

ARTFORUM

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CRITICS' PICKS

Heather Rowe

D'AMELIO TERRAS
525 West 22nd Street, Ground Floor
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Installation view of
Green Desert, 2006

The first thing you'll notice is a vicious blade of glass placed menacingly at eye level. It's impossible not to imagine running into it. The remainder of Heather Rowe's *Green Desert* (all works 2006)—a deconstructed, freestanding hallway built from broken floorboard, drywall, elaborate frames, mirror, and shag carpet—offers a sophisticated interrogation of architecture's coercive psychological effects. Along the top of each of the sculpture's walls, contiguous with the aforementioned shard, runs a long pane of darkened, mirrored glass. Simultaneously acting as reflector and window, the material functions as a trope for the ambivalence of intersubjective relations, suggesting that the stark barrier separating interiority and exteriority may be a smoke screen. Alluding to a scene from Michelangelo Antonioni's 1964 film *Red Desert* in which two people in a corridor ignore each other, Rowe pairs compelling ideas about our capacity to recognize others with a simple, physically intelligent execution. Strolling through and around the structure is an exercise in perpetual distraction, a game reinforced by the numerous clefts and pockets concealing further catoptric adventures. Sometimes it's like snooping about an exposed prop from a magic show. Occasional (and disturbing) splashes of plush, white fur at the structure's foot add narrative tension: Did the magician's trick go horribly awry? A small sculpture hung on the wall—*Gates Mirror*, the only other piece in this, Rowe's first solo show—rounds out the artist's elegant architectonic meditation on the complexity of the ethical encounter.

—David Velasco