

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Droitcour, Brian, "Critics' Picks: Allora & Calzadilla", Arforum. Com

Allora & Calzadilla

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515 West 24th Street

January 23–February 21



Allora & Calzadilla, Stop, Repair, Prepare, 2008. Installation view, 2009.

Beethoven's Ninth Symphony has a lot of baggage. The monument that discouraged lesser composers from writing more than eight symphonies has been, to name a few examples, the anthem of Rhodesia under white-supremacist dictator Ian Smith and a vehicle of dramatic tension in violent films like *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) and *Die Hard* (1988). Allora & Calzadilla's *Stop, Repair, Prepare: Variations on Ode to Joy for a Prepared Piano, 2008*, also recognizes the music's pomp and power but confronts those qualities rather than exploiting them. *Stop, Repair, Prepare* is a live performance on a piano with a hole cut through its harp and lid. The pianist stands inside the hole, working the instrument's strings and hitting its keys backward, with no score to guide him besides instructions to push the piano through the gallery while playing and to take the "Ode to Joy" as a basis for improvisation. Allora & Calzadilla's description of their work as "variations" could be a nod to Beethoven's own use of the technique to introduce ambiguity; after six serious iterations, the "Ode to Joy" mutates into a syncopated Turkish march, a popular, jaunty style that undermines the earnest outpouring of ecstasy preceding and following it. *Stop, Repair, Prepare* extends the principle of variation as subversion beyond rhythm and mood to the performer's relationships to composer, audience, and instrument.

At its premiere at Munich's Haus der Kunst, *Stop, Repair, Prepare* was meant to resonate with the "Ode to Joy"'s past as a Third Reich favorite and its present as the European Union's anthem. But travel has not dulled the work's impact. Beethoven's music transcends specific contexts thanks to its rich history of performance and manipulation—a history to which *Stop, Repair, Prepare* promises to be an enduring contribution. — Brian Droitcour