

Kate Gilmore
Whitney Biennial, 2010. Catalogue.

Kate Gilmore

1975

Bc

Armed with her signature high heels, sheer muscle power, and desperate determination, Kate Gilmore is the sole protagonist in her performative videos, as she kicks, flails, strikes, hurls, and (sometimes) breaks through self-constructed obstacles. With metaphoric depth and formal sophistication, Gilmore's videos explore issues of displacement, struggle, and identity as a modern woman.

Straightforwardly shot in one take, Gilmore's videos are primarily concerned with the process of undertaking Sisyphean tasks rather than with the end results. Thus, goals are sometimes achieved, sometimes abandoned, and sometimes ultimately just beyond the artist's grasp. Designed for a night on the town, Gilmore's attire is at odds with the brute physical labor she performs. Wearing incongruous high-heeled pumps and cocktail dresses, she smashes through drywall in *Walk This Way* (2008), pounds on wood and cinder blocks with a sledgehammer in *Down the House* (2008), and heavy-lifts bails of hay in *Blue Ribbon* (2008). Working through these limitations, she grunts, perspires, and sighs, sometimes falls down or drops a shoe as in *Higher Horse* (2008), and then carries on intrepidly.

Careful attention is always paid in her videos to chromatic and textural harmony and symbolism. In *Down the House* (2008), she uses a bright pink plastic ribbon to tie together heaps of furniture and cinder blocks as well as her ponytail. The neon pink color provides a vibrant counterpoint to the neutral brown wood, stark white cinder blocks, and shiny yellow fabric of her dress. The pink ribbon, here used for

the utilitarian purpose of binding things together, is also symbolic of femininity, a stereotype Gilmore exploits in this video and in the aptly titled *Every Girl Loves Pink* (2006). In the latter work, a narrow corridor tightly filled with pink packing paper provides the artist with her physical obstacle, from which Gilmore (in a pretty pink party dress) strives to break free.

Gilmore's work emerges from a history of body- and endurance-challenging video and performance art of the 1960s and 1970s, such as works by Marina Abramovic, Vito Acconci, Valie Export, and Bruce Nauman. With a decisively contemporary approach and aesthetic, Gilmore's tragicomic videos posit physical situations as metaphors for the inner conflicts and social obstacles we encounter today. MN

Walk This Way, 2008 /
Inkjet print, dimensions
variable / Collection
of the artist

