



Thursday, Mar. 11, 2010

Kate Gilmore

VIDEO ARTIST

You know the problem with video art: it's perceived as too arcane to be crowd-pleasing. Museums tend to stash installations in dark rooms off to the side, like some '70s Times Square peep show. A few people wander in, linger a while, then drift away. But in a YouTube world where we've grown accustomed to oddball memes and viral videos, Kate Gilmore's mad exertions before the camera seem less strange than strangely fascinating. In one video after another, the New York City-based artist, usually dressed in very feminine regalia, like a cocktail dress and high heels, takes on some mildly preposterous physical challenge. (You can find a sampling of her videos on [her website](#). Earnest and deadpan funny, her work can also be borderline creepy, which is part of the point. Exhibit A: the claustrophobic *Main Squeeze*, a split-screen affair in which she pulls herself horizontally through a narrow wooden shaft, gasping for air all the while. A wordless parable about pure determination with feminist overtones, it's very entertaining in its enigmatic way.

Her contribution to the Biennial is called *Standing Here*. A camera peers down to find her at the bottom of a tall shaft made of white wallboard. Getting out will require hoisting herself up the sheer walls. And this she does, by punching and kicking through the wall to bust out openings where she can plant her feet or grab on with her hands like a rock climber.

Part of what makes her ordeal so absorbing is that there's real physical risk involved. In the last minutes of Gilmore's climb, she's 15 or so feet (about 4.5 m) above the floor. There's no stunt double, no CGI and no net, just a resolute woman keeping on. There are debts in her work to artists like Matthew Barney, Marina Abramovic and Chris Burden. But let's not forget Ginger Rogers, another woman who did it all — and as somebody noticed, did it backward and in high heels.

—Richard Lacayo