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ARTslant



Fault Lines

Allora & Calzadilla

Gladstone Gallery - 24 St.

515 W. 24th St., New York, NY 10011

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Confrontational Aesthetics: Choirboys Sing Insults in Allora & Calzadilla Performance by Art Vidrine

The Earth breaks along fault lines. Mountains are pushed up; buildings crumble. Active faults are sites of extreme subterranean tension that operate on an unpredictable timeline with potentially devastating environmental, economic, and social aftershocks. To live near a fault is to live with unending uncertainty. Entire cities and nations have suffered when the earth shudders along her lines.

All of this would seem like ample fodder for the socially and politically minded artists Allora & Calzadilla until one sees (and hears) their current exhibition, *Fault Lines*, which has little to do with the upheaval to the strata quo. Instead, the artists rely on their trademarks of subtlety, humor, and unexpected associations to communicate an apt and nuanced metaphor for our current political culture.

At first glance, *Fault Lines* seems quite simple. Two plain-clothes choirboys use ten stone sculptures culled from fault lines around the world to perform a score written by Guarionex Morales-Matos. The lyrics are comprised of insults that Allora & Calzadilla mined from literary and political history. Performances

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occur every hour, last about thirteen minutes, and entail a choreographed interaction between the daily rotating performers that they developed in rehearsals with the artists.



Allora & Calzadilla, *Fault Lines*, 2013, Ten metamorphic and igneous rocks; Performance by Carlos and Jorge Tapia, from the Transfiguration Boychoir, Dimensions variable, Installation view: Gladstone Gallery, New York; Photo: David Regen.

One may wonder what fault lines, choirboys, and insults have in common. Firstly, each of the uniquely patterned and colorful stone sculptures formally resembles a two-tier choral riser. Modeled after either a normal fault or a reverse fault, these partially rough but mostly polished sculptures become platforms on which the performers sit, stand, ascend, and level insults at each other. Part Minimalism, part Earthwork, they look a little like what Robert Smithson and Carl Andre might have produced if they had worked collaboratively in the late 60s. Without an apparent conceptual reason for their particular arrangement,

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the sculptures are placed spaciouly throughout the gallery, allowing ample room for the performers to move among them and change platforms multiple times in a performance. Members of the audience likewise must alter their geography in order to follow the singers.

The openness of the work differs drastically from the enclosure Allora & Calzadilla built for *Sediments, Sentiments (Figures of Speech)* (2007), inside of which operatic performers sang fragments from political speeches. In contrast to that work, here the young singers' voices fluctuate in their ability to maintain notes consistently, perhaps an effect of voice break—a kind of vocal equivalent to planar destabilization. Though the music is beautifully ethereal at times, it is also a little frustrating. The polyphonic delivery often overpowers the lyrics and prevents the two voices from coming together in harmonic unison for extended phrases. Because of this, only a literal linguistic association emerges in the work between the *lines* of a fault, the *lines* of a musical score, and the *lines* of performed speech.

The most opaque connection may be gleaned from the etymology of “insult,” which comes from the Latin word “insultare” (to assail, to jump or leap upon). The original use of the word appropriately relates to the violent nature of plate tectonic shifting that occurs along faults, while the modern use of the word to signify an abusive remark or action describes the humorous slander each performer is hurling at the other. What is significant about this is how these associations apply to current politics.



Allora & Calzadilla, *Fault Lines*, 2013, Ten metamorphic and igneous rocks; Performance by Brogan Donston and Charles Rosario, from the Transfiguration Boychoir, Dimensions variable, Installation view: Gladstone Gallery, New York; Photo: David Regen.

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It is not hard to imagine the American political landscape as a fault with two opposing (ideological) forces clashing and creating destructive divisions in their wake. Politicians, pundits, and ordinary citizens all chime in, faulting the other party for the world's problems and heaving insults along the way. This collective cacophony drowns out any singular voice, much the same way the choirboys' singing tends to overwhelm the legibility of the lyrics. The performative power of the utterance is diminished. And this is not an accident in *Fault Lines*.

In fact, the work metaphorically points to the bloated, divisive nature of current politics and seeks to render it harmless and humorous. Like the stone sculptures, the damage is smoothed over, polished, and domesticated. When legible, the insults are silly and kid-friendly. The work functions like a mirror to political bickering: grown ups acting like children, children acting like grown ups.

—Art Vidrine

(Image at top: Allora & Calzadilla, *Fault Lines*, 2013, Ten metamorphic and igneous rocks; performance by Carlos and Jorge Tapia, from the Transfiguration Boychoir, Dimensions variable, Installation view: Gladstone Gallery, New York; Photo: David Regen.)

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