



*Installation view of "Carolyn Lazard: Two-way" at Artists Space, 2025. Photography by Greg Carideo and courtesy of Artists Space. [A darkened gallery space with dark blue walls and dark blue carpeting. A film is projected onto the farthest wall. The projection depicts a close-up of the lower half of a black person's face. A hand is shown taking the person's temperature orally with a thermometer.]*

At a time when reproductive rights are under attack in the U.S., and egregiously high Black maternal mortality rates illuminate dire inequalities in healthcare, Carolyn Lazard centers Black patients and workers with a pair of taut, unsettling videos on birth-related care in their exhibition "Two-way" at Artists Space. The Philadelphia- and New York-based artist filmed both works in a Queens hospital's "simulation center"—a set-like facility for employee training. Despite the shared setting, Lazard's videos offer contrasting perspectives on some of the most intimate and vulnerable moments of pregnancy and birth. In one, a pregnant patient, dehumanized by the healthcare system, navigates their first prenatal checkup; in the other, an all-Black medical team practices birthing techniques on a nonhuman surrogate—a mannequin with brown skin named Jayda.

A deceptively banal procedural, the 16-minute *Vital, 2025*, ultimately proves as fraught as the sensationalized soap opera playing on the waiting-room television in the video. The main character, a 34-year-old artist named Maxine (played by the artist-filmmaker Martine Syms), finds their search for care thwarted at every turn. Their regular OB-GYN is inexplicably absent for this important appointment and the substitute (actor and writer Cyrus Dunham) is inattentive and unsympathetic to their concerns. His dispassionate remove mirrors that of the healthcare industry at large: After the visit, Maxine learns their insurance coverage has been denied without explanation. Lazard's restrained script repeatedly demonstrates how opacity is employed to maintain hierarchy, keeping the patient in the dark about their own well-being. As the film seamlessly loops, Maxine appears fated to endlessly wander the hospital's empty corridors in a quest for something resembling care.

The Black birthing team in *Fiction Contract* represents a more positive vision (though the workers perform under surveillance). Within the video's frenetic but stilted action, doctors, midwives, nurses, and administrators roleplay emotional support as much as they practice maneuvers to reposition the baby during a "complex childbirth scenario." The patient, Jayda—via piped-in audio—expresses fear, discomfort, and finally relief: "I can't believe it, I'm a mother," she says. In the end, the successful "birth" feels eerily unresolved given the blankness of the dolls. But the camera lingers on the pair long enough to show the swaddling blanket rising and falling as if from breathing, reminding viewers of the very real implications of the exercise.