



KATE GILMORE
PHILADELPHIA

Armed with a sledgehammer and high heels, Kate Gilmore redefines DIY in her performance-based videos [Institute of Contemporary Art; September 5—December 7, 2008]. In a series of ironic gestures about sweat, striving, and fashionable clothing, the artist kicks, squeezes, bashes, and climbs her way through mazes of job-site materials, without stopping to adjust so much as a shoe strap.

Gilmore's videos are shot close up, which emphasizes the confining nature of her claustrophobic performance environments. Only legs and black satin skirt are visible in the video installation *Between a Hard Place*, 2008, as the artist's silk-gloved hands tear through a concatenation of four-by-four-foot drywall partitions. The hollowed-out remains of this structure are left in the gallery for our perusal, prompting us to ask: was it worth the effort?

The two-channel video *Main Squeeze*, 2006, gives two partial views of a performance. The left side of the projection shows her from bottom up as she shimmies through a space that resembles a ventilator shaft. Her form diminishes in size as she pushes away. Meanwhile, in the right-side projection, she grows larger and larger as she comes toward us through the same shaft. Her sweat-drenched, determined face grunts and sighs on the right while her flailing legs kick and bump on the left. But we remain unsure of her actual orientation in this termite-hole world—is it an upward climb, or merely a lateral slide?

Gilmore's work has everything to do with the redefinition of space. While she inhabits termite holes, her goals seem frustratingly far off. In one of the most poignant videos, *Every Girl Loves Pink*, 2006, Gilmore wedges herself into a plywood-and-drywall pit, her body scrunched into a hapless fetal position and covered with crumpled pink papers. The camera peers down from above as she turns this way and that in a desperate—but humorous—attempt at a Houdini-esque caper.

Watching this video, we get a gut-level sense of what

it means to “learn by doing.” While Gilmore's expression varies throughout the action's six-minute duration, it turns for a spell toward worry and defeat. Finding it impossible to maneuver her body into a more upright posture, she resolves to discover as much as she can about her environment while caught in this embarrassing posture. She gropes at boards, tests for weak spots, shifts paper wads, and finally turns her body ever so slightly, to the point where she can unleash her heels against the shabby plywood boards holding her in.

Gender also plays a key role in these performances. The protagonist's feminine vulnerability is palpable, her girly clothes—heels, satin dresses, and silk gloves—distinctly out of place in the plywood-and-drywall containers she has made for herself. What is most poignant about *Every Girl Loves Pink*, however, is that her solution turns gender on its head. Unable to assume a more dominant pose, Gilmore works from the bottom position—using her upturned legs to gain power and control.

What has Gilmore accomplished with her escapes, stunts, and demolitions? While covering little physical distance, the artist makes considerable headway in bridging the gap between self and other. The uncomfortably close-up views—the sweat, the dirty fingernails, the befuddled expression—make it difficult for us not to place ourselves in her shoes. Spending all that effort just to break through a hastily constructed box, the artist reminds us of all the less-than-sublime tasks with which we must contend every day.

—Edward Epstein