

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Michele Faguet, "Allora & Calzadilla", Artforum International, November 2009, 244

BERLIN

Allora & Calzadilla

TEMPORÄRE KUNSTHALLE BERLIN

Since opening its doors in October 2008, the Temporäre Kunsthalle Berlin has exhibited the work of contemporary artists residing in Berlin within a very basic white-cube construction, while just to its left, the Palast der Republik—former home to the East German parliament but also a center of East German social life with its restaurants, theaters, and galleries—has undergone the last stage of a highly controversial demolition. In its place will be a replica of the Berliner Stadtschloss, the Baroque Prussian palace originally located on this site before it, too, was torn down by the East German government in 1950. In their recent exhibition, Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla presented two works that address the ideological struggle over this particular site, in the context of their broader interest in the politics of geography, a concern partly informed by the artists' residence in Puerto Rico, an island with a long history of colonial subordination.

How to Appear Invisible (all works 2009) is a video that shows a demolition crew breaking down the final pieces of the Palast facade against the backdrop of a characteristically gray Berlin winter day.

Allora & Calzadilla,
*How to Appear
Invisible*, 2009, still
from a 16-mm color
film transferred to
HD video, 21 minutes
30 seconds.



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Iconic architectural elements such as the Berliner Dom and the Alexanderplatz television tower intermittently appear in a series of carefully composed medium shots. Into this melancholic scene of architectural ruin enters a German shepherd wearing a cone collar made from a KFC bucket bearing the familiar face of Colonel Sanders—one of the many symbols of Americana that attempts to give a benign dimension to global capitalism. This canine witness absurdly interrupts the nostalgic overload of the event and its aggressive historical revision, but it also brings in more conceptual baggage: The breed was both notoriously utilized by the Nazis and crucial to the early consolidation of the US film industry. (Rin Tin Tin is credited with having saved Warner Brothers from imminent bankruptcy.) If, as Walter Benjamin wrote, "allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things," this piece, with its proliferation of ideologically charged icons amid the rubble of a contemporary ruin, seems to indicate the critical potential of stripping down the mythology of historicism to reveal its skeletal remains.

While *How to Appear Invisible* was shown in a screening room located off of the bookshop/foyer of the kunsthalle, the gallery space proper was inhabited by a new work titled *Compass*—an architectural/sonic intervention that reduced the height of the space from about thirty-four feet to less than ten with the construction of a false ceiling, above which a tap dancer performed, invisible to the viewer. Allora & Calzadilla have often examined cultural histories of sound and music, seeing them as tools of social organization and control while alluding to the affective capacity of music's nonnarrative structure. In this case, what would ordinarily be the cheerful, dainty clatter of a dancer's metallic soles was magnified into an aural experience that was oppressive in its sheer volume—but also quite stunning. While tourists outside traipsed across what used to be a parking lot, now an empty space until its future is fully determined, the unconscious traces of repressed historical memory reappeared in the exhibition with a thundering aural and corporeal presence, deafening in the absence of its source.

—Michèle Faguet