

PORTFOLIO

Kate Gilmore

BY DAN HALM

As the video begins, there is a sea of naively drawn stars painted on a pale background. A woman enters, dressed in violet with a matching ribbon in her hair at one side. Pretty. She is smiling from ear to ear, and begins a series of look-at-me curtsies, arms open wide. And then it starts, with a resounding thump: a tomato flies from somewhere off camera and slams against her. Undaunted, she continues to curtsy as more tomatoes bombard her and the previously pristine backdrop until she and the backdrop are covered head to toe in tomato pulp. During the entire five-minute ordeal, her smile never falters.

"Most of my work deals with some sort of struggle," says video performance artist Kate Gilmore (MFA 2002 Fine Arts). "There's usually a situation, dilemma or obstacle to overcome. I'm trying to get from point A to point B. So these kinds of normal situations become incredibly abnormal."

Gilmore's "abnormal events," which appear to be incidental in their construction, are totally thought out, down to the last visual detail. "Things that look really easy, like somebody could do in five minutes, take me a ridiculous amount of time," she says. "I'm obsessed with color and with details. My outfit has to match my environment. I can spend two weeks on lighting alone. I have an image of what I want and it has to be that way or it doesn't happen."

The videos Gilmore produces (she is always the performer/protagonist in all of her work) are one-shot deals; they either turn out the way she wants or the work is never seen. She says she never re-shoots a performance because so much of her work relies on its spontaneous quality and capturing it as it happens the first time around.

After viewing the ordeals she puts herself through in her work—whether being confined to a wooden tunnel that appears too small for escape, cemented into a plastic barrel



KATE GILMORE, *Anything*, 2006, video.

with a hammer as her only means of escape, or chewing and pushing her face through a wooden star—many might ask, why would anyone do such things? In a review in the March 2007 *Art in America*, critic David Coggins says, "There is a striking clarity in Gilmore's videos—she sets herself a simple, challenging task and then carries it out, revealing her own limitations, and humanity, as she undergoes her self-imposed ordeals."

While her work has a strong feminist slant, addressing and breaking roles women are expected to play, Gilmore likes to see the work more from a humanistic perspective. "I like the whole ideal of battling through a world that rejects you," says Gilmore. "A world that tells you: you can't do this because of stereotypes and not fitting in when you're supposed to be a certain way. I love the whole idea of taking the sugarcoating off everything."

That statement might seem a bit incongruous because, in her new work, Gilmore has chosen to tackle a subject known for its saccharine sweetness: the stage musical. "I've been thinking about this idea of the musical and how it's so manufactured, this caricature of the world. I want to see how I can [flip it on its head and] try to make it bleed, or at least breathe heavily," she says.

The art world's response to Gilmore's work has included screenings in galleries worldwide and the recent purchase of her video *Main Squeeze* by the Museum of Modern Art. She also began a Rome Prize fellowship this fall, which means she will be spending the next few months at the American Academy in Rome creating new work, including videos for a show in Turin. With her European fan base growing steadily, an increased American following cannot be far behind, and Gilmore's not opposed to getting a little dirty and banged up to make that happen. ➔





TOP TO BOTTOM:
KATE GILMORE, *My Love Is An Anchor*,
 2004, video; *With Open Arms*, 2005, video.



KATE GILMORE,
Star Bright, Star Might, 2007, video.



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