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© Adrienne Hall, *Pastoral Desire* (still), 2017

## *Parentheses*

University of Pennsylvania MFA exhibition curated by David Hartt and Sharon Hayes

June 28 – July 26, 2018

David Nolan Gallery presents *Parentheses*, a group exhibition curated by David Hartt and Sharon Hayes, featuring the University of Pennsylvania's 2018 MFA graduating class: Lauren Altman, Danièle Dennis, Junyuan Feng, Erlin Geffrard, Adrienne Hall, Jiayi Liu, Jiaqi Pan, Zoya Siddiqui, James Allister Sprang, Heryk Tomassini, Kasey Toomey, Monika Uchiyama, Eric Yue.

It is an unstated reality that our work as artists is most often seen in group exhibitions, amongst and in conversation with other artists' work in a space with a distinct authorship and authority, under the rubric of a curatorial proposal. Of the experience of installing for a group show, a respected artist once advised younger practitioners, "Arrive first and place your work. And make what you bring is heavier than any other work in the show so no one will want to move it." Clearly, the navigation of this situation can be riddled with anxiety and competition and demands a negotiation, a reckoning of sorts, with the structural condition of aesthetic practice—that, despite all mythologies to the contrary, our work is not autonomous.

This group exhibition is composed around an unintentional collective. In choosing to study in the same place, at the same time, these artists became, by default, a group. Each engaged their own intensive interrogations in the context of shared structures, overlapping and intersecting urgencies and unexpected events or happenings. (One of those, for this group, was the tumult of the 2016 US Presidential Election and its aftermaths.)

This constellation of their individual works does not propose a thematic concern, a unified material investigation, a set of animating theoretical foundations or, even, a mutual commitment to a particular futurity. So what does this exhibition offer in terms of a shared horizon of aesthetic practice?

The heterogeneous works of these 13 artists evidence singular urgencies and deep commitments. Their work and the seriousness of their endeavors gather a kind of critical hopefulness that is rather extraordinary in this particular moment of time.

In his introduction to *Cruising Utopia*, performance scholar and queer theorist José Muñoz cites the work of philosopher Ernst Bloch from which his own theorizations have taken flight. “Bloch offers us hope as a hermeneutic, and from the point of view of political struggles today, such a critical optic is nothing short of necessary in order to combat the force of political pessimism.”

Here, in the works of these artists, are not moves of blind optimism but rather hard and insistent works of resistance offered in forms of bigness and heaviness that need not take up all the space in the gallery.