

CULTURED

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Artist Carolyn Lazard Reads the Room Back to Us
By Kat Herriman



Carolyn Lazard, *SYNC*, Essex Street, New York, 2020, Installation view. [A gallery space with white walls and a cement floor filled with objects. In the center of the space is a greenish-brown La-Z-Boy chair that stands upright and leans forward toward the left wall, revealing the metal armature supporting its uprightness. In the center of the space further back and to the left of the chair is a white ceramic sink that sits upright atop a brown stand with wheels. The sink, with its basin facing forward, approximates the overall shape and form of an old television. To the chair's right along the wall are two electric fireplaces that side by side on the ground. In the far left corner is a cluster of three standing air purifiers. On the wall on the left is a white ceramic sink hung vertically with its basin facing the gallery, approximating the overall shape and form of an old television. Further along this wall is a brown framed drawing. In the center of the back wall an hourglass is hung. On the wall on the distant right is another white ceramic sink hung vertically with its basin facing the gallery, approximating the overall shape and form of an old television.]

The tally of air purifiers that pocked “*SYNC*,” Carolyn Lazard’s Essex Street gallery debut in September, corresponded to manufacturers’ recommendations. If shown in the volumes of the kinds of institutional spaces where Lazard’s work often appears (Palais de Tokyo, Walker Art Center and the ICA Philadelphia, to name a few), their numbers would multiply according to square footage because it is, in fact, HEPA filter purified breeze blowing from the choir of haloed machine mouths that constitutes *Privatization* (2020). A new vision of the mundane, *Privatization* offers at once a moment of toxin respite and a blistering critique in the form of a premonition of urban miasma—infinately worsened by climate catastrophe and a police force discharging warfare-grade chemicals against its people—becoming an impossible barrier to life. “The work started out as a gesture of goodwill,” Lazard reassures me.

Though care for the viewer’s well-being permeates Lazard’s work, it doesn’t take away the edge of its appraisal. Lazard’s contributions as a writer, filmmaker and artist have knocked on the doors of institutions and individuals alike, to demand a fundamental overhaul of vision as it relates to our bodies and the demands we put upon them. Introducing the writings and

work of crip artists to the public is central to this realignment. For “SYNC,” Lazard obtained permission to republish late writer and disability community advocate Tameka Blackwell’s *And the Sun Still Shines* because of the way the short story transforms the mundane into narrative complexity. “What we are told to register as an event in our lives is culturally and socially constructed, and some of the feelings and ideas behind the show deal with challenging this,” Lazard says. “Instead of hiding the temporality of the domestic, maybe we should have it be primary, and embrace the slowness of convalescence.” Questions surrounding America’s extreme discomfort with rest lay at the heart of the show, which transformed the white cube into a disjointed living room consisting of La-Z-Boys posing like figurative sculptures and a fleet of sinks moonlighting as televisions. Those indoctrinated in Lazard’s work might have expected video from the Philadelphia-based artist and, in a way, these metal and ceramic readymade basins filled that role, if only as screens for projection.