

ARTFORUM

May 22, 2007



Ward Shelley, Pelle Brage, Eva la Cour, Douglas Paulson, Maria Petschnig, and Alex Schweder, *Flatland*, 2007, wood, transparent vinyl, household appliances, and six people with personal belongings. 30' x 24' 7" x 2' 7".

CRITICS' PICKS

The Happiness of Objects

SCULPTURE CENTER

44 - 19 Purves Street

April 29–July 29

Based on art theorist W. J. T. Mitchell's provocative proposition that objects have their own desires, "The Happiness of Objects" posits the subjectivity of art. Beyond phenomenological concerns about the viewer's relationship to sculpture, the show plays on the relationship between the objects themselves. Sylvie Fleury's crushed makeup strewn on the floor is reflected by Tom Burr's mirrored purple folding screen, thereby creating new meaning for both pieces. Ian Tuzon questions the objectivity inherent to the flat image, pulling an object from her photographs and placing it alongside the pictures, while Jutta Koether's contribution investigates installation practices by placing panels at the same spot on the indoor and outdoor surfaces of the building's exterior wall. Further pushing the boundaries of the sculptural object, Felipe Arturo creates the illusion of a cityscape through the blurred lights that appear in his video when he gestures with a wooden plank lined with electrical components. Despite these interesting individual pieces, the exhibition comes off more as a chaotic collection of sculptures than as any real proposition on objectivity, except for *Flatland*, 2007, which easily eclipses the rest of the show. Six artists—Ward Shelley, Pelle Brage, Eva la Cour, Douglas Paulson, Maria Petschnig, and Alex Schweder—constructed a tall, very narrow, four-story space with eight nodes—two communal and six for individual artists to live in for several weeks. Based on the investigation of two-dimensional space in E. A. Abbott's 1884 novel of the same name, this performance in extreme living tests the boundaries of not only its inhabitants but also its viewers, eliciting anything from horrified claustrophobia to a desire to enter the structure. More performance than sculpture, *Flatland* considers architecture and people as art, taking the cheeky "Object's Bill of Rights"—a text presented by the exhibition that instantiates Mitchell's ideas—into the more engaging realm of human rights.

- Lori Cole