

# 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.
- 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".
- 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 their project in Melbourne, internationally recognised artist duo Allora & Calzadilla presented *Stop, Repair, Prepare: Variations on "Ode to Joy" for a Prepared Piano*, a captivating mix of sound, performance and sculpture, at the State Library of Victoria's Cowen Gallery.

Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla began collaborating while studying in Florence, Italy, in 1995. They have since exhibited around the world, including at documenta 13 in 2012, and representing the US at the 54th Venice Biennale in 2011. Spanning video, performance, sound, installation and social intervention, their work is playful and critical, testing ideas such as authorship, nationality, borders and democracy.

First exhibited at Munich's Haus der Kunst in 2008, *Stop, Repair, Prepare* forges a new relationship between sculpture, performance and music. Drawing on the influence of John Cage's "prepared pianos", Allora & Calzadilla cut a large hole in the centre of a Bechstein grand piano, allowing a pianist to enter and play from within, while wheeling the piano across the floor.

At the State Library of Victoria, the gruelling performance took place every hour, requiring multiple classically trained pianists, each with their own style and specially choreographed path. Upside down, their contorted playing became as much gymnastic feat as musical performance, as they played the fourth movement of Beethoven's 9th Symphony, famously known as "Ode to Joy".

Widely considered a hymn to humanity and fraternity, "Ode to Joy" has been co-opted throughout history by proponents of differing politics and ideologies. It was played on a Bechstein grand piano during Adolf Hitler's inauguration of the Haus der Kunst in 1937, and adopted as official anthem of the European Union in 1985. In Allora & Calzadilla's variation, the music is recognisable but incomplete, the cut rendering two octaves of the piano inoperable, creating a dull echo.

The New York Times critic Roberta Smith found that the work "destabilises all kinds of conventions, expectations and relationships. The music is often muffled and fragmented, the players prone to error... Precariousness ensues; things teeter on the brink of disintegration".

Kaldor Public Art Project 27: Allora & Calzadilla, *Stop, Repair, Prepare: Variations on 'Ode to Joy' for a Prepared Piano*, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne, 16 November - 6 December 2012

Photo: Andrew Curtis



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