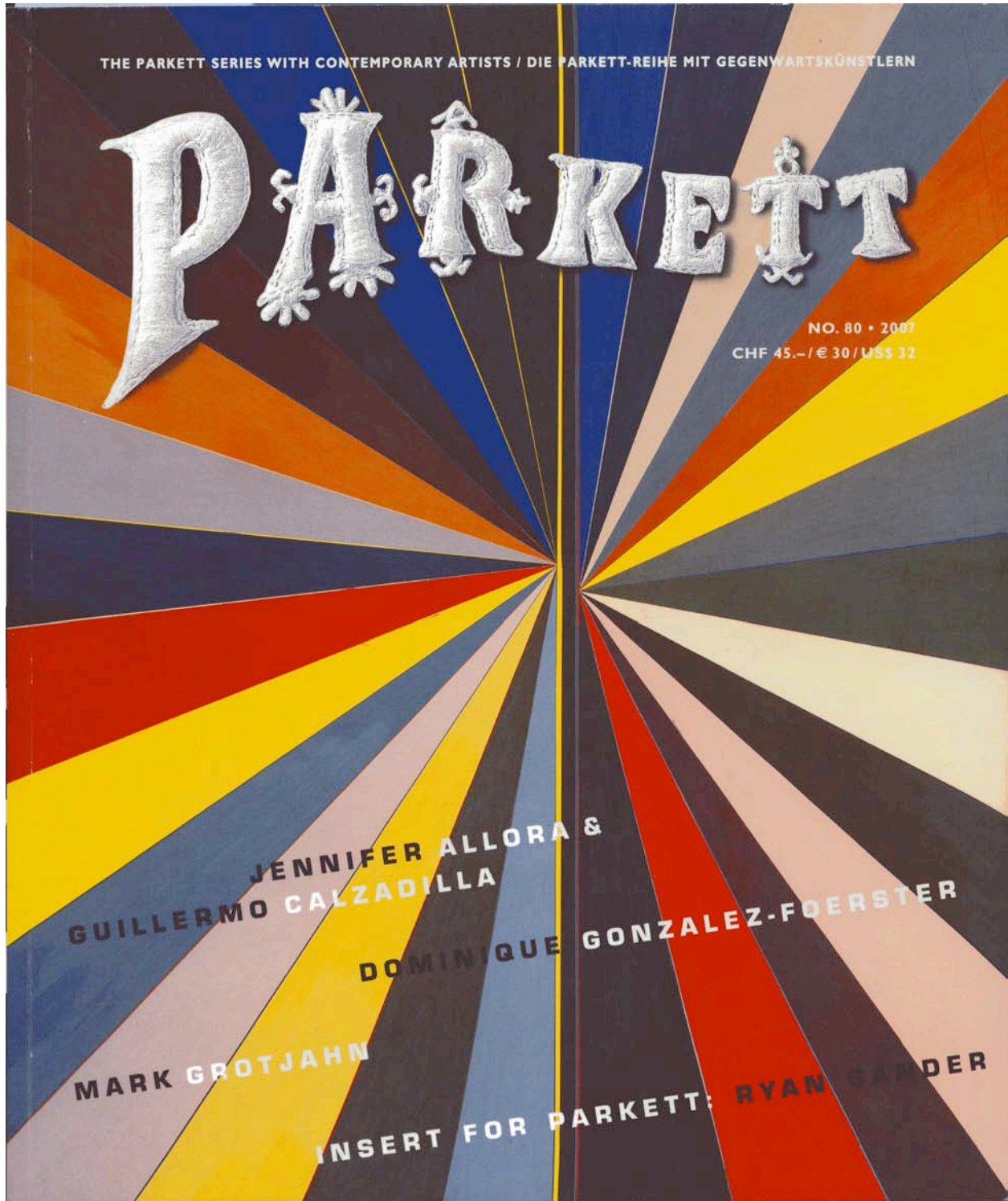


# GLADSTONE GALLERY

Falguieres, Patricia, "Archipelago," Parkett No 80, 2007



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## Jennifer Allora & Guillermo Calzadilla

Jennifer Allora, born 1974 in Philadelphia, and Guillermo Calzadilla,  
born 1972 in Havana, live and work in Puerto Rico.

Jennifer Allora, geboren 1974 in Philadelphia, und Guillermo Calzadilla,  
geboren 1972 in Havanna, leben und arbeiten in Puerto Rico.

## Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster

Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, born 1965 in Strasbourg,  
France, lives and works in Paris and Rio de Janeiro.

Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, geboren 1965 in Strassburg,  
lebt und arbeitet in Paris und Rio de Janeiro.

## Mark Grotjahn

Mark Grotjahn, born 1968 in Pasadena, California,  
lives and works in Los Angeles.

Mark Grotjahn, geboren 1968 in Pasadena, Kalifornien,  
lebt und arbeitet in Los Angeles.



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Allora & Calzadilla

# ARCHIPELAGO

PATRICIA FALGUIÈRES

*One ventures from home on the thread of a tune.<sup>1)</sup>*

It would seem that there are (at least) two ways of approaching the work of Allora and Calzadilla. Via the island where the two artists spend most of their time—one of those “enchanted isles” located less in the Caribbean than on the outskirts of New York: Puerto Rico. Or via the itineraries that have taken them from Peru to China, from Boston to Paris, following the thread of the “art of opportunities” that is now the regime of artists with international reputations. But this opposition is deceptive, first of all because it opposes a “home” to an “elsewhere,” a “given” or a “particular” to a “foreign.” For, however far back their respective relations to the island may go, it does not function in their work as an “origin”; rather, they have constructed it. To do so, they broke off a bit, a ready-made parcel isolated by American imperial history, a few cable lengths away from Puerto Rico, and identified by a long legal dispute between the Navy and a population of despoiled fishermen: the military base of Vieques.

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RETURNING A SOUND (2004) traces out this territory—that is to say, it invents a map, not land, but an artifact (the territory does not pre-exist its qualifying mark; it is the mark that makes the territory). “Home turf” does not pre-exist; first you must trace a circle, just as a child walking in the dark makes his or her own Ariadne’s thread by whistling. On his moped, Homar (the young fisherman whose beauty gathers about itself the heroic beauties of Eisenstein’s *Que viva Mexico*) completes the triumphal circuit that acclaims the fishermen’s victory over the Administration and their re-conquest of the island. But the sound that gives the triumph substance (the triumphant expressiveness of brass) is overlaid with a pattern that is very different from the familiar ribbon of the road, a grotesque and vaguely obscene hiccupping noise,<sup>2)</sup> jumping and jolting to the jerky rhythm of the revving and accelerating, conveyed through the exhaust pipe to which it is attached. The sound is entrusted with what Deleuze called the “line of flight” that makes the refrain (*ritornelle*): this “marking out of a home space” is, at the same time, an invitation to leave it, to expose oneself to the great wide world by paying out the thread of an uncertain itinerary.

What, for Allora and Calzadilla, is the “local”? It is a place that offers a grip. So many activists have readily cast themselves in the role of teacher or missionary, revealing, on-site, the local variant of a universal

ALLORA & CALZADILLA, LAND MARK (FOOT PRINTS), 2002, color photographs, 20 x 24" each / LAND-ZEICHEN (FUSSABDRÜCKE), Farbphotographien, je 50,8 x 61 cm. Imprints of soles, each with different treads that demonstrators fixed to their shoes. / Abdrücke von Sohlen, die Demonstranten an ihren Schuhen befestigten (COURTESY ALL PHOTOS, UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED; ALLORA & CALZADILLA)

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*Allora & Calzadilla*



*ALLORA & CALZADILLA, RETURNING A SOUND, 2004, 1-channel video with sound, 5'42" /  
EINEN TON ZURÜCKGEBEN / 1-Kanal-Video mit Ton.*

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*Allora & Calzadilla*



*ALLORA & CALZADILLA, GROWTH, 2006, grafted cactuses, dimensions variable / WACHSTUM, gepfropfte Kakteen, Masse variabel.*



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form of alienation (the local then becomes "the case"). In contrast, Allora and Calzadilla approach local struggles as specific, concrete situations from which they can learn; investigation, which is the specifically human modality of knowing, has become a moment in the work of art.<sup>3)</sup> What is at stake here is not mobilization or consciousness raising. (The fishermen did not wait for the artists to come along to be active, and Puerto Rico has a rich tradition of territorial claims, which has even extended to the American continent.)<sup>4)</sup> To borrow the felicitous formula used by Isabelle Stengers and Philippe Pignarre in their analysis of the new modalities of political action following the 1999 G-8 Summit in Seattle, it is not a matter of convincing the misled but of finding interested partners, of finding a grip, a handle.<sup>5)</sup> The "problem" (here, the "Vieques problem") is not so much what needs to be solved as what unites. The common challenge is to introduce a learning trajectory that actually engenders the local. In other words, the local is not opposed to the universal but instead offers a handle on a collective and individual experiment; it is both a risk and a resource—a *milieu*. Allora and Calzadilla "think through the milieu"; their relation to it is at once experimental and speculative.

LAND MARK (FOOT PRINTS), 2001–2002, demonstrates this operation of capturing or gripping involved in the learning trajectory that Allora and Calzadilla apply to the Vieques enclave. LAND MARK does not represent an event; it is the event or the occasion, the means of the event—the event *par excellence* that is the demonstration. It lasts no longer than it takes for the traces left by the demonstrators on the sand to be erased. It is the demonstration as event that signifies. The artists' intervention is a technical arrangement: the making of soles, each with different treads that demonstrators can fix to their shoes. The artists do not mobilize, they underscore the divergences within a crowd that has gathered temporarily, and thereby become a force: "There were evangelical groups, representatives of various political parties, conservationists, students, people whose families once lived in this area, there were members of the Ricky Martin fan club who had learned about the struggle through their local web-

site, there were anti-military activists, environmentalists of all sorts, and even a few celebrities, such as Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and Jesse Jackson from North America, just to name a few. We wanted to find a way to convey the diversity of this group in the photographs, as shown through the actual marks being produced in the sand—going in so many different directions, canceling each other out as one footprint replaced the one that was made before."<sup>6)</sup>

The artists' job is to construct, for all these singularities, the plane of a shared experience: alone together. In other words, they must offer each person a handle on the event: the event is grasped from the standpoint of each person's experience of it, never in an overview that might claim to tell the truth or expose their illusions. Nothing is guaranteed, neither the future of resettlement nor of re-appropriation. On the contrary, RETURNING A SOUND (2004) registers the limits of the restitution of Vieques—it observes the devastation of this enclave that must now be resettled. Nothing has been restored, reclaimed; one can only walk between and around the bomb craters and rocket silos, in the interstices of a contaminated environment. Allora and Calzadilla have learned from Matta-Clark (the Matta-Clark of the REALITY PROPERTIES: FAKE ESTATES, 1973–1974, who bought up useless slivers of land between New York buildings, on which nothing could be built) the art of approaching their material as a milieu (medium) for interstices, fault lines, and fissures. This, according to Isabelle Stengers, illustrates the meaning of Deleuze's expression, "penser par le milieu" (thinking through the milieu, but also the middle): "the interstice is defined neither against nor in relation to the block to which it nevertheless belongs. It creates its own dimensions out of the concrete processes that give it its substance and its scope, its import and that for which it is important."<sup>7)</sup> To make an interstice or make the interstice work, to "think through the milieu," is to be capable of following and creating the dimensions required by a "situation."

The word "situation" is often misunderstood. A kind of cultivated reflex associates it with Situationism (which label is itself dubious, as a close reading of Guy Debord shows). But Allora and Calzadilla do



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not cast themselves in the role of those who have understood, of those who pit themselves against the world by identifying with the theory of demystification. They do not distinguish between two worlds, the world of reality and the world of experience (with the former pre-existing the latter, and the latter acquiring legitimacy insofar as it verifies the ineluctability of the former). In the work of Allora and Calzadilla we recognize the radical empiricism of a very different philosophical tradition: there is nothing beyond experience, beyond the never-ending process of learning about the world as one experiences it—a philosophical phylum for which the empirical is the transcendental, and which obliges us to do away with the categories form/matter, truth/appearance, and substance/attributes. As William James puts it, "What really exists is not things made, but things in the making."<sup>8</sup> It is this process which, after the event, distributes functions and roles and names like so many local accents of the experience, like so many coordinates or positional names that make it possible to go from the initial "this" to the "here," "there," "now," "I," "we"...<sup>9</sup>

One single plane of experience, then, is a distribution of events or "relations that are now disjunctive, now conjunctive, following the series of shocks that we experience,"<sup>10</sup> the "patches" and "bits" from which the world is, according to James, interwoven—Deleuze's *archipelago*: "not even a puzzle, whose pieces when fitted together would constitute a whole, but rather a wall of loose, uncemented stones, where every element has a value in itself but also in relation to others: isolated and floating regions, islands and straits, immobile points and sinuous lines, for Truth always has 'jagged edges.' Not a skull, but a cordon of vertebrae, [...] a patchwork."<sup>11</sup> The material is no longer the substance of forms, categories, and representations; it is receptive to relations that are now conjunctive, now disjunctive, and serialized by function. Take for example the series "campfire—piglet—wheel hub—car engine" in *SWEAT GLANDS, SWEAT LANDS* (2006), in which humor activates the sequence, or *RUIN* (2006), a field of sculptures that in some ways evokes the Latin-American constructivism of the 1960s—a panoply of negatives, of industrial metal shapes, articulated and invested with

meaning by the addition of hinges, an endless reworking, folding, and unfolding, a perpetual relaunching of disjunctions and conjunctions. *PUERTO RICAN LIGHT* (2003) makes this collapse of representation explicit by literally connecting the splendid metaphor of a Dan Flavin *neon* to a battery periodically recharged in Puerto Rico. *10 MINUTES TRANSMISSION* (2003) exemplifies this process of directly linking the material to forces of another kind, thereby making them visible. Here we can recognize Paul Klee's "pure and simple line accompanied by the idea of the object," which is enough to make visible or capture the Cosmos. In the fine metal mesh woven by Allora and Calzadilla, a kind of "perspective vision of the idea" serves as an antenna and captures the ten minutes of radio transmissions sent out each time the international space station orbits the earth.<sup>12</sup>

In this work, relations are always external to their terms, just as the plant clippings are alien to the plans of *GROWTH* (2006) and the tropical fan is to the palm trunk in *CYCLONIC PALM TREE* (2004); the conjunctions make the work. Such is the condition for the constitution of a plane of immanence: "If we make relations dependent on a subject or a substance, then this immanence is lost, and so is the very nature of the relation: it becomes static and the model of eternal truths once again constitutes the horizon against which they will be thought."<sup>13</sup> To let relations develop in every direction and hence enter the field of multiple connections implies a play on perspective, a situation that is pioneered in the 1998 work *SEEING OTHERWISE*, which, literally and by artifice (digital trickery), decentralizes the subjective vanishing point on the marine horizon. Here Allora and Calzadilla show us the Leibnizian *monad*, the singular point of view that will never coincide with my own—I, who am watching the young man from behind, absorbed as he is in the contemplation of the universe. This non-coincidence of viewpoints, which undermines all theories of communication, recurs in the overturned table of *UNDER DISCUSSION* (2005), Richard Rorty's famous "negotiating table," (the ready-made "plane" or "level" that has the power to make everyone agree to congregate around an issue). The victorious young fisherman



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turns it upside down and adds an outboard motor, converting it into a boat with which to explore the Vieques enclave. The protagonists of Allora and Calzadilla's videos have grace, a grace and a joyousness that make them brothers to Russian filmmaker Boris Barnet's heroes, the amorous fisherman in *By the Bluest of Seas* (1936—but without the sentimentality of consensus or fusion. On the contrary, there is an attentiveness to the sound made by each person, to that originality which is the condition—for Melville, for Lawrence, and for Deleuze—of fraternity: "a sound that each one produces, like a ritornello at the limits of language, but that it produces only when it takes to the open road (or to the open sea) with its body, when it leads its life without seeking salvation, when it embarks upon its incarnate voyage, without any particular aim, and then encounters other voyagers, whom it recognizes by their sound." This is the community of explorers, of the brothers of the archipelago.<sup>14</sup>)

(Translation: Charles Penwarden)

1) Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Continuum Press, 2004), p. 344.

2) The French word "pétarader" usually employed to describe the racket of mopeds with neutralized silencers neatly underscores

the incongruity of the association of exhaust pipe and trumpet.

3) See the Vieques dossier put together by C & A in: *Land Mark* (Paris: Palais de Tokyo, 2006).

4) See the Young Lords movements in Chicago and New York during the 1960s, which have become a model of contemporary urban ecology movements. Cf. Matthew Gandy, *Concrete and Clay. Reworking Nature in New York City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002); Benedikte Zitouni, "Ecologie urbaine: mode d'existence? mode de revendication?" in: *Cosmopolitiques*, no. 7 (August 2004).

5) Philippe Pignarre and Isabelle Stengers, *La sorcellerie capitaliste. Pratiques de désenvoûtement* (Paris: La Découverte, 2006).

6) *Land Mark* (see note 3), p. 56.

7) *La sorcellerie capitaliste* (see note 5), p. 149.

8) William James, *A Pluralistic Universe* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2005), p. 263.

9) See the excellent commentary by David Lapoujade, in *William James. Empirisme et pragmatisme* (Paris: Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond, 2007).

10) *Ibid.*, p. 79.

11) Gilles Deleuze, "Bartleby; or, The Formula" in: *Essays Critical or Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 86.

12) On the cosmic development of modern art as the unlimited expansion of the technological imagination, see *Mille plateaux*, p. 344.

13) David Lapoujade (see note 9), p. 76.

14) Gilles Deleuze, "Bartleby; or, The Formula" (see note 11), p. 87.

ALLORA & CALZADILLA, LAND MARK,  
1999–2003, felt, 48 x 95' / LAND-ZEICHEN,  
Fitz, 14,6 m x 29 m.

