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Shows to See Right Now
Park McArthur, Edition One and Two Fantasies, Essex Street, New York
By Martha Schwendener

Park McArthur's "Fantasies," from 2020. The sculpture is made of 12 used ventilator filters encased in plastic and interlocking into one another in a column.

Breath is central to two phenomena dominating our moment, the coronavirus crisis and the reinvigorated Black Lives Matter movement, as well as to "Edition One and Two Fantasies," a spare conceptual installation by the New York artist Park McArthur that you can view online or in person at Essex Street gallery.

The door to the gallery is left open to suggest ample air circulation and ease of access. Just inside is "Fantasies" (2020), a stack of 12 disposable filters on the wall, taken from a ventilator that Ms. McArthur uses at night. (The actual filters are safely encased in plastic.) Elsewhere in the gallery, framed blue-on-white printouts titled "Form found figuring it out, show" — like artistic prints — are appropriated from the medical device called an incentive spirometer, which Ms. McArthur also uses and which is designed to help improve the functioning of the lungs.

Ms. McArthur's work recalls artists like Michael Asher and Cameron Rowland, whose institutional critiques consider questions like who makes an object and how it is displayed, purchased or consumed. However, ability (and disability) is what's at issue here. Ms. McArthur, who uses a wheelchair, expands upon critical disability theory issues that challenge discrimination and the single ("able") version of how people should be in the world. This show is somewhat stark and sterile compared with her clever and engaging 2014 show of disability access ramps laid out on the gallery floor. But it feels exceptionally timely. Where the coronavirus and Black Lives Matter highlight the "I can't breathe" of patients and Black victims of police brutality, Ms. McArthur shifts it to a personal register that feels both ameliorative and activist.