

frieze

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Carolyn Lazard Reframes the Readymade: At Essex Street, New York, the artist presents an array of prefabricated objects through the lens of disability and chronic illness

By Simon Wu



Carolyn Lazard
Cinema 1, Cinema 2, 2020
Fire
Infinite duration

[Two identical small black boxes sit directly on the floor, plugged into electrical sockets on the wall. On their top, identical configurations of logs appear burning in flames. Through small slits in the boxes, wires and electrical components are visible.]

The scene we encounter in ‘Sync’, Carolyn Lazard’s first solo exhibition at Essex Street, derives from the long hours the artist has spent in spaces where chronic illness and medical recovery are day-to-day realities. The gallery feels like a rehabilitation centre gone awry. Two power-lift recliners, *Lazy Boi* and *Piss on Pity* (all works 2020), are splayed out in the middle of the space: one is at its lowest, most reclined setting; the other is extended forward, as if dumping its occupant out onto the floor. HoMedics air purifiers, collectively titled *Privatization*, sit like surveillance cameras in various corners of the gallery, sterilizing the air. Lazard’s work – spanning video, performance, sculpture and writing – often draws from the Philadelphia-based artist’s experiences of living with chronic illness, here utilizing a very spare visual language to look at the readymade through the lens of disability.

Lazard suggests a connection between the time spent staring at everyday objects in hospitals and the time spent staring at screens. Three commercially produced sinks are mounted on the walls, while a fourth sits on a rolling cart in the centre of the gallery: each recalls the boxy shape of an old, cathode-ray-tube television. Two artificial fire lamps, *Cinema 1 and Cinema 2*, present a soothing display of light and shadow that provides a false sense of warmth and comfort; the objects’ endless flickering creates a strange monotony, as if everything were frozen in time. Lazard has previously explored temporality in *CRIP TIME* (2018), a ten-minute video showing hands methodically filling up dosage containers with an assortment of pills. As queer theorist Alison Kafer states in her book *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (2013), ‘crip time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds’, positioning disabled labour outside the bounds of ableist productivity: the speed and efficiency of normative, capitalist time.



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.]

Carolyn Working, a framed drawing made by the artist's partner, depicts Lazard in the position from which they presumably made the show: lying in bed, under the covers, working on a laptop. The contrast between the artist's ostensible inactivity and the numerous hours spent planning the installation of these commercial objects is nothing new: this displacement of physical and intellectual labour is the formula for the historical readymade. But Lazard's intervention proposes a new way of looking at it – one that values the labour of disabled bodies while critiquing the hegemony of the ableist world. In a recent interview with Catherine Damman in *BOMB* magazine, Lazard mentions that they are focussing on 'articulating disability through Blackness and the entanglement between care and harm'. This is perhaps most evident in *Free Radicals*, an hourglass overfilled with granite dust from the McCoy Rock Quarry in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, the artist's hometown. Understood in relation to *Privatization*, the hourglass references environmental racism: the dust, a result of the over-mined quarries, caused respiratory problems primarily in communities of colour, requiring the purchase of air purifiers and medicine. Capitalist forces privatize not only your health and time but the very air you breathe, before selling it back to you – at the expense of your *health* and *time*. This is the inequity that Lazard seeks to counter through the synergies and contradictions of thinking of disability through Blackness, a complex and under-theorized intersection that might help us reframe the entanglement between ableism and racism.

Carolyn Lazard, 'SYNC' runs at Essex Street, New York until 17 October 2020.