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Elizabeth Atterbury – Gordon Hall – Huang Ngo – Em Rooney
July 13 – August 18, 2018
Friend of a Friend

DOCUMENT is pleased to present *Friend of a Friend*, a group exhibition featuring the work of Elizabeth Atterbury, Gordon Hall, Huang Ngo and Em Rooney that opens on July 13th with a reception from 5–8 pm and continues through August 18th.

“My friends, real friends, better than your friends,” sings Beyoncé as one half of “The Carters.” Brand a marriage, brand your friends, brand superiority, safe and sound in 2018. “We came here for the friends. And then we got to know the friends of our friends,” muses a recent Facebook YouTube spot, before apologizing for selling millions of users’ data to companies like Cambridge Analytica. What might unsullied optimism look like in our dark cultural and political moment?

The organic networks of the art world are akin to friendships: warm greetings, social outings, mutual support, even the odd betrayal. The artists in this exhibition share a regard for *caring*, not just as a feeling but as a political gesture, one which extends to how art is made, packed, transported, installed, looked after, and collected.

The objects on display form a tableau in which the viewer can read existing or imagined connections. Photography is an evasive presence here, closely integrated and sometimes submerged within laboriously worked materials. Em Rooney embeds personally meaningful photographs in handmade, quasi-ritualistic framing structures, while in other cases only hinting at an absent photograph through reference to albums, books or packaging, moves that universalize their preciousness for specific beholders. Huang Ngo primes muslin with cyanotype emulsion and leaves them on lake shores or beaches, where they are buffeted by the waves during the exposure process; in the gallery they are displayed at floor level, on a bed of sand. Elizabeth Atterbury, who has previously photographed her sculptures, treats a swimming pool as a matrixial form for mortar wall works. Gordon Hall’s image of a bench-like sculpture by the late artist Dennis Croteau signals their reproduction of the object for choreographed bodies to interact with as well as their effective communion with a forgotten casualty of the AIDS epidemic through the language of abstraction.

Objects that lend photographs material heft, and photographs that charge objects with something like subjectivity. As if each cared for the other; as if we might do the same.

1709 W Chicago ave

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Elizabeth Atterbury (born 1982, West Palm Beach, FL) lives and works in Portland, Maine. Atterbury's studio practice is fluid, fluctuating between picture making and object making. Fascinated with the autonomy of the artifact – objects disassociated from their original function and context – Atterbury's practice considers the distinction or lack thereof between artifact, prop, model, and sculpture. Drawn to materials such as paper and sand, Atterbury constructs ephemeral tableaux specifically for the purpose of transfiguring and recording them. Her work builds upon a continued investigation of display and its visual structures, along with a more recent interest in language, ritual, and abstraction.

As a sculptor, performer, and writer, **Gordon Hall** (born 1983, Boston, MA) examines the personal, relational, and political effects of the ways we relate to objects and to each other. Using both abstract forms and re-constructed copies of found objects, the artist asks how we might use such things and how they solicit bodily engagements from us. Ultimately, Hall's interests lie in the social and political dynamics of these exchanges. The intentional, specific, and enigmatic objects Hall creates are both provocations to performance and allegories for an ethics of relationality. The sculptural objects and the performances that occur with and adjacent to them explore possibilities for an engagement with space, time, and objecthood that seek to model alternative futures.

Huong Ngo (born 1979, Hong Kong) is an artist based in Chicago and often working between France and Vietnam. Her research-based practice connects personal and political histories using a conceptual, interdisciplinary, and often collaborative approach. Having grown up as a refugee in the American South, Ngô interrogates the ways in which power is bound up with language and identity and creates work that reframes the hybrid, the imperfect, and the non-fluent as sites of survival and knowledge.

Em Rooney (born 1983, Bridgeport, CT) is a New York based artist, writer, and curator. She guards and inverts her photographs in an attempt to challenge the immediacy of the medium. Photographs are often uniquely framed or armatured, or occasionally incorporated subtly into sculptures. Sometimes Rooney excludes photographs from the work entirely, using sculptural forms as semantic stand-ins which carefully refer to a subject's specific attributes. Rooney's practice underscores how photographs, like mementos or keepsakes, can become objects to cherish.