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Julianne Swartz

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Julianne Swartz, a New Yorker born in Phoenix in 1967, has filled the Whitney's stairwell with a work of sound art. On the top landing, a small cupboard houses a complex grid of wiring and speakers. Stand near it, and you hear a cacophony of voices singing, humming or chanting Dorothy's lyrics from "Over the Rainbow." Each loudspeaker on the panel also feeds a separate clear-plastic tube, about two inches across, which runs along the stairwell's ceiling to an end point lower down, where it blossoms into a kind of modernist ear trumpet. As you pass down the stairs and stop en route to listen at each speaker's station, the confusion heard at the stairwell's top is pulled apart into its several different channels. The effect is to tie the different spaces of the Whitney's frigid Marcel Breuer building into a kind of warm community of singers -- almost as though the museum had become possessed by a ghostly barbershop sextet.