man climbing a fence.

A couple examples of Jemison's installation/mixed media art include *Same Time (1)* and *Stroke (2)*, and an example of her video work is a screen shot from the video titled *Maniac Chase (3)*.

