

SWISS INSTITUTE / CONTEMPORARY ART  
495 BROADWAY / 3RD FLOOR  
NEW YORK / NY 10012  
TEL 212.925.2035  
WWW.SWISSINSTITUTE.NET

# SI

LATIFA ECHAKHCH  
Time Out New York  
JAN 21 2010



## Latifa Echakhch, Movement and Complication

★★★★

Swiss Institute, through Feb 13  
(see Soho)

Latifa Echakhch is known for deconstructing cultural symbols in a way that transcends the often didactic tone of "multicultural" art. For her show at the Swiss Institute, the Moroccan-French artist takes on the Swiss urbanist and pioneer of modernism, Le Corbusier, though why, exactly, remains unclear. Back in the 1940s, the architect devised a scale of proportions he called Le Modulor, a system that, among other things, provided for the ideal height of a ceiling. Here, Echakhch blocks out large charcoal bands on the walls, each corresponding to one of the ratios in Corbu's scheme. She's left bottles of charcoal and messy dust on the floor, seemingly to symbolize her revenge on the rigidity and oppressiveness of form, but there's no telling for sure.

Similarly, Echakhch displays small wooden models of the Corbusier-inspired housing typical of the *banlieues* where she grew up. But by reducing these structures to pure objects, does she mean to highlight their indifference, and by extension French officialdom's indifference, to the people who live inside? Maybe, but not necessarily.

In her previous efforts, Echakhch has created standout works inspired by her heritage—Oriental carpets cut out so only fringed edges remain; smashed Moroccan tea glasses; askew Islamic patterns. Here, she facetiously applies saffron, a common ingredient in North African cooking, to the top halves of the gallery windows. It's a conceptually subversive gesture, yet it lacks visual punch.

Echakhch's unwillingness to commit her work to a pat reading is admirable, but it also makes for frustrating viewing. Although she represents a vital new voice in art, this uncharacteristically serene installation subdues it to the point of inaudibility.—*Nana Asfour*

