

## Allora & Calzadilla. BLACKOUT

An exhibition that opens with the dramatic situation of Puerto Rico and moves on to reflect the possibilities of artistic form within the current social-political situation of the globalized world

**16<sup>th</sup> February – 30<sup>th</sup> May 2018**

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*Rome, 15 February 2018.* An exploded electrical transformer that becomes a sculpture, a petrol pump sculpted in fossil calcareous stone, a motorcycle with a trumpet welded to the exhaust, an overturned table that becomes a motorboat, great pictures composed of fragments of photovoltaic panels and a chorus singing a composition featuring the words of Benjamin Franklin "...how many pretty systems do we build, which we soon find ourselves oblig'd to destroy! If there is no other Use discover'd of Electricity, this, however, is something considerable, that it may help to make a vain Man humble."

The provocative works of **Jennifer Allora** and **Guillermo Calzadilla**, one of the most thoughtful and innovative artists on the contemporary international artistic scene, are featured in the **BLACKOUT** exhibition, curated by **Hou Hanru** and **Anne Palopoli** and hosted at MAXXI from **16<sup>th</sup> February to 30<sup>th</sup> May 2018**.

For this exhibition, the artists have responded to the unique architectural characteristics of Gallery 5, creating a close relationship between the exhibition layout, the works and the museum.

The exhibited works include ***Petrified Petrol Pump*** (2010), an abandoned petrol pump that seems to have turned into stone. This piece alludes to the cyclical exploitation and destruction that characterises Man's relationship with nature; carved from limestone containing fossils, it carries with it evidence of the geological eras of the Earth and those organisms that contributed to the creation of fossil fuel. Today's technologies become relics, the object of future archaeology, and what in some way has been an agent of global climatic change has contributed to its own end, being reabsorbed by nature.

Work from the ***Solar Catastrophe*** series (2016), in which the artists use broken fragments of polycrystalline silicon solar cells arranged within a geometric grid to create a gestalt pattern, is also featured in this exhibition. The breaks, pauses and gaps created within the figure/ground composition trace a boundary between nothingness and signification alluding to the history of Modernist art, and the energy crises of the contemporary world. The artists consider the photovoltaic panel as a complicated symbol of evolving energy technologies. While photovoltaic's do not rely on carbon-based fossil fuels- a known source of the dangerous directions of climate change- they are nonetheless implicated in other processes of resource extraction and exploitation that raise other questions of sustainability. In *Solar Catastrophe*, the photovoltaic panel is deconstructed on a canvas, and becomes a metaphorical element,-alluding to the detritus that progress leaves behind.

Working through the complexities of alternative sources of energy, by combining the economic, ideological and aesthetic dimension, is paramount for the artists: **indeed, they have included a solar-powered system** that supplies power to the exhibited works.

The exhibition layout also includes ***Blackout*** (2017), which lends its title to the show. Created with one of the burnt out electrical transformers that caused an island wide blackout in Puerto Rico in September 2016, the sculpture consists of electrically charged copper, ceramic fragments and transformer coils. The work is completed by the *mains hum* vocal work (2017), created by American composer David Lang (in his third collaboration with the artistic duo) and inspired by a quote from Benjamin Franklin on electrical energy. Lang's composition, conceived in collaboration with the artists as a fundamental part of the sculpture, is performed by the Rome-based vocal ensemble VoxNova Italia, (in their second collaboration with the artists- the first being the 2015 Venice Biennial exhibition *All the World's Futures* with the work 'In the Midst of Things')

The exhibition also includes a number of **videos** such as *The Night We Became People Again* (2017), set in the *Guayanilla-Peñuelas* area on the South-West coast of Puerto Rico, where an ancient cave formation, *Cueva Vientos*, is found and which is also the site of their long-term commission with Dia Art Foundation, "Puerto Rican Light (Cueva Vientos)". The film blurs the boundaries between the prehistoric narrative of a Taino origin myth, an abandoned petro-chemical plant, a sugar cane plantation, and the short story by Puerto Rican novelist and renowned Marxist José Luis González "*La noche que volvimos a ser gente*". An off-camera voice emulates the sounds of alternating-current by using it as compositional direction. Thus, the voice becomes a singular musical agent that sutures together a disjunctive flow of narratives. The text the voice sings, no longer tethered to semantic meaning, is now transformed into an affective sonorous collage.

A video review accompanies the exhibition, lending it a historical dimension, with works that testify to the artists' enduring commitment to the analysis of key concepts of contemporaneity such national identity, democracy, power, freedom, participation and social change.

The videos shot in Puerto Rico, China, Japan, Iran, the USA, Turkey, Italy and France allow us to better understand the **centrality of sound** in their work: voices, words, noises and music render the violence in political, economic and social relations explicit. Allora & Calzadilla underline the worldwide nature of the circulation of sounds and create a system of resonance. In their works, the artists assemble a constellation of meanings and connections, hybrid situations capable of creating images that embody the complexity of reality.

Through a critical and visionary approach, which overcomes the boundaries between the diverse categories of artistic, social and philosophical thought, they reread the present to offer ever-new points of view.

**BLACKOUT** confirms Allora & Calzadilla's vocation for reflection on events and circumstances associated with historical-political reality; in this exhibition, the issue that almost inevitably comes to the fore is that of **energy** in relation to capitalism, power and the specific political situation of **Puerto Rico**, where the artists live and work. The exhibition sheds light on the forces playing a role in the island's geopolitics, an "unincorporated territory" of the United States, currently burdened by uncontrolled public debt and a serious energy crisis, which have revealed the legacy of US colonialism and its complicity with global financial capitalism.

**Allora & Calzadilla** are among the most thoughtful, progressive and innovative artists working in contemporary art today. They have exhibited their provocative sculptures, videos, installations, and performance works in solo and group exhibitions internationally. Some of their personal exhibitions were hosted by the most important museums in the world – such as the Museum of Modern Art of New York and the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam – and they have taken part in the major international festivals, such as Documenta 13 in Kassel, the Venice Biennale, the Whitney Biennial in New York, as well as those in Gwangju, Sydney, Sao Paulo, Sharjah, Istanbul and Lion. In 2011, the duo was selected as the American representative at the Venice Biennale.

**BLACKOUT** is part of a series of MAXXI projects focusing on artistic creation as a commitment to changing the world, an exhibition strand that has presented issues associated with the globalized economy, the circulation of goods, the movement of people, as in *Utopia for sale*, or the movement of ideas, the links between public interest and that of capital as in *Please come back* or the *NATURE FOREVER* exhibition. *Piero Gilardi*.

**The press kit and images of the exhibition** can be downloaded from the Reserved Area of the Fondazione MAXXI's website at <http://www.maxxi.art/en/area-stampa/> by typing in the password **areariservatamaxxi**

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