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Coup for Kaldor in moving ode to art

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The Haus der Kunst in Munich, New York's Museum of Modern Art and now the State Library of Victoria: John Kaldor has snaffled a key work by the latest US art world stars Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla to show in Melbourne next month.

It's quite a coup. Allora & Calzadilla are fresh from last year's Venice Biennale, where they represented the US, and the almost as prestigious dOCUMENTA (13), which closed last month in Kassel, Germany. The work - *Stop, Repair, Prepare: Variations on "Ode to Joy" for a Prepared Piano* - is not only the one that made their names but already belongs to MoMA.

Half sculpture, half performance, the piece involves a pianist playing, inverted and backwards, the last movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, one of the most famous – and co-opted – passages of music (it is also the anthem of the European Union). The task is performed from within a 1920s Bechstein Grand with a hole cut through it as it rolls around on wheels.

The piece debuted in Munich in 2008 in Munich's Haus der Kunst hall, which Hitler inaugurated with *Ode To Joy* played on a Bechstein, and which later hosted the notorious *Great German Art Exhibition*.

"We are very selective," Allora said of the work's Melbourne appearance from November 16 to December 6, only its fifth outing, when it will be played by students of the Victorian College of the Arts. "It's important to show the work in the right context."

For the artists, both born in the early 1970s, the drawcard was Kaldor and his art projects, from Christo and Jeanne-Claude's 1969 wrapping of Sydney's Little Bay on.

"We didn't know of John, but even from the other end of the world we certainly knew of some of his incredible projects," Allora says.

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"It's really impressive what he has done in the last 40 years. So when he contacted us three years ago we decided this would be a really wonderful introduction of our work to a new context."

As usual, Kaldor's interest in the artists stemmed from collecting their work. He approached them before both Venice and dOCUMENTA, then had to wait as they became increasingly famous.

Kaldor says he was drawn to *Stop* because it conflated visual art and performance, "which is one of the strongest trends today. Guillermo says that an art work isn't finished until the public participates, which typifies a real paradigm shift in art."

It was only when the work left Munich, and the context that had inspired the choice of music (the artists had been toying with the piano idea for ages, Munich gave them the all-important anthem) that it actually began to move. At the Gladstone Gallery in New York, the piano was the whole show, creeping around the six white-cube rooms as the audience "followed it like a game of hide-and-seek, or cat-and-mouse," remembers Allora.

It proved an instant hit. By the time it hit MoMA in late 2010, the *New York Times* art critic Roberta Smith was calling it a "full-fledged, crowd-pleasing museum masterpiece ... discernibly radical yet also resonating with the past".

As for what MoMA got for its money: "They bought a piano with a hole in the middle of it and the rights to present this piece in the future, along with the Liszt transcription of [the last movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony] that we used as the template," Allora says. "It was a really brave purchase because it's tricky; this new genre of performance-based art is still deciding itself."

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