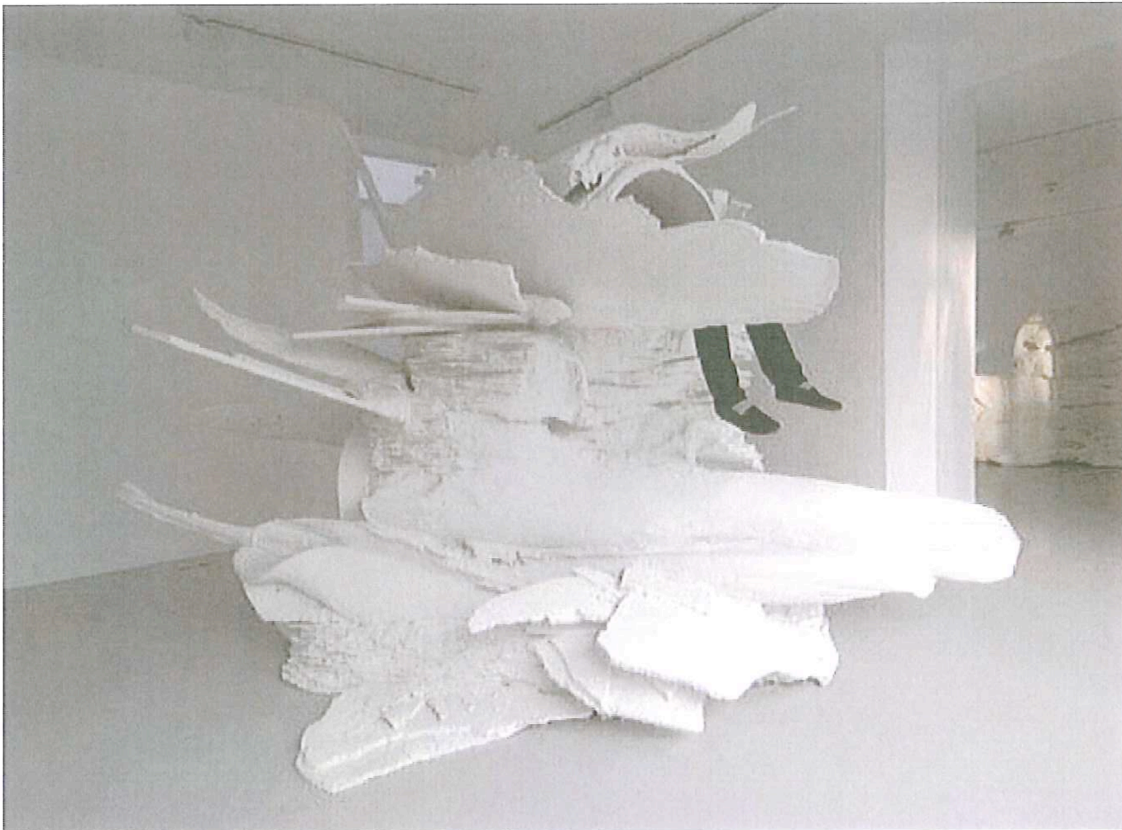


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2nd November 2007



Allora & Calzadilla at Lisson Gallery

Address: 29 Bell Street, NW1 5BY

Dates: 10 October - 17 November

Times: Monday - Saturday 10am-5pm, free

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Down in the basement of the Lisson Gallery lurks an inscrutable Bactrian camel with a tractor tyre tight around its middle, wedged between its two sagging humps. *Internal Combustion (Eye of the Needle)* is a short video where the tyre-ed camel is standing in the forecourt of a petrol station in Tehran; cars, lorries and tankers top up at the pumps in the background. The camel paces absentmindedly, watching sideways the stream of vehicles filling their tanks. The scene casts the camel as seemingly native, at once unassuming, apathetic to the hubris of humanity, slowly batting its great eyelashes at the absurdity of our plight. This is a familiar role in Allora and Calzadilla's previous works, but also in a wider context. Animality is not only a powerful antagonist to latent humanism, but it's also used as a means of objectifying human perspective - to be observed by the mute sentience of nature. Invariably, animals appear meditative, as pacific aliens who we abuse (witness the tractor tyre) with impunity. The contrast of the camel with the thrumming cars and petrol station behind, is emblematic of specific, regional antipathy and familiar, prevalent separations. Judeo-Christian pre-eminence in the West is abutted with the Islamic governance in Iran; but neither is 'represented' clearly. An interpretative hegemony is certainly not forthcoming. The Judeo-Christian specificity of the 'eye of a needle' aphorism might hint at a defining antagonism, but the shift from allegory to literal; of aphorism to nonsense, shrugs off our unambiguous reading. An interruption of the flow of information, rendering hegemonic structures as fluid and opaque, is at the heart of this exhibition.

Upstairs there are two large sculptures entitled *Sediments Sentiments (Figures of Speech)*. At the opening of the exhibition, these teetering formations were the unconventional platforms for a series of sung performances. These makeshift rostra look like the petrified, ashen ruins of a modern day Pompeii: jutting, industrial angles are stratified with flakes of stone and root-veined earth, the whole form bleached a uniform white. Bisecting the layers are sections of tubing, sewer-sized and fragmented; here the performers lay, entombed within the rubble. The lyrical recitation of their operatic songs comprised quotes from speeches given by political figureheads

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including Saddam Hussein, the Dalai Lama, George W Bush and Martin Luther King. The words become unfocused, appropriated under a new duress: the pomp of opera replacing that of political oration, supplanting historical and political accuracy with indiscriminate commemoration. The past potency of these words is lost or transfigured into unfamiliarity, and the words are returned to their democratic origins.

Similarly, the newspaper collages on the walls of the gallery enact a process of confounding the authority of words, where gingerly edited photos of current events in every field are treated as constituent letters: a pair of outstretched arms becomes the crossbar of a 'T'; a spread pair of legs the arch of an 'A'. The sentences depicted are expounded in the titles, and again quote infamous statements issued by political spokespeople. 'Ladies and gentlemen, we got him!' was spoken by L. Paul Bremer on the event of Saddam Hussein's capture, but here is subsumed by the media via pictographic representations of letters. The words and their intended meaning gather sediment on their journey into the public sphere, and become encased within a global web of information and disinformation - the importance of their origin displaced. This is certainly a democratising process, where authority is dethroned in the very act of transmission, but it is also dangerously trivialising. Allora and Calzadilla are all too aware that the act of translation is anything but transparent; that interpretation and intention are non-linear in relation to one another, and that the means of communication is just as pivotal as what is said. By signing over the role of explicitness to their accompanying texts and titles (there is a hefty press release to accompany this exhibition), the works themselves are advantageously positioned. They deliberately become embroiled in a mire of meaning and deflated rhetoric, embracing the fractured destinies of their ideas by pre-empting them.

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