

Artist's videos explore struggle, identity, failure

By Jessica Belasco

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SAN ANTONIO — There's suffering for your art, and then there's Kate Gilmore.

For her video piece "My Love is an Anchor," Gilmore uses a hammer to free her foot from a bucket of plaster.

In "Before Going Under," she's captured in a lasso and dragged across the ground.

In "Main Squeeze," she inches her way through a narrow tunnel on her belly while sweat streaks her face.

The New York artist sets up physical challenges for herself to overcome in her performance-based videos, exploring notions of struggle, identity, failure and achievement. Eight of her videos are on view in "Girl Fight" in the Hudson (Show) Room at Artpace San Antonio, an organization with residency and educational programs and exhibits, through April 20. They include a video she created at Artpace.

"All my work has this desperate wanting, this desperate desire for something, whether it's success or love or attention," said Gilmore, 32.

Gilmore, who was born in Washington, D.C., attended Bates College in Maine and earned her master's degree in fine arts from the School of Visual Arts in New York. She's spending most of the year at the American Academy in Italy as a 2007-2008 Rome Prize Fellow.

Gilmore came to San Antonio in January to create "Endurance Makes Gold," in which she stacks used furniture outside Artpace, climbs up the pile to the second story and enters the Hudson (Show)Room through the window.

She came up with the idea on a visit to the site last summer.

"I saw the outside space, and it was just perfect to climb," she said.

"And this idea of not getting into the gallery on the terms you're supposed to get into the gallery, going through the back instead of through the door."

It isn't easy (at one point, a chair falls on her head), but that's the point. Gilmore's

not a masochist, but her goal is to demonstrate the strength and perseverance necessary to overcome physically challenging situations that serve as metaphors for psychological challenges.

Those situations are usually silly, and the videos are tragically comic.

"Humor is a huge part of the work," Gilmore said. "I have to have humor in the work to actually get the message across."

To make the challenges more difficult, Gilmore often wears dresses and high heels, emphasizing both her identity as a woman and how that identity complicates her task. She said she's exploring the conflict some women feel when striving to achieve in situations where women haven't traditionally been welcomed.

"These characters are really displaced in these environments," she said. "I'm in this environment that's trying to destroy me."

In "Star Bright, Star Might," Gilmore spends more than 7 minutes forcing her head through a star-shaped hole in a piece of wood.

Because her head doesn't fit in the shape given her, she splinters the wood by biting and pushing against it.

At once the funniest and most cringe-inducing video in the exhibit is "With Open Arms." Gilmore repeatedly makes showy "ta-da!" motions with her arms while she's bombarded with tomatoes from an unseen audience. She keeps smiling, even as the tomato juice stains her lavender dress and stings her eyes.

Gilmore emphasizes that she is portraying characters, not herself, in her videos.

To retain authenticity, Gilmore creates her pieces in one take and does minimal editing. The work isn't about acting, she said, but about spontaneously reacting to real-life trials.

"I think what's great about video for me is you can get these moments that reveal personality, these small gestures that humans have that help you to create an actual character — these moments of achievement and moments of failure.



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In her short video "With Open Arms," performance artist Kate Gilmore repeatedly makes showy "ta-da!" gestures while she's bombarded with tomatoes from an unseen audience.



A scene from Kate Gilmore's short video "Baby, Belong to Me."