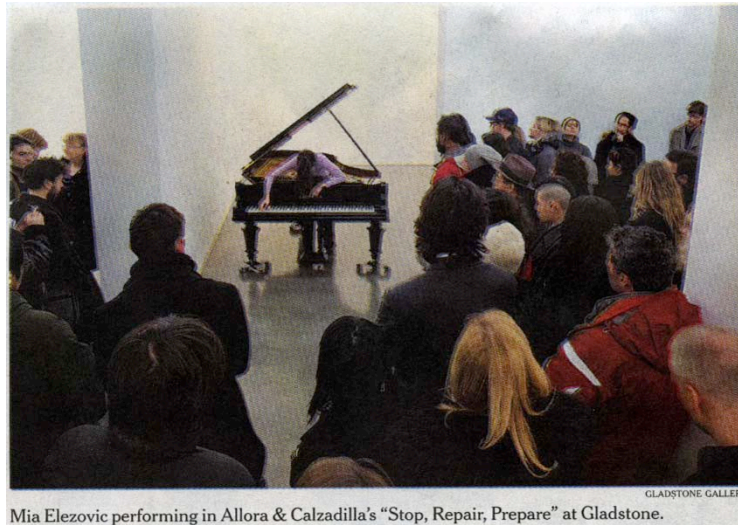


# GLADSTONE GALLERY

Cotter, Holland, "Allora & Calzadilla: Stop, Repair, Prepare", New York Times, 30 January 2009



Mia Elezovic performing in Allora & Calzadilla's "Stop, Repair, Prepare" at Gladstone.

## Allora & Calzadilla

'Stop, Repair, Prepare'

Gladstone  
515 West 24th Street, Chelsea  
Through Feb. 21

Some art moves you and some art just moves. The gallery debut of the team of Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla at Gladstone does both. There's just one piece, called "Stop, Repair, Prepare: Variations on Ode to Joy for a Prepared Piano." And it has two physical elements: a customized piano and a live musician, neither used in conventional ways.

Working with a piano specialist named Ben Stallman in Berlin, the artists reconfigured an early 20th-century Bechstein by removing a section of strings and cutting a hole through the center of the cabinet. They have asked musicians hired for the show to perform standing inside the hole, which means they have to play the keyboard upside down and backward. And while they play, they walk, propelling the instrument, set on casters, slowly through the gallery.

Six musicians rotate every hour on the hour, and they all play the same work: a piano transcription of the fourth and last movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, with the choral finale, "Ode to Joy." And this paean to universal brotherhood, well-known and much loved, has a slippery political history.

Closely associated since Beethoven's time with German nationalism, it was a Nazi party favorite; it was also conducted by Leonard Bernstein to celebrate the fall of the Berlin Wall; and it is now the (wordless) anthem of the European Union. Despite global pop status, the triumphalist mood it projects has become suspect. Stanley Kubrick used an electronic version of it in "A Clockwork Orange" as an example of beauty inciting violence.

In light of these paradoxical features, what role does a musician assume? Is he a prisoner of the music, trapped in it, the way the pianists at Gladstone are? Can he, with any credibility, be seen as emerging from its melodious center, like a god bestowing a gift? Or is he simply a worker, paid by the hour, handicapped by difficulties, doing his best to push his product along?

The same questions can be asked about art: Does it lock us up, free us or just help us slog through? There is no one right answer; in the subtle and poetic work of Ms. Allora and Mr. Calzadilla there never is. There is often, however, a kind of resistant pleasure, and joy is not too strong a word for the complex experience of hearing, for free, live but annotated Beethoven in Chelsea. The musician on my visit, incidentally, was Sun Jun; his playing was deft, his poise exemplary. His colleagues in rotation are Walter Aparicio, Terezija Cukrov, Mia Elezovic, Amir Khosrowpour and Kathy Tagg.