

Allora & Calzadilla

Never Mind That Noise You Heard

**Hush little baby, don't say a word
And never mind that noise you heard
It's just the beasts under your bed,
In your closet, in your head**
Metallica, *Enter Sandman*, 1991

The exhibition *Never Mind That Noise You Heard* is an opportunity to see (and hear!) recent videos and installations by the artist team of Jennifer Allora (b. 1974, Philadelphia, USA) and Guillermo Calzadilla (b. 1971, Havana, Cuba). In their work, the continuum between noise and music provides the framework for an investigation of worldwide political and cultural tensions. The use of music within the context of power, militarism and war occupies centre stage. The image on the invitations to the exhibition is a significant one. The artists sent out a newspaper photograph from 1989, a grainy black-and-white picture of an American soldier aiming a large loudspeaker at the Vatican embassy in

Invitation Stedelijk Museum
Press photo 'Operation Just Cause', 1989



Panama, where General Manuel Noriega sought refuge during the American invasion 'Operation Just Cause' (December 1989 – January 1990). As a form of psychological warfare, with the aim of infuriating the general and driving him out of his hiding place, the Americans used speakers to blast out *Welcome to the Jungle* by Guns n' Roses, *We're Not Gonna Take It* by Twisted Sister, and other American rock songs, day and night.

Allora and Calzadilla live in Puerto Rico and have worked together since 1995. Their conceptual methods have resulted in a varied oeuvre, consisting of installations, videos, performances, social interactions, work in the public space, photographs and collages. All of their work is characterised by playfulness, a sense of humour and social involvement. This may focus upon a very specific, local situation, or operate on a more general level, reflecting upon imperialism and the effects of globalisation.

The title of the exhibition *Never Mind That Noise You Heard* is a reference to a 1991 'lullaby' by the heavy-metal band Metallica. The videos and installations in the exhibition belong to a group of works that the two artists have been working on since 2006, and which was completed at the end of last year: three large sculptural installations in which sound and music as related to militarism and war play the main part. Two of these installations, *Wake Up* (2007) and *Sediments Sentiments* (2007), are being exhibited at Stedelijk Museum CS, together with four video works. The design and setting of the exhibition has been created in close collaboration with the artists.

Returning a Sound, 2004 (5' 42")

The exhibition begins with the video work *Returning a Sound*, which was filmed in Vieques. This small island off the coast of Puerto Rico has, for the last sixty years, been used by the United States military and NATO as a testing ground for bombs and weapons. Allora and Calzadilla have spent a lot of time on this island and became involved with the local movement of civil disobedience. In 2002, this movement succeeded in putting a stop to the military exercises and ensuring that the troops were removed from the island. The devastated area was demilitarised, cleaned up and redeveloped. *Returning a Sound* allocates a major role to the landscape of Vieques, and also to its soundscape, incorporating memories of the sonic violence of the bombing. The video shows the landscape of Vieques through the figure of activist Homar, who traverses the island, T-shirt flapping in the wind, on a moped with a

Returning a Sound, 2004. Single Channel Video with Sound, 5' 42"
Photo: Allora & Calzadilla. Courtesy Lisson Gallery, London



trumpet welded to the muffler. The camera follows him on his journey past bunkers, warning signs, political graffiti, but first and foremost past the landscape, which he effectively provides with a soundtrack: a trumpet sound that moves from elegant, rhythmic phrasing to long notes, as the moped accelerates and decelerates. The moped becomes an instrument – an air-raid warning, an ambulance siren and a serenade to freedom.

Unrealizable Goals, 2007 (6' 22")

The video *Unrealizable Goals* was made in Japan in early 2007. The theme of the work is Japan's contradictory military status: it is a sovereign country, but is also obliged to maintain its pacifist constitution. At the end of the Second World War, as part of the process of demilitarisation, the United States added Article 9, a 'no-war' clause, to the Japanese constitution. This barred Japan from maintaining an army,



Unrealizable Goals (Video still), 2007. Single channel video projection with sound, 6' 22"
Dimensions variable. Photo: Allora & Calzadilla. Courtesy Lisson Gallery, London

air force or navy, and also denied the country the right to use force as a means of settling international disputes. However, the Japanese government is currently considering an amendment to the pacifist constitution, so as to allow once again the possibility of an armed state.

The setting of the video is the post-industrial town of Kitakyushu. On a football pitch amongst the houses and blocks of flats are two goals with their openings placed together: a self-contained world. Around the enclosed goalposts, some children are continuing to play football, even though there is no chance of scoring. Their activity is interspersed with images of the town's skyline, blocks of flats, industry, television masts and a big wheel. Three musicians are sitting in a palm tree, partially concealed by the foliage, and playing sleepy excerpts of compositions from the repertoire of war. The title

Unrealizable Goals refers literally to the idea of football goals that cannot be scored and in a metaphorical sense to Japan's military status. The languid music echoing across the urban landscape illustrates the impossible dilemma in which this nation finds itself.

Wake Up, 2007

The central feature of the exhibition is the monumental sound-and-light installation *Wake Up* (2007). This work consists of a structure of three-metre high walls, painted bright white, that divide up the main gallery of the exhibition in an unexpected way. These walls are the basic elements of the so-called 'white cube', the sterile setting that has become the standard for museums of modern art. Allora and Calzadilla arrange their walls to create a route with a series of empty spaces and dead ends. The white walls are a reference to the minimalist



Wake Up, 2007. Mixed media, live performance with sound, and pre-recorded sound commissions by Franz Hautzinger, Mazen Kerbaj, Ingrid Jensen, Leonel Kaplan, Paul Smoker, Natsuki Tamura and Birgit Ulher. Installation View: The Renaissance Society, Chicago, 2007

tendencies in the art of forty years ago, while the work as a whole serves as a metaphor for political alertness and social awareness.

From *Wake Up* sound improvisations on *Reveille*: the trumpet-call that announces the start of the day in the army and wakes the soldiers in the barracks. Music has always played an important role in the army. In military tradition, every order had a particular tune or a few bars. As soon as the soldiers heard this, they knew what they were required to do.

For this work, Allora and Calzadilla invited seven young trumpeters from all over the world, trained in a wide spectrum of styles, varying from modern experimental music and classical music to free jazz: Franz Hautzinger (Austria), Mazen Kerbaj (Lebanon), Ingrid Jensen (Canada), Leonel

Kaplan (Argentina), Paul Smoker (USA), Natsuki Tamura (Japan) and Birgit Ulher (Germany). In their improvisations on *Reveille*, which vary between energetically expressive and long and drawn out, the original composition is sometimes pushed beyond recognition and the piece of music evokes countless new associations and meanings. The trumpet music plays from speakers concealed within the partition walls. The soundtracks are linked to a light system, with the ceiling of the gallery being illuminated from the walls in a flashing, staccato style that corresponds to the amplitude of the music. This creates an experience that may be compared to the sight of a military assault, as seen on television during the bombing of Baghdad, for example.



Sediments Sentiments (Figures of Speech), 2007 (see also cover). Mixed media installation, live performance and pre-recorded sound-track. Courtesy Lisson Gallery, London

Sediments Sentiments (Figures of Speech), 2007

The most recent work in the exhibition is the installation *Sediments Sentiments (Figures of Speech)*, which features the human voice and the spoken word as ways of expressing political messages. The work consists of two virgin white, rock-like masses perforated by tunnel-like passageways. Made of foam and white plaster, they were conceived as 1:1 scale models of some future disaster. Planes of fracture, geological rock formations and subterranean tunnels are conjoined in a manner that recalls an explosion or landslide. The amorphous sculptures function as platforms for a satirical dissection and unconventional interpretation of political rhetoric. From the tunnels come the voices of opera singers, performing excerpts from speeches by key figures in recent political history: from Martin Luther King and the Dalai Lama to George Bush and Saddam Hussein. Their political statements are presented as a cacophony of voices of patriots and sceptics, radicals and conservatives, polemicists and campaigners. At some points during the exhibition the words are sung live by young opera singers. When there is no live performance, their voices can be heard via portable speakers like those used at Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park, London.



There Is More Than One Way to Skin a Sheep, 2007 Single channel projection with sound, 7' 03". Courtesy Lisson Gallery, London

There Is More Than One Way to Skin a Sheep, 2007 (7' 03")

The video *There Is More Than One Way to Skin a Sheep* was made for the tenth Istanbul Biennial (autumn 2007). The film opens with a scene in which a lamb is roped to the roof of a car, most likely on its way to be slaughtered. The main role is played by a tulum player, who uses his instrument to pump up the tyre of an old bike in a bike shop beneath a viaduct in Istanbul. The tulum, a bagpipe-like instrument made out of the carcass of a sheep, is probably one of the oldest piping instruments in the world. It originated in the Kaçkar Mountains, along the Black Sea coast in Eastern Turkey, and plays a key role in the oral traditions and the history of the folk music of the region. Bagpipes are also known as instruments of war, with the sound of the bagpipes being used mainly to instil fear in the enemy. Nowadays, against a background of economic progress and a huge population increase in Istanbul, this instrument is at risk of disappearing from everyday life. When the tulum player in the video uses his instrument to fill his bike tyre with air, he produces a series of shrill and penetrating notes that resonate within the soundscape of this big city at the crossroads of Europe, Eurasia and the Middle East.

Sweat Glands, Sweat Lands, 2006 (2' 21")

This video was made in Loiza, Puerto Rico. A pig is roasting over an open fire on a 'lechonera', a kind of spit found throughout the Latin American world, particularly in the Caribbean, which is connected to the rear wheel of a car. As the car accelerates, the pig turns at different speeds. The sound of the motor forms a backing track for the voice of Residente Calle 13, a young reggaeton singer from Puerto Rico, performing a Spanish text that he wrote with the artists. More rapping than singing, he describes forms of complex social organisations in the animal kingdom, drawing on the examples of bats, termites and ants as possible ways of organising a community. Or is every form of organisation ultimately doomed to failure? The world



Sweat Glands, Sweat Lands, 2006. Single Channel Video with Sound, 2' 21". Photo: Allora & Calzadilla. Courtesy Lisson Gallery, London

that Residente describes in his delirious phrases is a world of overpopulation, suffocation and restriction, of antagonistic order and disorder, heat and excess, civility and barbarity.

Sweat Glands, Sweat Lands (2006)

With a knee in each leg
And a flashlight
Walking inside a cave
While the state
Eats
And urinates
Border Order
Disorder with rage
Like a pork that rotates
Like an ant
Look to the edge
Eat fish legs
What you stick with glue
Stays
But like termites
Separate
Like a hiccup
Bursting from caves
From esophagi
That burn
This sun will burn
And not even with
globalization lotion
There is protection
When you have
Sweat glands
Sweat lands

Amphibious
Not ambiguous
Precise
Like fried pork stalactites
That fall
And reverberate
Like a collective hiccup
That gets stuck
Gets you stuck
That doesn't open or close
Like the ethic of the drawer

Leave it semi open
Leave it semi closed
The manta ray can't be
trained
The blind tick can't be trained
Like a hiccup
Spastic
Civilized?
Barbaric?
What does that have to do
with traffic?
With a knee on each leg
Ask
What's the social order?
What's your special order?
Hot dog juice?
Democracy
With hot grease

That fries your teeth
Quick
Like a bat volcano
Blind them,
Ticks
And let that foam burst from
your mouth
In excess
From your brain
From Esophagi
Fried
Stuck
Hiccup
6 billion at the same time
That breaks the body
For a moment
And makes the planet
2.68 microseconds shorter
Broken
Hiccup
From billions of people
Waiting with teeth
Throw away what floats
Use what sinks

Translation of the Spanish
lyrics by Residente Calle 13

Stedelijk Museum CS

Activities Guided tours

Guided tours are provided on request for groups of up to 15 people. Please book at least two weeks in advance. For information on prices and reservations, contact: educatie@stedelijk.nl or +31 (0)20 - 573 28 11. Prices for school groups: Dutch € 50 per hour; English € 85 per hour. Prices for other groups: Dutch € 85 an hour; English € 105.50 per hour. N.B. Admission to the museum is free for all guided groups.

Education

The Stedelijk Museum offers many educational activities for a wide range of people. These include teaching packs, individual workbooks (*Eerste hulp bij kunst, fotografie, design en video*), children's workshops with artists, special projects based on exhibitions, and guided tours for different educational sectors and courses.

Bulletin

The February 2008 issue of the *Stedelijk Museum Bulletin* contains an article about *Allora & Calzadilla*. The Bulletin is on sale in the museum shop (NL/EN, € 5).

Newsletter

For latest information about the activities of the Stedelijk Museum, subscribe to the digital newsletter via www.stedelijk.nl.

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30.05.08 – 30.09.08
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20.06.08 – 30.09.08
Wolfgang Tillmans
20.06.08 – 30.09.08
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DOCKING STATION

Ulla von Brandenburg – La Maison
18.01.08 – 04.03.08
Alexandra Bircken
7.03.08 – 13.04.08

Stedelijk Museum CS

Post CS Building, 2nd floor
Oosterdokskaade 5
1011 AD Amsterdam
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Open: daily 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.

Art on exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum CS is generally from the post-1968 period.

Subject to alterations.



08.02 - 04.05.2008

English



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