

Shotgun Review

Josephine Taylor and Kate Gilmore

by Patricia Maloney

CATHARINE CLARK GALLERY

The recent exhibition of work by artists Kate Gilmore and Josephine Taylor at Catherine Clark Gallery capitalizes on the overt narratives of risk and survival with which the artists engage. However, more nuanced themes emerge with the pairing as well. Taken together, their drawings or videos depict female characters somehow indifferent towards themselves, but nevertheless facing down the world in defiant stances. These characters inhabit bodies that are truncated, distorted, and subjected to precarious settings that overshadow any erotic elements at play. Love is unbearable, they suggest, rendering possible extreme states of self-protection or selflessness. There is need to deflect the perceived threats to and from the ones they love. Like the central female figure in Taylor's drawings, the woman performing in Gilmore's videos is the artist herself. While Gilmore's character is less identifiable as self-portraiture, both bodies of work can be read as located in the spaces existing beyond personal boundaries of assuredness and certainty.

In the six videos on view, Gilmore either subjects herself to the instability of a self-constructed environment--such as the scaffolding erected from ribbon and furniture in *Anything* (2006)--or is at the mercy of some unseen entity, as when lassoed around the waist in *Before Going Under* (2007). Although attired in stilettos and dresses, her movements are often more awkward than alluring. She flails in her attempts to conquer the very structures she has created. Only *Heart Breaker* (2004) offers the possibility for triumph, in the moment the artist stands exhausted and winded over the large heart-shaped, wood-scrap sculpture she has just whacked to pieces. The effort she has expended--exacerbated by the inadequacy of the hatchet she uses-- seems greatly disproportionate to the foe she vanquishes.



Kate Gilmore. *Anything*, 2006. Single-channel video, edition of 5. 5:39 trt.

However absurd and haphazard the situation she places herself in, Gilmore's performances are not just assessments of vulnerability. Her environments create a bridge for her audience to a *felt* experience. In placing considerable emphasis on formal elements of color and shape, on the material's tactility and her bodily contact with it, the artist connects the viewer to her physical efforts and what they manifest emotionally. Listening to the destruction and to efforts thwarted, one hears rejection, dissatisfaction, and determination.

In Taylor's *Bomb Landscape* series (2007-08) --large ink drawings depicting a post-apocalyptic world-- naked, mangled human beings battle against animals in abstracted underground lairs. Though hands, faces, breasts, and genitalia are

finely rendered, the ghostly figures are mostly silhouettes carved out from negative space. They falter in their humanity, signaling an existence reduced to its most basic form of self-preservation.

In *Bomb Landscape 4* (2007), three figures are stacked totem-like on the page. At top is the mother; her left eye is gouged and a stream of milk pours from her breast into her swaddled infant's mouth. However, another stream emits from the child, becoming a life-support tube to the older, enfeebled figure lying prone below. This composition harkens back to Taylor's more explicitly autobiographical work, but also suggests a break with those drawings. The kneeling mother knows that she is keeping the dying figure alive, with the infant as intermediary, but she is also empowered to disable it. Cut off at the lower edge of the page, it moves away from mother and child, as if to suggest the past doesn't belong here.



Josephine Taylor. *Bomb Landscape 4*, 2007. Colored ink, india ink and colored pencil on paper, 104 x 76".

To the extent that sound is significant in Gilmore's work, Taylor's drawings are notable for their muteness. Not silence, as the mutilated figures invoke a range of imagined sounds: howls, grunts, sharp gasps of pain, the vicious tearing of flesh, cries of hunger. Instead, what Taylor conveys so forcefully is the incomprehensibility of rage and fear, the impossibility of stamping any sense of time and place upon either emotion. Here are the states of being that cleave comprehension and experience irrevocably from the past. Everything exists in the unending present. The freefall of what is happening now alters everything that happened before and puts it forever out of reach.

Previously, Taylor has used a blank eye to suggest the detachment that is a defense tactic against trauma. Now, the missing eye becomes a marker of adaptation, of shedding what is useless. In a not dissimilar way, Gilmore often cuts off her narratives before they reach resolution. One does not see what she earns from the risks she takes, whether she succeeds, or how failure might even be measured in the world she has constructed. In other words, the fact of whether Gilmore's and Taylor's characters survive is not nearly as relevant as the fact that they persist. Tangible and known orders may collapse; they remain steadfast.

Videos by Kate Gilmore, and Josephine Taylor: *Bomb Landscapes* will be on view at Catharine Clark Gallery through January 24th.

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