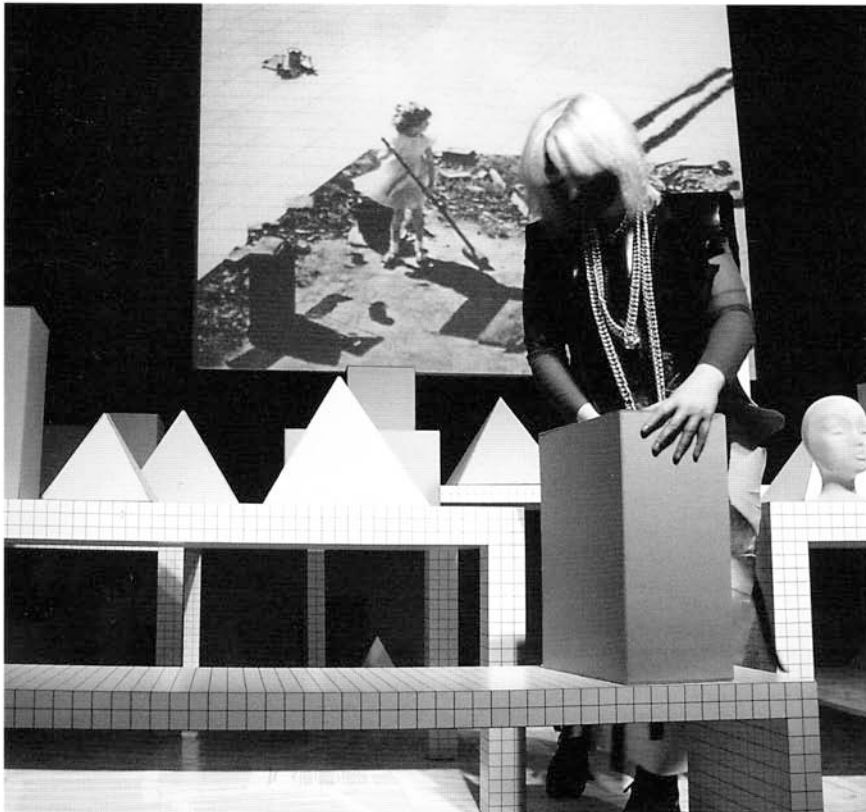


Latifa Echakhch and Lili Reynaud-Dewar



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Latifa Echakhch's deconstructed carpets are a literal exercise in reduction. The artist unravels them, thread by thread, until only the frame of the original shape remains. The resulting sculptures are mere markings, abstract outlines on the gallery floor, the cacophony of heritage and history reduced to the geometric and the purely formal.

Still, the more one contemplates these works, which are simply titled *Frame (red)* or *Frame (green)* (both 2006), the more the suppressed and erased connotations return. The fabric frames appear like partially dematerialized flying carpets, conjuring a vast landslide of narratives and imagined places. Echakhch's simple act of erasure is slowly inverted into a more complicated gesture of surplus and addition.

For this exhibition, which was curated by Karma International, Echakhch was paired with French artist Lili Reynaud-Dewar. In many ways the match was a canny one. Both artists are concerned with the construction of postcolonial

narratives, and with the presentation of African cultural 'artifacts' in distinctly Western settings. But where Echakhch is preoccupied with removing context and meaning, and with placing culturally laden objects in perfectly constructed Minimalist contexts, Reynaud-Dewar's work - a four-part collage, two videos and a performance element, which reference ancient Egypt, Italian Utopian group Superstudio, the banlieus of France, and hip hop culture - piles tangential association upon tangential association with an almost rococo largesse.

Both artists, however, resist the simple dialectic between reduction and amplification. Echakhch removes elements from the objects under consideration; the works cohere around that very absence, and around the redoubled awareness of what has been removed. Reynaud-Dewar employs a language of shuffling and collage, of

Lili Reynaud-Dewar
*In Reality, Is the Sphinx an
Annex of the Monument,
Or the Monument an
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2008
Documentation of
performance

active juxtaposition (as literally evinced in her collage featuring fragments of text alongside Superstudio's images of imagined Utopias); those fragments coalesce into a single ontology composed of disparate parts.

Also for this show, Echakhch exhibited a pair of plywood plinths, *Les petites lettres* (The Little Letters, 2008), which were scattered, both on the work's surface and on the surrounding floor, with small black triangles. The sculpture initially seemed like an exercise in abstract Minimalism. Black is juxtaposed against white, the rectangular against the triangular. But upon closer examination, the black triangles become visibly brittle, formed as they are from sheets of paper coated in ink; the sculpture's impenetrable surface is cracked and exposed. The triangles are actually made from Moroccan paper pastry templates; cultural association infuses the previously abstracted form. Finally, Echakhch's title, *Les petites lettres*, references alphabets and systems of language; in their impenetrable signification, Echakhch's little letters almost appear like Modernism's hieroglyphics.

This sense of time travel is replicated in Reynaud-Dewar's work, *In Reality, Is the Sphinx an Annex of the Monument, Or the Monument an Annex of the Sphinx?* (2008), which operates like a freestyle mash-up of cultural and art-historical references. In one video, two children are dressed in street clothes and crowned with Pharaonic headpieces. While they dance, other children behind them arrange and rearrange a collection of white boxes, pyramids and busts. These objects reappear in the corresponding video, documentation of a performance that comprised a lecture and a musical interlude featuring Reynaud-Dewar. In the performance, the video of the children is projected onto the stage, amongst other images; in front of these projections, Reynaud-Dewar lays out and catalogues the same set of boxes and pyramids.

Reynaud-Dewar's work is full of this sense of separate but interlinked worlds. The tracing of fragile links between disparate ecologies is part intellectual exercise, part paranoid compulsion: she projects herself as a cartographer of imagined lands, a cultural archivist and a seer.

On the surface, Echakhch essays a more clearly defined marriage of postcolonial discourse and Minimalism. But both artists are interested in ideology at work both in the academy and in life, and in the life of objects within this realm. Whether it is in the fantasy of Utopia, in the art-historical canon or in the notion of history itself, Echakhch and Reynaud-Dewar use these objects to trace the contours of diverse ideologies, and then carefully twist and draw those lines together.

Katie Kitamura