



The TROIA theater, a public performance-art space designed by Martin Hoyer, as it will appear in Stuttgart this summer

## Stage Fright Mobile theater dramatizes security debate

Like the mythical wooden horse that inspired its name, TROIA's unprepossessing gray steel exterior suggests nothing of what's inside. The transportable modular building, which can be assembled in a few days in any urban plaza, contains the world's first six-sided pixel room. Lined with 28,000 LED panels and a hidden surveillance system, the 1,700-square-foot space is designed to generate public debate about homeland security systems and technologies of political control.

BBM, a German artist collective known for elaborate technology-based performances, conceived of the project after reading a report by the European Parliament about instruments of repression in Europe. (BBM is short for Beobachter der Bediener von Maschinen, which translates as

"Observers of Operators of Machines.") With funding from an EU education and culture initiative called Culture 2000, the collective commissioned Los Angeles architect Neil Denari to design the theater. Denari's ambitious design won a Progressive Architecture citation in 2004 but could not be built because of budget restrictions. This scheme—a small foyer connected to a larger pixel-packed theater—was redesigned by architect and BBM member Martin Hoyer and will debut in Stuttgart, Germany, on July 1. (TROIA travels to Budapest, Vienna, and Manchester through 2006.)

Upon entering TROIA's foyer, visitors get an "armpod," a multimedia contraption with an LCD screen that straps to the shoulder and streams video of Taser guns and similar "non-lethal" weapons. "The concept is technology intruding on the body," says BBM's Olaf Arndt. Inside the theater, low-res, paranoia-inducing text and graphics move along the LED walls—Denari compares the experience to "walking into an Atari video game." And indeed, a strange game plays itself out: Performers, acting as *agents provocateurs*, mingle with spectators in a 90-minute surveillance-themed theater piece called DEMONS (an acronym for Directed-Energy Munitions, which refers to weapons that blind sensors on vehicles so that they may be more

easily attacked). The mingling continues during a post-performance party in which the actors, seemingly out of character, engage the audience with questions from a script.

Arndt says TROIA is not meant to instill fear in the public, but to "raise attention about these forthcoming technologies, to start a discussion about the nature of control and weapons." Through art, he hopes that visitors will see the potential of technology "to improve bodies instead of repelling or punishing them." [www.bbm.de/troia](http://www.bbm.de/troia)  
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