

# GLADSTONE GALLERY

Chelsea Beck, "Review: Allora & Calzadilla at Redcat," *Artinfo*, July 27, 2014.

## Review: Allora & Calzadilla at Redcat

by Chelsea Beck, Modern Painters



A still from Jennifer Allora & Guillermo Calzadilla's *Apotomē*, 2013.

(Photo by Marc Damage)

Immediately entrancing, Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla's Los Angeles [debut at Redcat](#) (through August 24) is an excellent introduction to the research-driven duo's transdisciplinary alchemy. Sound is the primary component in their video *Apotomē*, 2013, which is generated by the vocalist Tim Storms, whose otherworldly subsonic singing sounds like frog-throated chanting to human ears. The camera pans and cuts, slow and steady, as the video insistently yet poetically prods us to wonder what this performance may sound like—if anything—to other beings.

Looking and acting like a mixture of *The X-Men*'s Professor X and magician David Blaine, Storms meanders around a storage facility ostensibly communicating through song with hundreds of taxidermied animals, specifically the bones of a pair of Indian elephants once on view at the Natural History Museum in Paris in 1798. Only mammals as large as elephants can hear the extremely low-octave notes Storms has the rare ability to hit. Mere humans hear only a fraction of the sound he emits. The work cultivates a heightened awareness of our human

# GLADSTONE GALLERY

Chelsea Beck, "Review: Allora & Calzadilla at Redcat," *Artinfo*, July 27, 2014.

limitations not only sensorially, but mortally, physically, and creatively. Beyond an attempt at interspecies communication, Storms's performance is also something of a séance. When the camera scans the audience of long-dead exotic stuffed animals for a reaction, their faces and remains frozen, carefully catalogued and arranged, the subsonic threshold becomes a metaphor for one of life's biggest mysteries — death.

This project is based on Allora & Calzadilla's research into the pair of captive elephants originally stolen from the menagerie of Holland's Head of State and brought to France at the turn of the 19th century. In keeping with Enlightened times, the elephants were treated to a concert staged by a group of musicians who were curious to see what kind of reaction human music might illicit from the animals. Two-hundred and fifteen years later, Storms subsonically performs the songs from the original concert in an attempt to reach the elephants' bones. Engaging enough as a re-enactment of the concert, the locus of action of Storms's performance actually happens on a level that is physically inaccessible to us, though we are aware of it intellectually. This awareness of a present yet unbridgeable distance is thrilling, however. Though we cannot hear the notes, we wonder how they affect our bodies and minds. What else is occurring that we may not sense?

Allora and Calzadilla's practice has often grafted disparate fields of study to illuminate an otherwise hidden or paradoxical paradigm. While their approach can sometimes feel stiff or didactic, *Apotome* maintains its autonomy from the history it references and the experts who the artists consulted. It weaves a mysteriously personal and sensitive web that viewers are drawn into, a vivid meditation on what we understand to exist but cannot rationalize with our senses, as well as our implicit connection to a history that often, through its ideologically narrow scope, mistakes might for right.

*A version of this article appears in the October 2014 issue of Modern Painters magazine.*

# GLADSTONE GALLERY

Chelsea Beck, "Review: Allora & Calzadilla at Redcat," *Artinfo*, July 27, 2014.



Allora and Calzadilla, *Apotomè*, 2013.  
Performance view at REDCAT, Los Angeles, 2014.



Jennifer Allora & Guillermo Calzadilla

*Apotomè*, 2013 (Still)

Super 16 mm film transferred to HD,  
sound, 23:05 min.

Exhibition view at Chantal Crousel  
Gallery, Paris, 2013



Jennifer Allora & Guillermo Calzadilla

*Apotomè*, 2013 (Still)

Super 16 mm film transferred to HD,  
sound, 23:05 min.

Exhibition view at Chantal Crousel  
Gallery, Paris, 2013



# GLADSTONE GALLERY

Chelsea Beck, "Review: Allora & Calzadilla at Redcat," *Artinfo*, July 27, 2014.



Allora and Calzadilla, *Apotomē*, 2013.  
Performance view at REDCAT, Los Angeles, 2014.



Jennifer Allora & Guillermo Calzadilla

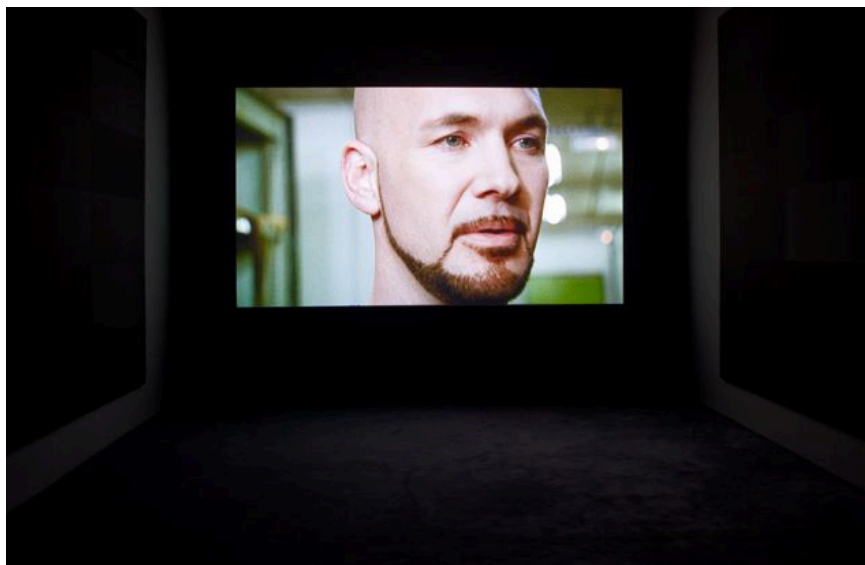
*Apotomē*, 2013 (Still)

Super 16 mm film transferred to HD,  
sound, 23:05 min.

Exhibition view at Chantal Crousel  
Gallery, Paris, 2013

# GLADSTONE GALLERY

Chelsea Beck, "Review: Allora & Calzadilla at Redcat," *Artinfo*, July 27, 2014.



Jennifer Allora & Guillermo Calzadilla

*Apotomè*, 2013 (Still)

Super 16 mm film transferred to HD,  
sound, 23:05 min.

Exhibition view at Chantal Crousel  
Gallery, Paris, 2013