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Wandering in the 'Desert'

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By [ANDY BATTAGLIA](#)

Released in 1964 and known to make art-house audiences swoon and squirm ever since, Michelangelo Antonioni's "Red Desert" tells the story of a woman (Monica Vitti) confounded by life in an extravagantly modern, polluted, industrial town. Themes of isolation and existential bewilderment were common in Antonioni classics (including "L'Avventura" and "L'Eclisse"), but "Red Desert" marked the Italian director's first foray into color.

'Red Desert,' Michelangelo Antonioni's 1964 masterpiece and his first color film, is enjoying a 10-day run at BAMcinématek through Sunday. Here's how it arrived in Brooklyn.

\$7,000 Cost to strike new print of 'Red Desert'	125 Full-price tickets to sell to meet minimum
\$1,500 Minimum to be paid to distributor to screen it	2 Number of prints of film now circulating in America
35% Share of gross to distributor (if minimum met)	9,149 Miles traveled by print (Rome to L.A. to Brooklyn)
\$68,116 Gross from BAM's 2006 Antonioni retrospective, its	\$31,854 Gross from second-highest-selling BAM film series

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And what a foray: Renowned already for his meticulous framing and control in black-and-white, the director famously painted grass and trees (as well as fruit at a road-side stand) to play with the drama in their natural colors—all of which networked well with his fixation on electric reds and blues spied in industrial factory settings.

"There's an incredibly distinct use of color in this film," said David Reilly, assistant film curator for BAMcinématek, which is screening the film through Sunday. "It's almost like Abstract Expressionist painting. Notably, after Antonioni finished the film he was signed in America to MGM, a studio

most known for lavish Technicolor and Hollywood musicals. It marked a strange transition for him in his career."



Everett Collection
Monica Vitti and Valerio Bartoleschi in Michaelangelo Antonioni's 'Red Desert.'

To make good on the legacy of "Red Desert," BAM worked with distributor Janus Films to strike a new print of the film after a restoration of parts in 2008. The print's 10-day run has arrived five years after BAM's celebrated Antonioni retrospective in 2006. That series remains the most successful such survey ever programmed by BAMcinématek, and "Red Desert" in particular holds the distinction still as the theater's highest-grossing one-day movie event ever.

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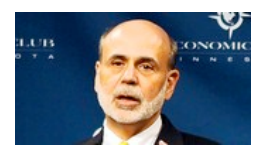
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