

and necessary for the preservation of food, especially meat. One may be reminded that more recently the importance of oil has replaced that of salt, playing a key role in the wars in Iraq and other countries of the region.

Like much of his work, Pujol himself figures in each of his four desert scenes. Naked, he lies down on the dry earth in two photographs, as if resting or deceased. In two other images his body appears tightly curled up like a fetus: he faces downward in the salt flats and upward in Judea. While the show is about loss, brokenness, and death, it is also about survival and perhaps even birth and renewal. Although Pujol's project explicitly addresses the religious ordeals of the Middle East and the United States, and thereby focuses on Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, the suggestion of Buddhism and the samsara, as I see it, are apparent as well. The ongoing, never-ending cycles of life and death, religion and war, difference and intolerance, seem destined to repeat themselves unless we overcome our ignorance and learn to work together.

The importance of collaboration is a continuing theme in Pujol's oeuvre. In the gallery's project room, Pujol included the work of three artists: Stephanie Diamond, Rosemarie Padovano, and Joy Whalen. He chose these women because they engage in

performance art and depict the female body, which Pujol felt would offset the presence of the male body in his photographs. Their work also addresses similar themes connected with religion, but to varying ends. Diamond's *Three Graces* recreates a pagan theme and refers to a spiritual practice known as the Five Rhythms. Padovano depicts a chapel-like environment in which she lies at rest, like Mary before the Assumption. Lastly, Whalen shows a corrupt baptism, although her work is more broadly related to unconscious and emotional states. While Pujol's project may bemoan, in part, the fact that the first decade of the new millennium has shown us ongoing religious strife, his work, coupled with that of his collaborators, also suggests the possibility of spiritual coexistence and peace.

Craig Houser

Allora & Calzadilla

Barbara Gladstone Gallery

Allora & Calzadilla's *Stop, Repair, Prepare* (2009) at Gladstone Gallery examines the contradictions between collective optimism and individual cynicism. A hybrid with roots in performance, intervention, fluxus, and happenings, the work focuses on the potent combination of aesthetic form, critical synthesis, and empirical experimentation. The first and only material object one sees in the gallery is a performer standing in the middle of an early 20th century Bechstein piano, playing variations of Beethoven's Fourth and Ninth Symphonies, followed by the choral finale, "Ode to Joy." Allora & Calzadilla hired various musicians who play standing, upside down, and backwards, alternating throughout the exhibition, each performance lasting for about 50 minutes. The piano was reconfigured by a specialist from Berlin, Ben Stallman, who cut a hole in the piano, removed the middle strings, and shifted the foot pedals, placing them backwards in order to be accessed by the performer from inside the piano. With the strings removed, the performer uses the disabled keys to create rhythmic percussive sounds during intervals.

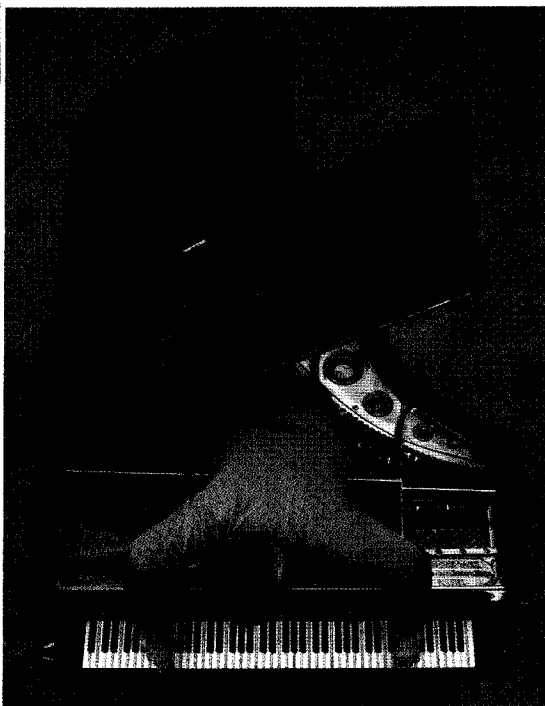
Allora & Calzadilla's emphasis on fragmentation, from the formalism of the cut-up piano to the variety of musical performances, alludes to the holes of collective nationalisms associated with various political histories. The

selection of Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* as the audio component of the piece comments on the diverse and contradictory histories associated with the anthem. Based on an ode by the German poet Friedrich Schiller, it celebrates an ideal of unity and forgiveness of all mankind. In 1938, the piece was performed as the high point of the Nazi music festival, and was later used to celebrate Hitler's birthday; in 1985, it was adopted as the official anthem of the then European Community, and was performed when the European flag was raised for the first time in front of the Berrymont building. *Ode* symbolized the fall of the Berlin Wall in Leonard Bernstein's 1989 production, and since 1993, it has served as the anthem of the European Union. In Taiwan in 1996, the anthem celebrated the people's victory during the inauguration of the first democratically elected head of state, Lee Teng-hui.

The piece takes on its own significance at Barbara Gladstone Gallery as the performer pushes the wheeled piano throughout each room of the gallery. The anticipation of collective motion led by the piano on wheels mocks the very ability of engagement that the music portrays. Interactive works, as in the case in *Stop, Repair, Prepare*, do not intend to amuse or entertain, but to provoke, creating tension and chaos. In conventional musical performances, the audience sits on demarcated seats, offering clear views of the performance. In *Stop, Repair, Prepare*, the lack of demarcated spaces is crucial in its critical engagement with the audience, as it enables a sense of dialogism, of the carnivalesque, resisting the monological idealism of the meaning of the music. The audience must become complicit with the performance, listening while not always seeing, walking while not always participating, experiencing but not always fully engaged. Is this what is expected from the viewer? Must viewers engage in the optimism of brotherhood that the music expresses? Or must they parody their own sense of the collective? The politely moving audience at Barbara Gladstone is merely driven by appearances like a stretched rope ready to split.

Here, both the interactive experience and the so-called art object are determined by necessary inconsistencies, inconsistencies that are produced in our own cultural models. The shifting object of art is always at the intersection between the piano and the performer, between hearing and viewing

Allora & Calzadilla. *Stop, Repair, Prepare*, 2009. Performance.



This uncertainty of the object is also that of the subject, the individual in the midst of the collective. Collective ideals of brotherhood only remain viable on the level of appearances, or on the other hand—when appearances are no longer needed—on the level of catharsis. Here the choices are regulated by contradiction: Can one endure being burdened by discomfort in one's own choice of space, or should one become more open to losing oneself in the organic mass? The trap then is that pessimistic individuality cannot be separated from collective optimism. Like the viewer, the performer is also in a state of impasse: not knowing whether he embodies the instrument or is locked inside it. Regardless, he endures, playing upside down and backward, showing a sense of ease, a detachment seen in contortionists. He keeps busy, playing variation after variation. He obviously knows his music. But how many viewers can indeed *understand* the music? Judge the performer's performance? Can one listen to music without making an aesthetic judgment? And yet, if not to be judged, can one perceive real meaning behind the volume and rhythm, intensity or playfulness of these heroic songs without identifying them? Knowing their history? If so, the audience is inadequately knowledgeable, if only for the sake of appearances.

Denise Carvalho

Pablo Helguera

Cooper Union School of Art

"History is a territory that is conquered and owned," says Pablo Helguera, and we could add: geography can be a tool to build narratives to justify and dissect land grabs, social engineering and human clashes with nature. Since Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, considered by many as the origins of geography, this is a discipline that uses information we have (factual and sometimes mythical) of lands and peoples to create maps, models and other systems of representation. Pablo Helguera's (Mexico City, 1971) show, *Committed Explanations in Geography*, welcomes the visitors with the piece, *Past and Future* (2007), two side-by-side texts written phonetically: "the past is a foreign country," (coined by the British writer L.P. Hartley); and "the future is not what it used to be," (from French writer and philosopher Paul Valéry). The use of the phonetic alphabet positions



Pablo Helguera. Still from *Chipilo*, 2009. Video, 12 minutes.

the visitor as a foreigner, as a disoriented traveler struggling with alien languages and strange cultures, while searching through a labyrinth of anachronisms, or as a tourist in a quest for the ultimate exotic experience.

With these very well-known quotes, the artist seems to isolate the concept of time from history, emphasizing its links with geography, and turning it into a flexible material which can be revisited (even played backwards) — like *Land Tender The* (2009), a backward reading of an excerpt from James Agee's book, *Let Us Praise Famous Men*, over Aaron Copland's "The Tender Land" suite playing backwards as background music), or even captured — as the songs and texts in a Native American language preserved in primitive wax cylinder recordings, in *Conservatory of Dead Languages* (2005).

The pieces selected for this show, created between 2002 and 2009, seem to be reflections of Helguera's ambitious *The School of Pan-American Unrest Project*, a multimedia experiment in collaboration with a wide variety of organizations and individuals, a participatory piece which included a nomadic forum or think-tank initiated in 2003 that crossed the Americas by land — from Anchorage, Alaska, to Ushuaia, Argentina, in Tierra del Fuego. This trip was meant to rediscover whatever is left of the continental unity utopias, but also was an opportunity to connect ideas with geography.

Helguera establishes parallels and dialogues between different epochs and distant places. In *Punitive Expedition* (2002) the artist retells the story of General John Pershing's failed military expedition of 1916, in search of the revolutionary leader Pancho Villa

through the Sonora Desert in Mexico. But instead of images of that border region, he illustrates the piece with photos of the Afghani landscape from roughly the same period. Pershing's adventure reflects in many ways the lofty, misguided and revengeful endeavor of Bush's War on Terror, and ultimately was a similar failure. In both cases, the most advanced war technology of its time was worthless against the mobility and ingenuity of a band of guerrillas. Instead of capturing Villa and bringing him to justice, the American troops became unwelcome, but nevertheless profitable, visitors who sustained a thriving boom of bars, warehouses and all sorts of services. Also, Pershing's strategic blunders provided stories and anecdotes that would enhance and become part of the legend of the colorful *Centauro del Norte*. The artist focuses on the ironic contemporary echoes of this invasion but is also interested in rescuing the historical memory of the fleeting community that was spawned as a collateral effect of the military action which, we could infer, in turn was a lasting influence in the area.

The artist's work deals with worlds in extinction, cultures crushed by the weight of progress and change. There is an unavoidable element of nostalgia in some of his pieces, but at the same time this is work that thrives in the last breath of vanishing traditions, ideas and peoples. In some former works, notably his book *The Witches of Tepoztlán*, Helguera fuses history and fiction, creating playful and confusing narratives and re-imagined realities. But Helguera can also transform himself into a documentarian, an ethnographer, a sociologist and a geographer. Here he does so through three