

ARTFORUM

M. K. Guth

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Left: **M. K. Guth**, *This Fable Is Intended for You: A Work-Energy Principle*, 2009 (work in progress), backpacks, cords of used clothing, dimensions variable. Right: View of **M. K. Guth's** residency at 1 New York Plaza, November 2009.

M. K. Guth is a Portland, Oregon–based multimedia artist and filmmaker who has exhibited widely and received critical praise for her work in the 2008 Whitney Biennial. Her exhibition at the World Financial Center in New York opens January 6.

THERE ARE DEEP CONNECTIONS between my current project, *This Fable Is Intended for You: A Work-Energy Principle*, which is part of Mark Russell's 2010 Under the Radar Festival, and the installation I created for the 2008 Whitney Biennial, *Ties of Protection and Safe Keeping*—but there are a lot of departures as well. The similarities revolve around narrative structure and the amplification of collective voice and human presence, and also around the consideration of a particular site. But the two projects are significantly different. The Whitney installation was truly interactive; however, in my new work, the public does not interact with the piece physically, but through acts of generosity. People who live and work in lower Manhattan have donated all the materials—used clothing and fabric—that compose the project. These materials have directly shaped the appearance and process of the work, but the public has not literally helped to construct the installation as they did at the Whitney. My new work is arguably more expansive, and it presents the *process* of the piece in three successive phases.

In November, during the first phase of the project, I conducted a residency at 1 New York Plaza in lower Manhattan. The residency space was an old retail store that is now used by artists. It has two large banks of windows, so the public could view me at work with my assistant, the New York–based artist Molly Dilworth. The space acted as a window onto the performance of our labor. People could witness materials undergo transformation for the exhibition. I took into account aspects of display and construction. So, for instance, as

CRISTIN TIERNEY

Molly and I processed donated materials, we worked in unison: cutting, folding, hanging, stacking, or sewing—using the same types of movements—and placing materials with a mind to the aesthetic qualities of place. Each week, the space changed to complement a different form of work, accumulating into an environment of diverse forms, colors, materials, and gestures.

The exhibition—the second phase of the project—takes place in the gallery at the World Financial Center. It features long lengths of cord braided from the used fabric and clothing. The cords are anchored to backpacks hung along the walls of the gallery. The backpacks are removed from the walls for the performances and then replaced. The gestures of the residency are also captured in the exhibition, but in other forms—filling vitrines, for instance. The show acts as a staging area for the performances, and the original labor of the project is still present there.

The January performances are the final phase and culmination of the project. They involve twenty-four volunteer performers from different backgrounds—some are people I met during the residency who work in lower Manhattan, some are artists, writers, performance artists, etc. Each of the twenty-four performers will wear a backpack with a sixty-six-foot braided cord attached to it—thirty-three feet on either side. As the performers walk throughout the Winter Garden, they follow a series of choreographed movements based on maps I created in response to the architecture and significance of the site. As the performers shift, they create shifting geometric shapes—temporary sculptures—that amplify the shape and character of the Winter Garden. The braided cords connect the performers. As the performers change formation, they must carefully negotiate and manage the cords.

The geometric shapes created during the performance resemble much of the reflective glasswork in the atrium and also some of the intricate stonework on the floors. I'm interested in how the performers will amplify the human presence of the people who work in lower Manhattan and the patterns they follow in their daily lives. The title of the piece, *This Fable Is Intended for You: A Work-Energy Principle*, is inspired by an 1836 [Hans Christian Andersen](#) story. In the story there is a mirror, and when someone looks in the mirror, it tells the person about his or her life. I like the idea that a work of art tells everyone a little bit about everybody else—either through a reflection or a collective voice.