

New York

CRITICS' PICKS

Christian Holstad

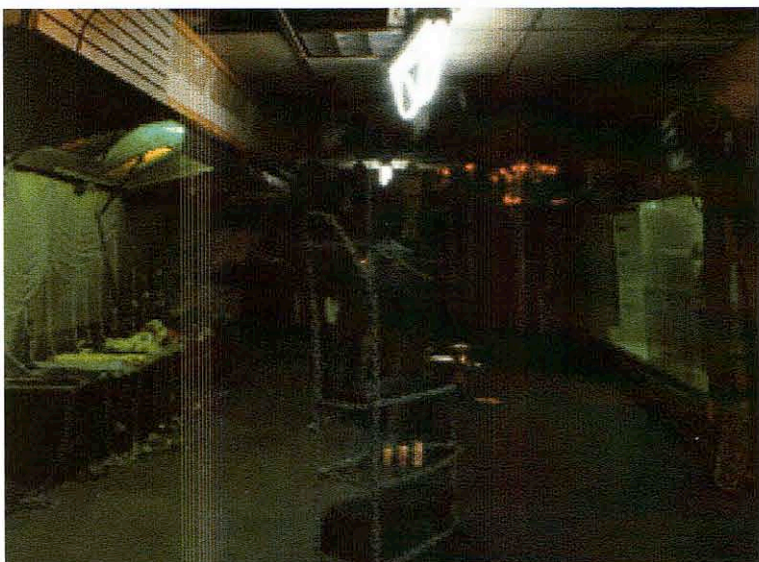
LEATHER BEACH

200 West 43rd Street

March 11–April 20

Even before entering Christian Holstad's latest show at this Daniel Reich Gallery outpost, everything—the reproduction of a chapter from Larry Townsend's 1972 *Leatherman's Handbook* that acts as a program; the Chashama-foraged retail space recalling Claes Oldenburg's *The Store*, 1961; the *Love Story*-inspired exhibition title "Love Means Never Having to Say You're Sorry"—proves the artist is an excessive cultural scavenger. Once you've pushed through *Confessional (Revolving Door)*, 2006, and into the dilapidated, caliginous former deli, further references abound: more Oldenburg cognates in the form of vegetable-leather chaps and faux-velvet ropes and heady Earth-art derivatives via Hans Haacke's 1969 *Grass Grows*. In the basement, the sculpture *Light Chamber (Tanning Booth)*, 2006, channels the 1955 film noir *Kiss Me Deadly*. At times there's an exhausting sense of hip desperation to it all, which could be irritating if this appropriation didn't successfully add up to a tender, critical encomium to leatherman culture. Offering his distressed wares on retail display racks, Holstad critiques the counterculture's commodification and widespread dissemination at the same time that he seems to mourn the decline of communities bent on ecstatic transcendence. To complicate matters, the artist's use of vegetarian materials and some inexplicably placed greenery add a strange subtext, evoking the soiled histories of naturalist movements and hinting at a promise for new life. All set in an area once home to a thriving gay underground, Holstad explores the lamentable state of New York's grime and grit with remarkable dexterity.

—David Velasco



Installation view, 2006.