BODY OF WORK

MARCH 16—JUNE 9, 2013

Main Gallery

Kate Gilmore's performance-based works show the artist wearing typically feminine clothing while struggling through absurd physical challenges. At times, her actions appear futile, doomed to fail and disappear; in other situations she rages in a mode of creative destruction. Combining elements of slapstick humor and visceral discomfort, Gilmore uses her own body as a subject to address female identity, labor, and resistance. Body of Work surveys a decade of Gilmore's output, bringing together five works on video and a newly commissioned performance, displayed in the gallery as both video and sculptural installation.

KATE GILMORE IN DIALOGUE WITH ROSE BOUTHILLIER

Rose Bouthillier: Can you talk back to how your performances started? When did you decide to use your own body in your work?

Kate Gilmore: I first started doing performance for video during my graduate studies at School of Visual Arts in New York. I went into the program as a fairly traditional sculptor working with conventional materials, but when people came to my studio they were much more interested in the dirge of projects, the chaos of my process, or hearing me talk. I wanted that sense of engagement to enter the work, and the easiest way was to insert myself. I started doing photographs dressed as specific female characters placed in situations that didn't make any sense. For instance, Hillary Clinton in the hut of Ted Kaczynski, AKA the Unabomber. I ended up videotaping these displaced characters in environments that rejected them, which has developed into the work I am doing today.

RB: Your work connects to a generation of both hardcore and feminist performance artists that emerged in the 1960s and '70s, including Vito Acconci, Marina Abramović, Chris Burden, Chris Burden, and Carolee Schneemann. How does your practice draw from these histories and realities. We all live complex lives. We are held back, propelled forward.

KG: Seeing Marina Abramović perform live was one of the most amazing art experiences of my life. When she did Seven Easy Pieces at the Guggenheim in 2005, re-enacting historical performance works, including her own, I was dumbfounded. Her intense physical and psychological strength, ability to control an audience, her use of a body as a sculptural tool, and her total and intense focus are all humbling. Beyond the influence of performance artists, I am also incredibly inspired by sculpture and painting. Minimalism and Abstract Expressionism are two heroic art periods that I deal with in my work. I am a lover and a hater of these movements—probably at the same time.

RB: What do you love and hate about them?

KG: I love the control and rigidity of Minimalism. The elimination of excess, the rules. And I love the chaos and emotionality of Abstract Expressionism. Whether it's Donald Judd's perfect boxes or Jackson Pollock's ejaculatory drips, these works are monumental and I am seduced by them. I love color and often think of my videos in relation to a work on canvas. At the same time, I resent the machismo and exclusivity of these art movements, and I often use that reaction as inspiration for my work. I find great humor in the myths that the art world creates—our “male artist heroes”— which I poke fun at in my work as well.

RB: You set up situations that construing, constraining, and order bodies. At the same time, many of your works seem to celebrate chaos. Can you talk about this balance in your practice, between control and release?

KG: When I'm planning a piece, there is a lot of control—I'm specific about the way things are built, the objects that are being used, color, a shot, lighting. When I perform the piece, that way of working is over. It's about learning how to make sense of the piece, create something, and survive unscathed. I think it has something to do with the way we function in the world, how we are constantly put in situations that are out of our control and we must figure out a way to survive or, more appropriately, be successful.

RB: What ideas are you developing with your new work at MOCA Cleveland?

KG: For this piece, I am thinking about how interior design, art history, social structures, and organizational systems can be combined through sculpture. The colorful, patterned pots are meant to reference daily and ordinary life, while the structure is formally weighted in art history, very monumental and austere. I am hoping that by integrating these elements through the performance, the piece will bring the domestic into the art historical and vice versa.

RB: Though many of your video works draw on emotional wreckage and futurity, the overall sensibility is one of strength and resilience. For viewers, I think that there's a complex mixture of emotions: empathy, amusement, pity, admiration. What does this complexity achieve for you?

KG: I want viewers to care. Care about what this character is going through and to be engaged enough to stick around. I want people to think about themselves and their own experiences and realities. We all live complex lives. We are held back, propelled forward. We struggle and achieve. I hope that my work reveals something about the human spirit—as laughable as that sounds—and the ability to break through, despite all odds!

SPONSORS

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WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION
All works courtesy of the artist and David Castillo Gallery, Miami

Love 'em, Leave 'em, 2013
Sculptural installation and high definition video with sound, 2013

Buster, 2011
High definition video with sound, 7:40 minutes

Standing Here, 2010
High definition video with sound, 10:48 minutes

Between a Hard Place, 2008
Video with sound, 9:00 minutes

With Open Arms, 2005
Video with sound, 5:39 minutes

My Love is an Anchor, 2004
Video with sound, 7:05 minutes

WORK IN THE EXHIBITION

*My Love is an Anchor*, 2004
Video, 7:50 minutes

*Heart Breaker*, 2004
Video, 16:24 minutes

*With Open Arms*, 2005
Video, 5:39 minutes

*Main Squeeze*, 2006
Video, 4:59 minutes

*Baby, Belong to Me*, 2006/2007
Video, 3:16 minutes

*Walk This Way*, 2008
Video, 4:33 minutes

*Buster*, 2011
High definition video, 7:40 minutes

*TBT*, commissioned performance, 2013

*TBT*, commissioned video, 2013

COVER: *Buster*, 2011 (detail), high definition video with sound, 7:40 minutes. Courtesy of the artist and David Castillo Gallery, Miami.