

# SheTube: Female Voices on the Small Screen

Q. What is feminist video?

A. A good way to reduce overcrowding in museums. Unless, that is, you are referring to "Reflections on the Electric Mirror: New Feminist Video," an entertaining exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum.

## ART REVIEW

KEN JOHNSON

Nothing in the show is politically strident or ideologically didactic. The videos — by nine artists, including a pair of two-member teams, and featuring the creators as performers — are variously funny, dark and poetic. If they are feminist, they express it in provocatively unpredictable ways. This well-selected exhibition was organized by Lauren Ross, interim curator of the Brooklyn Museum's Sackler Center for Feminist Art.

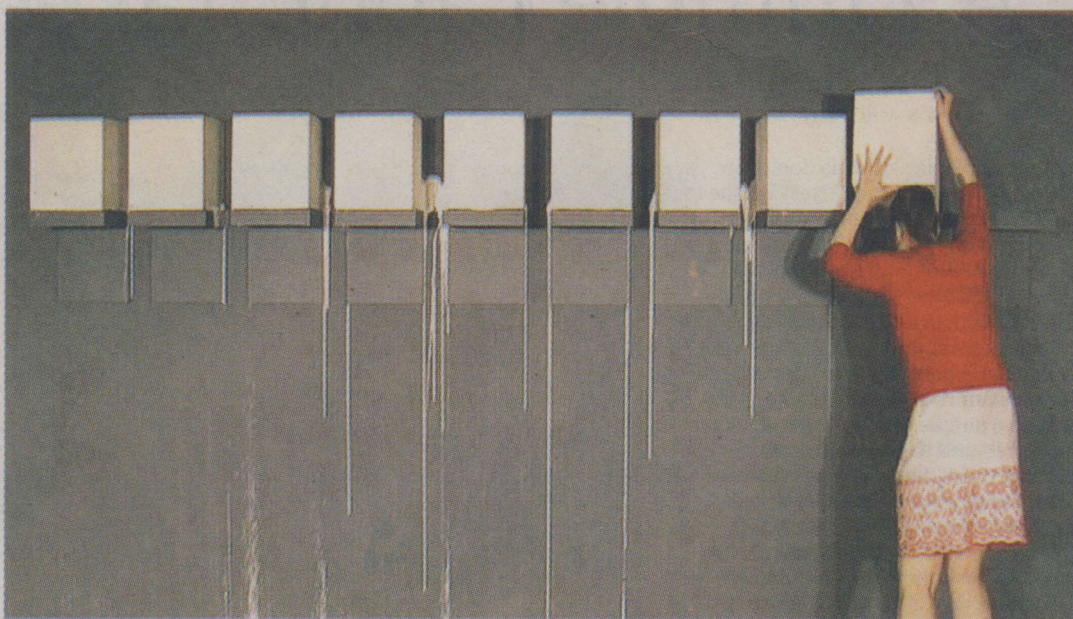
In "Blood From a Stone" Kate Gilmore, dressed like a suburban housewife in a cardigan and knee-length skirt, lifts 10 one-foot cubes of solid plaster one by one onto shoulder-high shelves. The blocks weigh 75 pounds apiece, and as Ms. Gilmore manages to heave each into place, wet paint on the shelf splatters and drips down the wall. This calls to mind Jackson Pollock's drip paintings and Richard Serra's poured-lead works.

Ms. Gilmore's performance is quite a show of strength and fortitude — huffing and puffing, she can just barely pick up the final block — but to what end? Is she mocking art history's love affair with masculine power and ambition? Or might she be satirizing old-school feminists' grim determination to equal men in all endeavors? The work's ambiguity is a big part of its charm.

Parodic television news reports by Wynne Greenwood and K8 Hardy also have some fun at the expense of '60s-style feminism. In one segment the correspondent Henry Stein-Acker-Hill, played by Ms. Greenwood, reports on two women who burn their bras to protest the treatment of women on reality shows.

But to frame videos as feminist just because they're made by women and feature female performers could be construed as sexist. When, in two of her works, Klara Liden beats her bicycle

"Reflections on the Electric Mirror: New Feminist Video" runs through Jan. 10, 2010, at the Brooklyn Museum, 200 Eastern Parkway, at Prospect Park; (718) 638-5000, [brooklynmuseum.org](http://brooklynmuseum.org).



KATE GILMORE/SMITH-STEWART

Kate Gilmore's video "Blood From a Stone" (2009) suggests Jackson Pollock or Richard Serra.



SHANNON PLUMB/SARA MELTZER GALLERY

Shannon Plumb in one of her roles in "Commercials" (2002).

## Reflections on the Electric Mirror New Feminist Video Brooklyn Museum

with a steel pipe or dances wildly through a passenger train, it is more an expression of youthful, punkish energy than a challenge to gender prejudice. On the other hand, the freedom these artists assume to do whatever the heck they want is at least partly rooted in feminism, so maybe it's a moot point.

Leaving the feminist question aside, "Whacker," by Harry Dodge and Stanya Kahn, is wonderfully wry. Ms. Kahn appears in a short, flimsy halter-top dress, aviator sunglasses and high-

heeled slip-ons, using an electric weed whacker to mow the tall, yellow grass of a vacant corner lot in a scruffy Los Angeles neighborhood.

Ms. Kahn is a brilliant comic actress, and much of the delight of the seven-minute video is in her subtle body language. She operates the machine as if she were a blasé fashion model, pausing to gaze out over the landscape with an enigmatic, Clint Eastwood-like expression. It is even funnier when you realize that the pose is a fake — she is not really mowing anything at all.

Shannon Plumb is another terrific comic performer. She makes mock television commercials in a flickering, silent-movie style and adds rousing soundtracks of jazz,

## ONLINE: VIDEO

Excerpts from some of the videos featured in "Reflections on the Electric Mirror: New Feminist Video" at the Brooklyn Museum: [nytimes.com/design](http://nytimes.com/design)

rock, folk and country music. Portraying a student with attention deficit disorder, an absurdly bewigged model for a shampoo ad, a patient suffering side effects from a stop-smoking pill and other characters, Ms. Plumb is hilarious. Comparing her to Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton might sound like a stretch, but it's not.

In addition to low-tech immediacy, a certain unifying spirit emerges from the exhibition: an attitude of hard-boiled sarcasm that masks, perhaps, a romantic vulnerability. It is poignantly expressed in Cathy Begien's "Black Out," in which she tearfully narrates a night of aimless drinking, while supporting actors force her to drink bottled beer and shots of hard liquor and to smoke cigarettes.

That generational pseudo-cynicism — "Whatever" meets "Please love me" — is concisely captured by Jen DeNike's contribution, in which she stands among trees at the edge of a beautiful lake, the reflective glare of the sun partly obscuring her face. In a constantly repeating loop, she presents a series of one-word signs that say all together, "There are no happy endings."