

**REAL
ART WAYS**

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This exhibition is a result of Real Art Ways "Step Up" competition in 2004, which requested proposals from emerging artists living in New York or New England. "Step Up" was juried by Joe Amrhein, Owner/Director of Pierogi 2000, Artist Ellen Driscoll, and Tumelo Mosaka, Assistant Curator of Contemporary Art at the Brooklyn Museum.

The exhibition was made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.



REAL ART WAYS, founded in 1975, is a nationally recognized, alternative multi-disciplinary arts organization that presents and supports contemporary artists and their work, facilitates the creation of new work, and creatively engages and informs audiences and communities. Real Art Ways is an active presenter of different art forms, including music, performance, spoken word, film, video and visual arts. Real Art Ways has a particular commitment to supporting the work of emerging artists.

On the cover: still from *My Love is an Anchor*, video, 2004. Courtesy of the artist. (detail)

Kate Gilmore



still from *Heartbreaker*, video, 2004. Courtesy of the artist.

Kate Gilmore

By Katharine C. Ebner

Kate Gilmore's video artworks address specific struggles and dramas of everyday life, creating narratives that explore the symbols, behaviors and sentiments associated with stereotypical expectations of women. These narratives present situations with uncertain outcomes, such as jumping rope in high-heeled shoes on a perilous platform, thus evoking risk and danger, yet in the guise of feminine beauty and dutiful drama. Gilmore's artwork pokes fun at these predictable social confines—the roles women play and the ridiculous situations to which women subject themselves in order to do so. Because the artist performs these acts, she mitigates the perpetuation of such stereotypes by actively and humorously controlling the situation.

With Open Arms premiered during Gilmore's 2005 solo exhibition at Real Art Ways, playing on a monitor perched atop a white pedestal at the entrance to the space. In this six-minute video, the artist dressed in a sleeveless, lavender cocktail dress, arms flung wide-open, proudly gestures to her audience as if saying "ta-da!" Though it appears to be the finale of a theatrical performance, the actress is pelted with tomatoes while she tries to maintain her pose and smile. Two additional monitors, also on pedestals, looped the video artworks *Double Dutch* (2004) and *My Love is an Anchor* (2004). In *Double Dutch*, the artist, dressed in red stiletto heels and

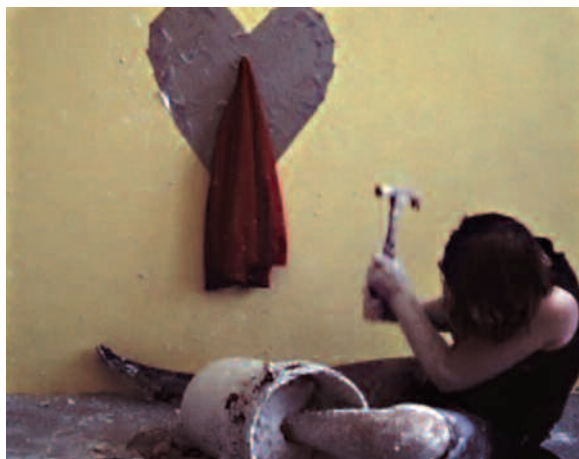
Kate Gilmore has shown her work in solo exhibitions at White Columns, Plus Ultra Gallery and Real Art Ways, as well as in numerous group exhibitions such as, the Greater New York 2005, PS 1/MoMA Contemporary Art Center, Long Island City. In 2006, her most recent work will be shown in an exhibition at the Haifa Museum of Art, in Haifa, Israel, and at the Franco Soffiantino Arte Contemporanea, in Turin, Italy.

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a brown dress with pink lace, jumps rope on a punctured metal platform with jagged holes for nine-minutes. *My Love is an Anchor* includes seven-minutes of the artist hammering away on a plaster filled bucket in which her left foot is encapsulated. Breaking free from the bucket without injury was perhaps Gilmore's most complicated, emotional and outwardly frustrating performance. On the far, end wall of the exhibition space, *Heartbreaker* was projected, larger than life. The scene opens with a gigantic heart, a construction of wood pieces (approximately 6ft tall x 8ft wide) propped against a wall. Moments later, Gilmore enters in a yellow dress with a matching scarf and an axe in hand, steadily and assuredly approaching the heart. The remainder of the video includes scenes of her slamming away, relentlessly destroying the wooden heart, which even "bleeds."

In a large basement space in Brooklyn, shared by three other artists, Gilmore's studio is easily identifiable—it's the space with television monitors, a video camera and a large blank, white wall—her stage. Here, she creates the settings for her performances, modifying the stage according to her vision of the scenario for each performance. *With Open Arms* was performed against a light-green backdrop with stars made of duct tape, ultimately splattered with bright red tomato juice. The stage for *Heartbreaker* was painted a soft pink behind

still from *My Love is an Anchor*, video, 2004. Courtesy of the artist.



2005 installation view at Real Art Ways, showing *Double Dutch* (video, 2004), *Heartbreaker* (video, 2004) and *My Love is an Anchor* (video, 2004), left to right. Courtesy of the artist.

the massive wooden heart; and, while *Double Dutch* did not use the stage wall, the platform itself functioned as the stage set and the prop—a scrap of metal with punctured holes that tore under the continuous pounding of the artist's high-heeled shoes, as she jumped rope. For each performance, the stage setting and props contrast vividly with Gilmore's costume and character. She acknowledges, "Formal concerns (matching installations with shoes, dripping chocolate with the proper hair accessory) is something that is always considered." Dressed in silky, cute and complementary attire and always with uncomfortable-looking shoes, Gilmore executes these bizarre, yet genuine, performances. "The clothing that I wear in the videos is a very important aspect of each piece," says the artist. The outfits are usually very feminine—high-heeled shoes, dresses, manicured long nails, exaggerating the sexuality and identity of the character in the videos. "The contrast between the character and her environment (the two extremes) is something that is very important in the work." Once the theme for the performance is determined, the stage setting and props constructed

and her character's wardrobe assembled, Gilmore films alone with a mid-range digital, video camera. Sometimes, however, stage helpers are necessary, as in *With Open Arms*. In this video, extra help was needed on set for props—specifically, someone had to pitch the tomatoes. Gilmore confessed that such stage helpers are usually friends or studio mates—"someone I have to feel pretty comfortable with."

Since Real Art Ways, Gilmore has continued her work in video performance. An installation currently in progress, titled *Main Squeeze*, is a construction of wood pieces

that measures about ten-feet in length and forms an irregular tunnel with television monitors placed at the tunnel's entrance and exit. Videos play on both monitors allowing one to watch her as she enters and exits the tunnel. Like her work in the Real Art Ways exhibition, this work is a performance of mental challenge and physical exhaustion. For nearly six minutes Gilmore is seen as she crawls through the tunnel and struggles with ripped clothing and fits of claustrophobic panic. Unlike *Heartbreaker*, *With Open Arms*, *My Love is an Anchor* and *Double Dutch*, *Main Squeeze* renders no destruction...only freedom and escape, once her task is completed. In another recent work titled *Cake Walk*, Gilmore premieres in roller skates (and a coordinating outfit) confronting an inclined ramp of jagged wood, at the top of the ramp sits dessert. It is a demonstration of, as Gilmore puts it, "what a girl will do for a piece of cake."

Though somewhat affronted by her unwillingness to surrender no matter what complications arise (others would likely quit), Gilmore's dedication is impressive. Whether destroying a

wood-constructed heart or smashing free from a plaster-filled bucket, she accomplishes the seemingly futile mission. A combination of performance and installation, ultimately, Gilmore's video artwork succeeds as a humorously demented and exhaustive struggle that is analogous to the absurd struggles of life. In addition, Gilmore continues conversation with early feminist art, adding a contemporary spin and humor. Her work is funny, fresh and clever. Yet, it is also about sculpture, a girly approach to heavy-duty sculpture—a mismatching, a juxtaposition of two different elements. Platforms, stages and props, the sculptural elements subtly strengthen and ultimately hold her performance work together. When regarding her sculptures, the artist puts it simply: "I become it."

For many reasons, Gilmore's video artwork captivates. Her carefully constructed performances belie the impression of futility and hopelessness one might take away from her work. Rather, her meticulous control of both sets and costumes hints at the elaborate farce the artist is trying to create in her humorous video performances.



view of installation with *With Open Arms*, video, 2005. Courtesy of the artist.

Katharine C. Ebner, former Visual Arts Coordinator for Real Art Ways, has worked as an essayist, archivist and research associate for various museums and private collections. She has published essays on the work of a number of American sculptors.