

GLADSTONE GALLERY

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MUNICH

Allora & Calzadilla

HAUS DER KUNST/KUNSTVEREIN

Milan Kundera once paraphrased Marx: "Optimism is the opium of the people." As the twentieth century has shown us, there is a fine line between jubilation and the eruption of violence—above all when there's musical accompaniment. In Europe, no melody has been used and abused to produce a spirit of optimism more than the "Ode to Joy" from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, a favorite of both Hitler and Stalin, masters of mass seduction. Under the direction of Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla, this anthem sounded again at Munich's Haus der Kunst, which was built by the Nazis as the Haus der deutschen Kunst (House of German Art). This time no one rose in jubilation. The audience looked down, uncomfortably, as a grand piano glided through the room producing a somewhat discordant, but still recognizable, rendition of the melody. The sound came out of a round hole that had been cut in the center of the piano, just big enough for a young pianist to stand in and play the keys from the reverse side. While playing, she was pushing the enormous instrument with her frail body through the Hall of Honor of this historic building.

The performance at Haus der Kunst, *Stop, Repair, Prepare: Variations on Ode to Joy for a Prepared Piano*, 2008, was complemented by three elaborate installations at the city's Kunstverein. There, upon entering, the visitor was met with a hellish cacophony of sounds and voices that bounced off one's body like projectiles, all coming from the

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Allora & Calzadilla,
*Stop, Repair, Prepare:
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Piano*, 2008.
Performance view,
Haus der Kunst.

most elaborate of the three installations, *Clamor*, 2006: a gray, ruinlike bunker whose jutting shape evoked the ice floes painted by Caspar David Friedrich as well as Berlin's Mies van der Rohe war memorial. From this hybrid sculptural shell, one heard live trombones and trumpets echoing the music with which the Janissaries had once terrorized Vienna, the Viet Cong's hymns of resistance, the ballads of the Russian October Revolution, and "We're Not Gonna Take It" by Twisted Sister—a jumble of tunes and rhythms that sometimes intensified to ear-shattering volume.

During quieter moments, one could hear singing. This seemed distant, but actually came from *Sediments Sentiments (Figures of Speech)*, 2007, a sculptural mass of tunnel-like pipes that each held a singer within. Half-hidden and half-exposed, these men and women were sitting, squatting, or lying in symbiosis with the shapeless structure, interpreting in song various excerpts from speeches by Martin Luther King, the Dalai Lama,

George Bush, and Saddam Hussein. Reminiscent of opera, their artificial diction and force of expression became a parody of the hollow but cleverly staged verbal explosions typical of such speeches.

This cacophony was augmented by more trumpeting, which emanated from the third installation, *Wake Up*, 2007, consisting of a simple white partition from behind which emerged not only sound but light: Variations of reveille, revised and enriched with references to musical history, were linked to a lighting system, so that depending on volume and rhythm, lights went on and off as during an air raid. Quivering lights, clarions, expressive—almost screaming—women's voices, a bunker with partitions that evoked barricades, coupled with the Romanticism of heroic songs and Friedrich's ice floes—seldom in contemporary art does one encounter spaces of such intensity, spaces that thrust back into consciousness things that have been buried. This is the seductive, alarming, menacing power of sound.

—Noemi Smolik

Translated from German by Laura Hoffmann.