

ART REVIEW

Artist Struts Her Stuff in Others' Shoes

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With "Walk the Walk," a piece being staged during office hours in Bryant Park through Friday, the artist Kate Gilmore expands beyond the solo act that has characterized her performance work so far. In this it represents a big, courageous move, but that doesn't keep it from feeling transitional and not quite up to her usual level.



"Walk the Walk," Kate Gilmore's new piece in Bryant Park, is basically a detail of a busy intersection, like those nearby.

"Walk the Walk," which is sponsored by the Public Art Fund, consists of seven women in bright smiley-face-yellow dresses — and when the weather turns brisk, bright pink sweaters — walking relentlessly around the 10-foot-by-10-foot top of an 8-foot-high plywood box painted the same shade of yellow. Basically, the work is a detail of a busy intersection — of which there are several nearby — extracted and abstracted, and crossed with Post-Minimal dance à la Trisha Brown. It also has a sound-art aspect: step into the cube and you'll hear the pounding percussion of those seven pairs of walking feet, all shod in ivory pumps. In an instant, you've gone from busy city street to nightmare New York apartment.

But more than anything, the piece, which can be viewed from 8:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. every day, is a kind of ephemeral monument to city workers and urban energy. It you watch it for any length of time you can see that energy ebb and flow. As the performers zig and zag, dodge one another or collide, they go a bit blank, tire, then regain focus and determination, just like the rest of us. Occasional stomping feet speak for nonspecific urban frustrations. The yellow color, which makes the piece visible a long way off, also

suggests the constant cheerfulness expected of office workers, especially women. With "Walk the Walk" Ms. Gilmore reaches the turning point faced by many performance artists: how to develop work without the artist as star attraction and chief perpetrator and to share the wearying physical rigors. For example, Joan Jonas, who is over 70, has continued to perform by involving other people in her art. Chris Burden and Vito Acconci gave up performance for other kinds of work.

Ms. Gilmore segues here into the role of director or choreographer. Up to now she has been known for short, sweet and violent videos in which, wearing demure dresses and matching heels, she punches and claws her way through or up walls. Occasionally these works are performed in the very galleries in which they are exhibited, so that viewers may approach the videos through torn-apart walls. Sometimes the vandalism reveals another wall that may match her outfit. Other times, as in a piece now on view in the Whitney Biennial, it enables her to climb upward until she can reach the video camera and turn it off. In a work she created at the American Academy in Rome, Ms. Gilmore struggled to maintain her footing atop a pile of white blocks of cast plaster, while two buff young men walloped away at them with sledgehammers.

The play of femininity, endurance, danger and color-coordinated monochromes in these pieces is often gripping because it is clearly carefully thought out, and, frankly, because it doesn't last that long. "Walk the Walk" has none of Ms. Gilmore's usual brevity or weirdly anticlimactic climaxes, and none of herself. In a sense, especially when the temperature drops below normal, it is a generic endurance piece with a Gilmore sense of color and eye for detail. That is not nothing, but it is also not quite Kate Gilmore. Still, she deserves a lot of credit for facing the inevitable and plunging fearlessly ahead.

"Walk the Walk" runs from 8:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. through Friday in Bryant Park, at East 41st Street and Avenue of the Americas; publicartfund.org.