



Image on reverse: All Hands on Deck, Damon Davis, 2014 – present

Visitors are encouraged to display the image where they live or work as a "sign of collective responsibility and an ode to that diverse collective dedicated to protecting human rights, no matter race age or gender." Visit [alhandsondeckproject.org](http://alhandsondeckproject.org) for more information and more images.

# The Weight of Hope

Almost eight years ago Barack Obama was elected president on a wave of optimism that was almost tangible; it impacted the individual body almost as much as the body politic. The election of the first black president in American history presented itself, perhaps only to the naïve, as a harbinger of a new era of greater equality. One year ago Shepard Fairey, the artist whose iconic graphic of Obama situated above the word *HOPE* did as much as any image to crystalize the buoyant feeling of that 2008 election, said that he was "out of hope for Obama" because of the state of the country. (Fairey was also sentenced to a fine, probation, and community service for charges related to the illegal use of the source photo for that image; hope rarely escapes the complications of reality). In the years between these events, the murder of Trayvon Martin inspired the creation of Black Lives Matter, one of if not *the* most significant American justice and liberation movement of this generation. In the days that it took to contemplate, write, and edit this text, at least two black men, Alton Sterling and Philando Castile, were killed by police. Sterling was shot several times at close range while being held on the ground. Castile was shot while his hands were in the air above his head. In any measure of time, year to year or moment to moment, we can find the swell and atrophy of hope.

As Obama's tenure in office comes to a close and a new election looms heavy on the horizon, there is less talk of hope and more talk of pragmatism and political expediency. Supporters on all sides in the 2016 election have described their candidate of choice as the lesser of evils. Meanwhile, the cries of "black lives matter" that still rise up in the wake of the murders of black Americans are met with the retort that "white lives matter, too." Campaign slogans are conflated with protests. The memory of optimism seems, at times, to taunt us. Hope seems effervescent in the moment of choice, but it returns with gravity in the outcome, when governing, being governed, and other realities of living and dying in America consume us. We might assert (with more or less naïve optimism) that hope did not evaporate, but lies waiting. Something so hard-won can't be discarded. Surely it lingers and impacts this moment, too. Maybe it imparts struggle now, rather than buoyancy. Maybe, like Langston Hughes' *Dream Deferred*, "...it just sags / like a heavy load," a hope that offers resistance, shaping and training the body.

This exhibition looks at the impact of that shifting hope's weight in the last eight years on the body politic, and in particular on the Black body, through the work of four artists. Each produces work that not only takes stock of this moment between promised hope and whatever comes next, but also, in the words of Dread Scott, propels history forward. Scott is known for powerful, often performative work that brings history into the present, foregrounding the black experience of a systemically oppressive society. Unflinching and vital, his work refuses complicity with the status quo. Mariam Ghani overlays China Mieville's sci-fi noir novel, *The City & The City*, onto the landscape of St. Louis, melding fact and fiction in an elegiac look at the inequity that is born out in the geography of our cities. In Ghani's work, liminal and non-sanctioned spaces offer healing and respite from the work of living. Damon Davis began the All Hands on Deck photo project in the streets of Ferguson in 2014, a gesture that leavened despair and converted bystanders into agents of advocacy. It has since spread across the country as a testament to collective responsibility. It is presented here as an invitation for action. In his large, figurative paintings Terry Lynn combines potent images, including some from local Black Lives Matter protests, with sumptuous brushwork and engaging surfaces to honor his subjects and lead his viewers toward empathy and action.

At Black Lives Matter-organized protests across the country, including here in Memphis, t shirts and signs can be found bearing the slogan "I Can't Believe I *Still* Have to Protest This Shit." Exhaustion may be hope's pendant, or it might be heavy hope itself, a counterweight that keeps lifted spirits tethered to tired bodies under siege, to reality, where there is much work to be done. This may be the most enduring message of the art included here, that no matter how hope transmutes, no matter the weight that it accumulates, if we can bear it, if we will put in work, it will drive us forward.

**Clough-Hanson Gallery**

**at Rhodes College**

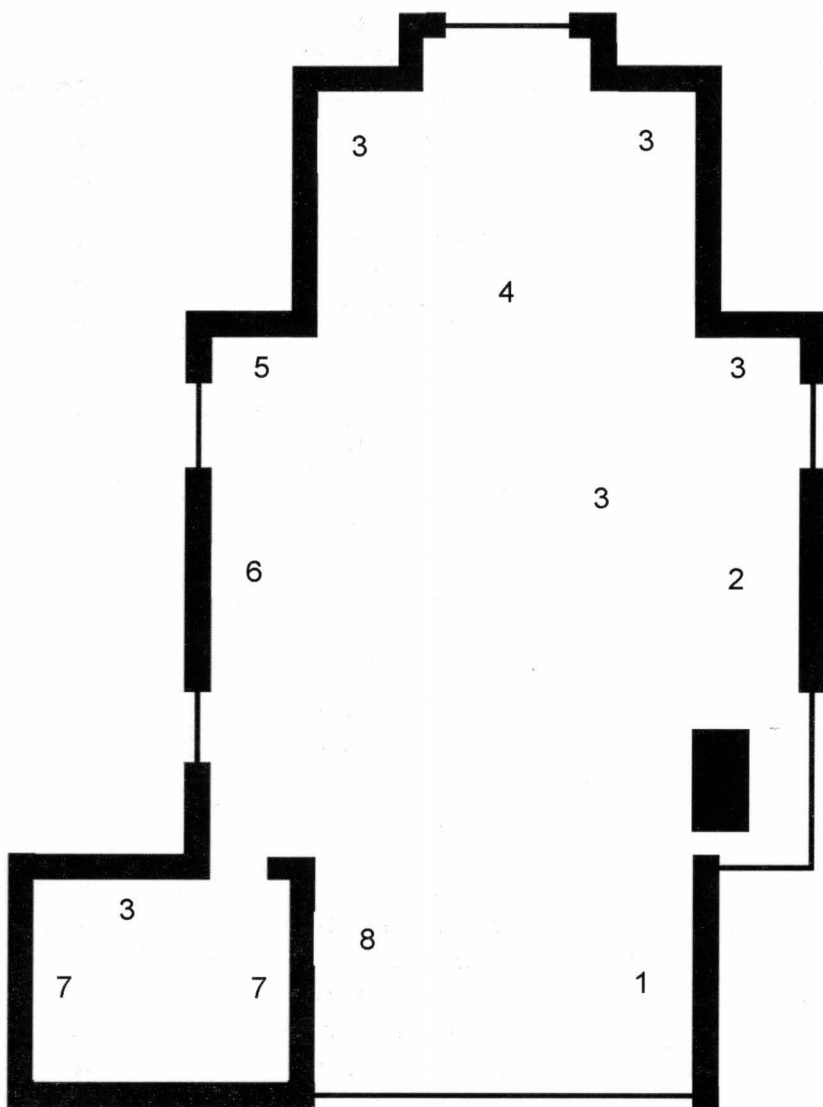
**10 September -24 October, 2016**

Joel Parsons

# The Weight of Hope

Clough-Hanson Gallery at Rhodes College

10 September – 24 October 2016



**1. I Am Not a Man  
(performance stills 60, 68, 114,  
and 220)**

Dread Scott  
Pigmented prints  
2009

**2. Rise**

Terry Lynn  
Acrylic, photograph, collaged  
canvas on paper  
2016

**3. All Hands on Deck\***

Damon Davis  
Photographic prints  
2014 - present

**4. The City & The City**

Mariam Ghani  
Digital video, 28 minutes  
2015

**5. Passage**

Terry Lynn  
Acrylic, paper, collaged  
photographs on canvas,  
hydrocol, books

**6. A Man Was Lynched by  
Police Yesterday**

Dread Scott  
Nylon  
2015

**7. On the Impossibility of  
Freedom in a Country Founded  
on Slavery and Genocide  
(performance stills 1 and 2)**

Dread Scott  
Pigmented prints  
2014

**8. Pink**

Terry Lynn  
Acrylic, tape, paper, and  
enamel on canvas

\*a note on the All Hands on Deck Project:

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#allhandsondeck