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**Pounding the Pavement on a Bryant Park Pedestal**

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The warm-weather sidewalks around Bryant Park are usually as packed as the stateroom scene in the [Marx Brothers](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/m/marx_brothers/index.html?inline=nyt-org)’ “Night at the Opera.” But beginning on Monday, if pedestrians plowing through raise their weary heads, they will encounter a vision of truly stunning Midtown Manhattan density in the air above them.

Seven women in identical bright yellow dresses and ivory pumps will be walking across the top of an eight-foot-high yellow box — walking with purpose but with nowhere to go, really, except around the 100-square-foot surface, and into one another. Is it a psychology experiment? A catwalk gone horribly wrong? A reality show? An ad for organic bananas? Or is it art?

For 10 hours a day, 8:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., Monday through Friday of next week, you can come and decide for yourself. The project, “Walk the Walk,” is the creation of the artist Kate Gilmore, who can currently be seen in a pretty red polka-dot dress and heels, walloping her way, Jake LaMotta style, out of a small sheetrock enclosure in a much-talked-about video at the [Whitney Biennial](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/w/whitney_museum_of_american_art/index.html?inline=nyt-org).

Like that work, the new one, commissioned by the [Public Art Fund](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/p/public_art_fund/index.html?inline=nyt-org), is the kind of primal-conflict-in-a-candy-wrapper that Ms. Gilmore, 34, has become known for in recent years, a sort of postfeminist take on the absurdity of contemporary life. It might not be quite the epic feat of public endurance taking place a few blocks north at the Museum of Modern Art, where [Marina Abramovic](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/a/marina_abramovic/index.html?inline=nyt-per) has been sitting daily in the museum’s atrium, unspeaking and mostly unmoving, since mid-March, and will continue to do so through May.

But Ms. Gilmore’s work can be seen as a kind of crowd-friendly capstone to a serendipitous season of live public performance art in New York, one that began in late January with a show at the Guggenheim by Tino Sehgal, who enlisted dozens of performers to walk and talk with visitors along the museum’s otherwise empty ramps.

The art fund selected Ms. Gilmore from among dozens of emerging artists who compete every year for only three commissions offered by this nonprofit organization, which finds the artists spaces — often prominent ones — to display their work, provides them with up to $15,000 to make it and gives them each a $2,500 fee.

Getting the chance to present her first live-performance work in such a highly trafficked part of Manhattan, Ms. Gilmore — whose major themes are desire, uncertainty and defeat — is likely to find audiences that will understand what she is after, whether art lovers or not. As the writer Lyra Kilston observed in the magazine Modern Painters, in words that could just as well describe the life of many a New York office worker, the trials in Ms. Gilmore’s work “thwart victorious resolution,” and even if the hapless striver succeeds, “we see a vaguely confused expression that seems to question why she was engaged in the senseless action to begin with.”

Nicholas Baume, the director of the Public Art Fund, said he was drawn to Ms. Gilmore’s idea partly because it reflects urban life back at itself, riffing on personal space and “the individual versus the mass.”

“One tends to forget how much energy and determination it takes just to walk down a busy city street,” he said.

Given that she often uses an ax, a hammer or her own head to break things in her pieces, it probably shouldn’t come as a surprise that when she started looking for women to perform in the project, Ms. Gilmore made one thing clear upfront: “I told them basically, ‘I don’t want to deal with any weaklings.’ ”

In person, Ms. Gilmore is funny and friendly, belying her drill sergeant routine, which she laughs trying to describe. Last week, when several of her performers (she calls them her “ladies”) arrived at her studio in Dumbo, Brooklyn, for a fitting and a rehearsal of sorts, she had sun tea and almond cookies set out. But she is asking a lot of the women, because they will serve, in a sense, as stand-ins for Ms. Gilmore, who has always worked solo in the past and gives herself few breaks in her brand of hard-knocks aestheticism.

Seven women at a time will be crowded onto the structure, which will rise along the park’s western edge on the Fountain Terrace. Those on the morning shift will climb up just before 8:30, and will be spelled by an afternoon shift at 1:30 — a version of the regimented office routines taking place in the buildings ringing the park.

The recruits will do only walking, no talking. “The only way I want you to communicate is with your bodies and with your feet,” she told the nine who had arrived at her studio after they had all changed into their identical rayon-and-spandex cowl-neck dresses. Ms. Gilmore had bought these in bulk online from the “career dresses” section of Chadwick’s, a budget clothier.

“I feel like we’re all bridesmaids in some insane wedding,” said Amanda Gale, 30, a graduate M.F.A. student at [Purchase College](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/s/state_university_of_new_york_at_purchase/index.html?inline=nyt-org), where Ms. Gilmore teaches and from which many of her art enlistees came.

Ms. Gilmore’s goal for the piece was to create a kind of collective New York woman, she said, and the 14 performers she chose represent a range of ages (20 to 38), races (white, Asian, black) and dress sizes (2 to 12). “New York City is not all white girls who are size 4,” she said.

Her biggest concern in casting them, she added, beyond diversity and their ability to go the distance, was to weed out actors and dancers: “You can tell an actor a mile away.”

During the rehearsal, a 10-by-10-foot square was marked off on the studio floor with masking tape to give the women a sense of the severe ambulatory constrictions they were about to face eight feet above Manhattan. Seven women got into the square and started walking, in circles and zigzags, creating what looked at first like a children’s-show dramatization of the properties of electrons.

A lively debate ensued: to stomp or not to stomp? The cube will be open on all four sides, allowing Bryant Park visitors to go inside and experience what it might sound like to be directly beneath the deafening drumhead of a New York City sidewalk.

“What about shuffling?” asked Mr. Baume, who had arrived to watch. “We promised shuffling in the press release.”

Reluctantly, Ms. Gilmore decided to cede a bit of control. “I think I’ll leave it up to you if you want to sort of diversify your foot experience,” she told the walking women, some of whom, 20 minutes in, had already begun to develop wan, “Stepford Wives” expressions.

The only concession to the performers’ peace of mind will be a 36-inch-high railing around the top of the box to prevent them from falling if they make a misstep, which would send them onto the concrete near the park’s fountain. (Perhaps appropriately, the fountain is believed to be the city’s first public memorial dedicated to a woman, Josephine Shaw Lowell, a social worker and reformer.)Rachel Wiecking, 38, another Purchase College M.F.A. student, said she was a little worried about what her feet would look like after a week, and whether people with pea shooters would show up.

“Will one of us go crazy?” she wondered. “Will we all hate each other by the end?”

But for any woman who has worked as a waitress, as most of the performers have, walking for five hours in public isn’t as daunting as it might sound, she said. And at $15 an hour, the pay wasn’t bad, either, at least for art work.

Nonetheless, Ms. Gilmore was making sure to prepare them mentally.

“I don’t want anyone to take a break,” she said. “I mean, of course, if you really need to, you can take a break.”

“But don’t take a break.”

Even if it rains? “Look,” she said, smiling self-consciously over her glasses, “I don’t want to torture these women. If it rains a lot, we’ll go out and get them some cute umbrellas.”

**Questions** | For discussion and reading comprehension:

1. What do you think Kennedy means when he characterizes much of Kate Gilmore’s work as “primal-conflict-in-a-candy-wrapper”?
2. What are the other themes apparent in Ms. Gilmore’s work, according to art experts quoted in the article?
3. Why do you think that in choosing her performers Ms. Gilmore avoided casting actors and dancers?
4. What questions did the performers have?
5. Have you ever seen live public performance art? What did you think?