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## GREATER NEW YORK

## The Art of Trash Talking Comes Alive at Chelsea Gallery

By CORINNE RAMEY

In a Chelsea gallery, Evan Corn and Douglas Butler were climbing on the art, pointing fingers and swapping insults.

"I'll be sure to use small words so that you'll be sure to understand, you warthog-faced buffoon," Douglas, a 12-year-old in cargo shorts, sang sweetly.

Evan, a 13-year-old wearing a yellow polo shirt, crossed his arms and scowled.

"Talking to you makes me think that man's descent from the apes hasn't even started yet," he replied.

Their words weren't those of just two boys acting out or showing off. Douglas and Evan were rehearsing a new performance-art piece at the Gladstone Gallery by the Puerto Rico-based artists Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla, known professionally as Allora & Calzadilla.

The exhibition, titled "Fault Lines," features pairs of young

singers from the American Boychoir School and the Transfiguration Boychoir who climb on rock sculptures while singing insults from sources ranging from Cicero to Shakespeare to Mark Twain.

"Two things we find interesting are geology and emotions: something that takes millions of years to form, and something that can spark within a second," said Mr. Calzadilla, 43 years old, perched on one of the 500- to 2,000-pound rocks scattered around the gallery. "When we found the word 'fault lines,' it was a moment when we could link geology with speaking."

The pair, who are life partners as well as professional ones, began working on the piece last year. "We became interested in the short-term and ephemeral range of the boy soprano as this incredible, precious sound that is constrained by time," said Ms. Allora, 40.

In the piece, the boys, who range in age from 9 to 14, adopt

the universal body language of strife—crossed arms, pointed fingers, rolling eyes—while singing angelically. While the work uses composed music, by the Puerto Rican composer Guarionex Morales-Matos, the choreography is largely improvisational.

The artists are known for their unusual palette. Their 2008 piece "Stop, Repair, Prepare: Variations on Ode to Joy for a Prepared Piano, No. 1," which was shown at the Museum of Modern Art, featured a grand piano with a hole cut in the middle. A pianist stood in the hole, pushing the instrument around the room while playing Beethoven's famous melody.

In 2011, Ms. Allora and Mr. Calzadilla represented the U.S. at the Venice Biennial. As in "Fault Lines," their works tend to include unlikely juxtapositions, and many use people who are respected in their fields. One Biennial piece included the Olympic

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Douglas Butler and Evan Corn rehearse 'Fault Lines' by Allora & Calzadilla with another boy at Gladstone Gallery in Chelsea.

Cassandra Grubbs for The Wall Street Journal

## A Chorus Of Insults

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decathlete Dan O'Brien, on a treadmill, atop a military tank.

One afternoon at the Gladstone Gallery, pairs of boys took turns rehearsing the 10- to 15-minute piece, which they will perform on a rotating schedule during the gallery's afternoon open hours. The artists offered feedback, gently critiquing everything from rock-climbing technique to body language.

"Listen to all of your shoes' acoustics," Ms. Allora instructed a rapt audience of wide-eyed boys, eliciting a sudden chorus of sneaker squawks. "If they squeak, bring in a different pair of shoes tomorrow."

After the rehearsal, Douglas—his favorite insult: "You must be the reason for contraception"—and Evan—"Are you in great physical pain, or is that your thinking expression?"—pondered their role in modern art.

"It's fun," said Evan. "All the insults and how mean they are and how we get to interact."

"I enjoy the acting part of it," said Douglas, since choral performances at school are generally a stationary affair.

How will the audience respond?

"Definitely laughs," said Evan. "And in their mind, surprise. They wouldn't expect 12- and 13-year-olds to use these insults."

*"Fault Lines" runs through Oct. 11 at the Gladstone Gallery, 515 W. 24th St.; 212-206-9300; gladstonegallery.com.*