

LATIFA ECHAKHCH SPEAKERS' CORNER

Exhibition open
19 September – 23 November 2008

The Level 2 Gallery programme is conceived
and curated by Tate Modern's Assistant Curators,
in dialogue with Mark Godfrey, Curator

Latifa Echakhch 'Speakers' Corner
is curated by Ben Borthwick

Text by Simon Bolitho

The next exhibition in the
Level 2 Gallery will be Nicholas Hlobo
9 December 2008 – 1 March 2009

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Taking its name from the area in Hyde Park designated as a space for free speech, protest and debate, Latifa Echakhch's first exhibition in the UK explores themes of the individual and the state. It comprises two dramatic installations, each combining new and existing works.

The first space is an immersive dark blue environment, made by lining the walls with thousands of sheets of carbon paper. The title of this work, *For Each Stencil A Revolution 2007, or A Chaque Stencil une Révolution*, looks back to the radical protests of the 1960s, when carbon paper was used to print multiple copies of revolutionary statements and images. Echakhch's use of this archaic material, which has become almost redundant in an age of cheap photocopiers and laserprinting, casts a melancholy light on the legacy of 1968, itself now forty years in the past. There is also a performance element to the

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work, as Echakhch splashes methylated spirit against the paper so that the blue seeps down, gathering in pools at the bottom of the wall. The performative element and deep blue may allude to the work of Yves Klein, while the resulting streaks are reminiscent of the surface of a Colour Field painting, drawing attention to the sometimes tenuous links between the political claims of abstract art and the radical politics of the 1950s and 1960s.

As an addition for this exhibition, Echakhch has placed a number of burned tyres in the centre of the room. As well as creating a contrast between different manifestations of civil disobedience, from ideological tracts and organised protest to destructive anger and spontaneous riots, there are formal links between the collapsed structure of the tyres and the dripped pools of blue.

The second space is dominated by *Fantasia 2007*, a dense network of bare flagpoles protruding from the wall. Without a specific flag to identify them, the poles suggest a generalised symbol for the nation-state; and the way in which they crowd and intrude upon each other can be seen as either the innumerable teeming arms of state bureaucracy, or the manoeuvrings of global politics. Raised aggressively like fascist salutes,

the poles prevent visitors from moving freely, but also disrupt their spatial ability and sense of the room's architecture. Here, the new element specially added by the artist is a box placed on the floor, reminiscent of the makeshift platforms used at Speakers' Corner - a space for the individual from which an analytical, subversive or eccentric challenge to state power might be articulated.

Speakers' Corner follows a series of works in which Echakhch has examined the traditions of liberty and protest espoused in Western democracies. In *La Marseillaise 2005*, she led a perforated cardboard barrel organ score of the French national anthem, with its fervent revolutionary associations, into a portable document shredder. In *Untitled (11 March 2005) 2005*, she filmed the cleaning crew that followed closely in the wake of a street demonstration in Paris. Fliers and other detritus left by the protestors are swept away with military efficiency so that - within a few minutes - any trace of the demonstration has been erased. Echakhch has described the work as reflecting on the 'poor heritage' of the French Revolution and the events of 1968 in a city where 'there are five demonstrations a week'.

