

PROJECT 26

Allora & Calzadilla

2012

Stop, Repair, Prepare: Variations on 'Ode to Joy' for a Prepared Piano

16 November – 6 December 2012

Cowen Gallery, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne

BIOGRAPHY

Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla create works that explore societal systems and are characterised by their sense of playfulness and use of humour. They respond to these contemporary issues by using visual art as a tool for experimentation and research, creating poetic videos, photographs, collages, sculptures and installations. Allora & Calzadilla often include performative elements in their works, soliciting public interaction and participation.

FACTS

- Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla have collaborated as an artist duo for more than 20 years.
- Their work is both playful and critical, and tests ideas such as authorship, nationality, borders and democracy.
- For Project 26, Allora and Calzadilla presented one of their most celebrated works *Stop, Repair, Prepare: Variations on 'Ode to Joy' for a prepared piano* in the Queens Hall, the grand space of the original State Library of Victoria on Swanston Street.
- The composition performed was the 4th movement of Beethoven's famous 9th Symphony, known as 'Ode to Joy' and widely understood as a hymn to humanity and fraternity.
- The term 'prepared piano' was coined by experimental composer John Cage, who was among the first to make adjustments to a piano, using various implements to alter the sound. Some prepared pianos involve additional noises, for example the bell or padded hammer that the player could sound using a foot pedal.
- Allora and Calzadilla cut a hole into the centre of a Bechstein piano, slicing through two octaves of strings. These notes became inaudible, apart from the dull clack of the impotent keys being struck.
- The piano was set on wheels to allow the performer to propel it around the performance space in a uniquely choreographed series of movements.
- The piece was performed hourly for 16 minutes with pianists stepping under and into the piano and reaching over the top to play.
- *Stop, Repair, Prepare* created a unique relationship between the sculpture, the piano player and the piece of music.

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

For the 26th Kaldor Public Art Project in Australia, internationally renowned artist duo Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla presented the celebrated project *Stop, Repair, Prepare: Variations on 'Ode to Joy' for a Prepared Piano* in the State Library of Victoria's Cowen Gallery. This project combined sound, performance and sculpture in a captivating new experience for audiences.

Engaging, poetic and athletic, *Stop, Repair, Prepare* created a unique relationship between the sculpture, the piano player and the piece of music. The artists cut a large hole from the centre of a Bechstein grand piano and made adjustments to the pedals, to allow the pianist to enter the piano and play it from within, wheeling it across the floor as they walked. Upside-down, their contorted and unwieldy performance became almost a gymnastic feat.

A meditation on art, idealism and power, the work was centred on a performance of the 4th movement of Beethoven's famous 9th Symphony, known as 'Ode to Joy' and widely understood as a hymn to humanity and fraternity. This ever-popular piece of classical music has been co-opted throughout its history by proponents of diverse and conflicting politics and ideologies – from nationalists to dictators and demagogues, until its more recent adoption as the official anthem of the European Union in 1985. In Allora and Calzadilla's variation, the work is recognisable but incomplete, as the cut renders two octaves of the piano inoperable and the missing keys create only a hollow resonance.

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