

Kate Gilmore Blankets Pace Gallery with 7,500 Pounds of Clay

By Andrew Russeth 7/14 10:38am

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“Quick, come over here!” Susan Tribbitt called to her husband, Charlie Tribbitt, at the Pace Gallery’s 22nd Street outpost last night, at about 6 p.m. “This might not last!”

Mr. Tribbitt sauntered over and joined a crowd of a few dozen people watching a team of five women in sensible pastel dresses vigorously attack a large clay cube with their bare hands, a performance that was organized by the New York–based artist and 2010 Whitney Biennial participant Kate

Gilmore for the opening of the gallery’s new summer group show, “Soft Machines.”

The women ripped off hunks of clay and launched it at the gallery’s white walls, on which it left oily, pale brown imprints. A few pieces stuck. “They’re getting really good at making it stay,” Ms. Tribbitt said to her husband and *The Observer*. “But this will not be so quick after all.” Indeed, after about 10 minutes, the women had barely made a dent in the large cube.

But the women kept working, digging their fingers into the block and ripping off pieces. A few stomped the clay onto the pink platform on which they stood, while others continued throwing clumps at the walls, sending clay shrapnel toward *The Observer* and the surrounding crowd on a few occasions. Ms. Tribbitt, like many in the crowd, looked transfixed. “I want to know if they like to wear those dresses,” she said.

At about 6:30 p.m., with the opening only 30 minutes old, *The Observer* had to depart for other quarters (namely the “Ostalgia” opening at the New Museum). The performance was just beginning. Thankfully, this morning, Ms. Gilmore kindly provided a synopsis of the evening’s events via telephone.

“It turned into mayhem,” Ms. Gilmore said. “It was awesome. They got the whole piece down in about two hours and fifteen minutes.” A photo she supplied, taken near the conclusion of

the performance, shows the platform and surrounding walls covered with clay.

“Pace is a super beautiful and pristine gallery,” Ms. Gilmore said, when asked about how she conceived the work. “I wanted to do something that would work well there, that would go against the space and use it in an interesting way.”

The remnants of Gilmore’s piece performance — including the stage and all 7,500 pounds of clay — will be left untouched in the gallery through Aug. 26, when “Soft Machines” is scheduled to close. Photographs of the performance will be available in an edition of 10, and the platform with the clay remnants will be for sale as an installation, according to Pace representative Sarah Goulet.

What’s next for Ms. Gilmore? “I was using Sheetrock for a while, but I’m on a clay kick now,” she said. “I always need a new material. I move through them quickly.”

Correction: Updated the weight of the clay to 7,500 pounds.