

ARTNEWS

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AROUND NEW YORK

In “Private Matters” at **Essex Street, Jason Loeb**s took on the issue of eminent domain. The artist filmed three separate sites of government land seizure for the purposes of corporatized development, including the nearby megaproject under way at Essex Crossing; the resulting smartphone footage was shown on three elegantly assembled AV setups on low pedestals. Real-time recording of the playback by another phone (notably in each case the “source” phone is a Samsung while the secondary “feeder” is an iPhone; two different makes corresponding to distinct proprietary controls in their settings) was projected onto the walls at relatively close range. This light stream, ostensibly the vehicle of the work’s content, polluted the immediate optical field, so that the “feeder” camera struggled to calibrate its mark. The resulting video image was poetically displaced and refracted through a chain of reframings, a metaphor for the destabilization of the commons under neoliberalism. The visitor was welcome to take a rest in any of the six Herman Miller wheeled Aeron chairs placed around the gallery in pairs (three sculptures total, each comprising two chairs). Not unlike New York’s CitiBikes, their quasi-public counterparts, they had predetermined operating specificities, tethered in each instance at the arm rest by plastic zip-ties, each rotated in a different orientation with respect to its neighbor. Bodily comportment thus became another dramatized element in a room of semi-inert negotiation. The choreography of objects and images, echoing and amplifying discursively, created a visually and acoustically interesting environment. Regrettably, though, technology found its Anthropocene other in a large sculpture of a phallus, a copy of a Paleolithic fetish, cast from local dirt and displayed as though it were a relic.