



Wake Up (partial view).

## Smell the coffee

Allora and Calzadilla urge viewers to *Wake Up* at The Renaissance Society.

By Ruth Lopez

If there is a roster of universal sounds, the reveille is on it. The bugle sounds, the soldier jumps out of bed and grabs a weapon. *Wake Up*, a sound and light installation at The Renaissance Society, is built around ten interpretations of this military tune by trumpet players with diverse styles. Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla, an art team from Puerto Rico, continue their exploration of war music, which began with *Clamor*, a sculptural installation created last year at the Miami-based nonprofit Moore Space. It was produced in collaboration with the Renaissance Society and the San Francisco Art Institute (as the duo advances westward).

*Clamor* was a giant bunkerlike contraption concealing musicians (or sound systems) from view. It projected all manner of battle songs and marches as well as the ditty "I Love You" by Barney the purple dinosaur, used to torture detainees at Guantánamo, and Springsteen's Vietnam protest rock anthem "Born in the USA."

Allora and Calzadilla spent a few weeks here trying to figure out how to present *Wake Up*, and they settled on a stark construction that suits the space to a T (although it more closely resembles a Z). Upon entering the

gallery, viewers are confronted by a tall white wall running askew and nearly the length of the space. The choice to turn left or right is left up to us, and that is just the beginning of the countless associations, intentional and unintentional, that one can think of here. Overhead warm-toned lights pulse, dim, or flash brightly—the intensity controlled by a computer program where values are assigned randomly to different sounds in each piece of music. Speakers are arranged overhead in columns, and the reveille diagonally crisscrosses the space.

### The piercing blasts made me wish for a foxhole.

Depending on the style of the player, and the acoustics where the piece was recorded, the effect of sound moving around the room can be so magnified that it is completely lost in this room of hard surfaces. Each musician's approach—whether atmospheric, melodic or chaotic—also influences the mood. Occasional piercing blasts (and rockets' red glare) during one visit were so disorienting it made me wish for a foxhole.

Circling the piece became a walking meditation on war; Maya Lin's black stone Vietnam Memorial and the Berlin Wall came to mind. During a discussion at the opening with curator Hamza Walker, the artists talked about their "parasitic" relationship

with other artists (riffing off works by Dan Flavin, for instance, for their 2003 *Puerto Rican Light*). While the piece was built to conceal cables and other equipment within its three-foot-wide walls, it serves to promote relevant connections. It's also large enough to make one wonder about its fun-house potential. During the talk, someone in the audience commented on how the grid below the ceiling (the permanent architectural feature of the space) made her think of razor wire—a fluke since the potential distraction of the grid on the lightshow was initially of some concern.

Allora and Calzadilla have been collaborating since 1995 and their videos, installations and performances have addressed globalization, environmentalism and activism. Their work was included in the 2006 Whitney Biennial, and Chicago audiences might remember their videos in the "Beyond Green" show at the Smart Museum in 2005—pieces that dealt with activism spurred by military bombing practices on the island of Vieques off of Puerto Rico. Urging action from viewers has always been part of their work. In *Clamor*, Allora and Calzadilla examine the connection between sound and violence. And here, the piece seems to suggest a sort of reclamation, and the potential to awaken to our many possibilities and choices.

*"Allora and Calzadilla: Wake Up" is at the Renaissance Society through April 15.*