

---

## Jane Burns: *Movement (Arrest)*

### Kelly Gellatly

Jane Burns' series *Movement (Arrest)*, 2024 freezes the combination of action and conflict in time, focusing on the moment in which climate protestors are arrested. In their stillness and isolation from the chaos of protest, the movement of opposing bodies become studies in form, their twisting torsos recalling both the figures of classical sculpture and the idiosyncratic and emphatic gestures of contemporary choreography. Starting with news imagery documenting global environmental protests, Burns has stripped away all extraneous (and identifying) details, instead using texture and colour to focus on the human figure as the subject of its own drama. As the artist has remarked:

... I am ... interested in how these snapshots may serve as a witness statement about human interaction during this time in humanity's history, when there is an increasing need for citizens to protest against political and corporate power that seeks to divide communities and destabilise nations.<sup>1</sup>

Burns' practice has ranged across photography, printmaking and installation, but in recent years it has been firmly embedded within the realm of textiles. Since 2022 Burns has been producing handwoven works on a TC2 Jacquard loom – a computer-controlled, manually operated loom that enables the artist to translate photographic elements in intricate detail. The technology for the TC2 was developed as a prototyping tool for soft furnishings but has been adopted by traditional hand weavers and artists, who, like Burns, have been attracted to the machine's versatility and ability to create intricate designs that are impossible to achieve on traditional looms. There are only three such looms in Australia and none of them are available for external use. As a result, Burns' commitment to using this technology in her practice has seen her travel twice to Finland and, to New Zealand, and later this year she will commence a new body of work in France. The ten works comprising *Movement (Arrest)* were made in Finland in 2024 on the largest TC2 loom available.

In *Movement (Arrest)* colour is used to convey the sense of drama that is central to each image; the individual in custody depicted in a bright hue, while the often-disproportionate number of authority figures appear in gunmetal grey and silver. The complex weave structures surrounding the figures seem to embrace and soften the inherent violence of the actions depicted; the curve of their form reflecting the weavers' (Burns') movements as she crafts the work – her mood, energy levels and indeed, the temperature, affecting the way in which the pattern of the weave develops (and differs) as she creates the piece.

---

<sup>1</sup> Email correspondence with the author, 15 May 2025.

Despite the gloom of current-day climate predictions, it is this combination of the personal and the bodily, with the colour and bravery of the protesters, that transmits a sense of hope. As Burns has observed:

As troubled and dark as these times are that we are living in, I am an optimist and have faith that the pro-social values that humans share—and these are far greater than the extrinsic values that can pit us against each other—will help us to galvanise and fight to protect what we love. This includes the natural world that we are wholly dependent on.<sup>2</sup>

The individuals arrested (physically, but also in time and space) in Burns' images are representative of a collective movement of everyday people—mothers and children, student and grandparents, scientists, doctors and emergency workers—who together comprise the mass gatherings and groups that come together to protest for action on climate change. Even though crackdowns on environmental protests have become increasingly common,<sup>3</sup> the “heroes” of Burns' work put themselves on the line, risking arrest and potential jail time for the greater good. Thus, while referring to the event unfolding in the frame, the title of the series – *Movement (Arrest)*, also speaks of the attempted “arrest” or stoppage of citizen movements, which are gaining momentum as public opinion and climate anxiety sit increasingly at odds with global capitalism and political will.

---

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> The UK government's passing of Public Order 2023 (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/15>) for example, has a significant impact on contemporary protests as it bans any action that prevents “business as usual”; including nonviolent disruption of public places such as buildings (ie. corporate headquarters), bridges and roads.