

Michael Rakowitz

**The invisible enemy should not exist
(Room G, Northwest Palace of Nimrud)
2018 - 2019**

19 reliefs from Middle Eastern packaging and newspapers, glue,
cardboard on wooden structures, museum labels /
19 Reliefs aus Verpackungsmaterial und Zeitungen aus dem Nahen
Osten, Klebstoff, Pappe auf Holzstrukturen, Museumsschilder

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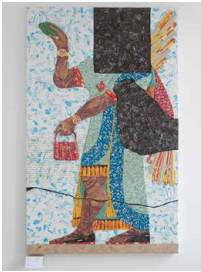
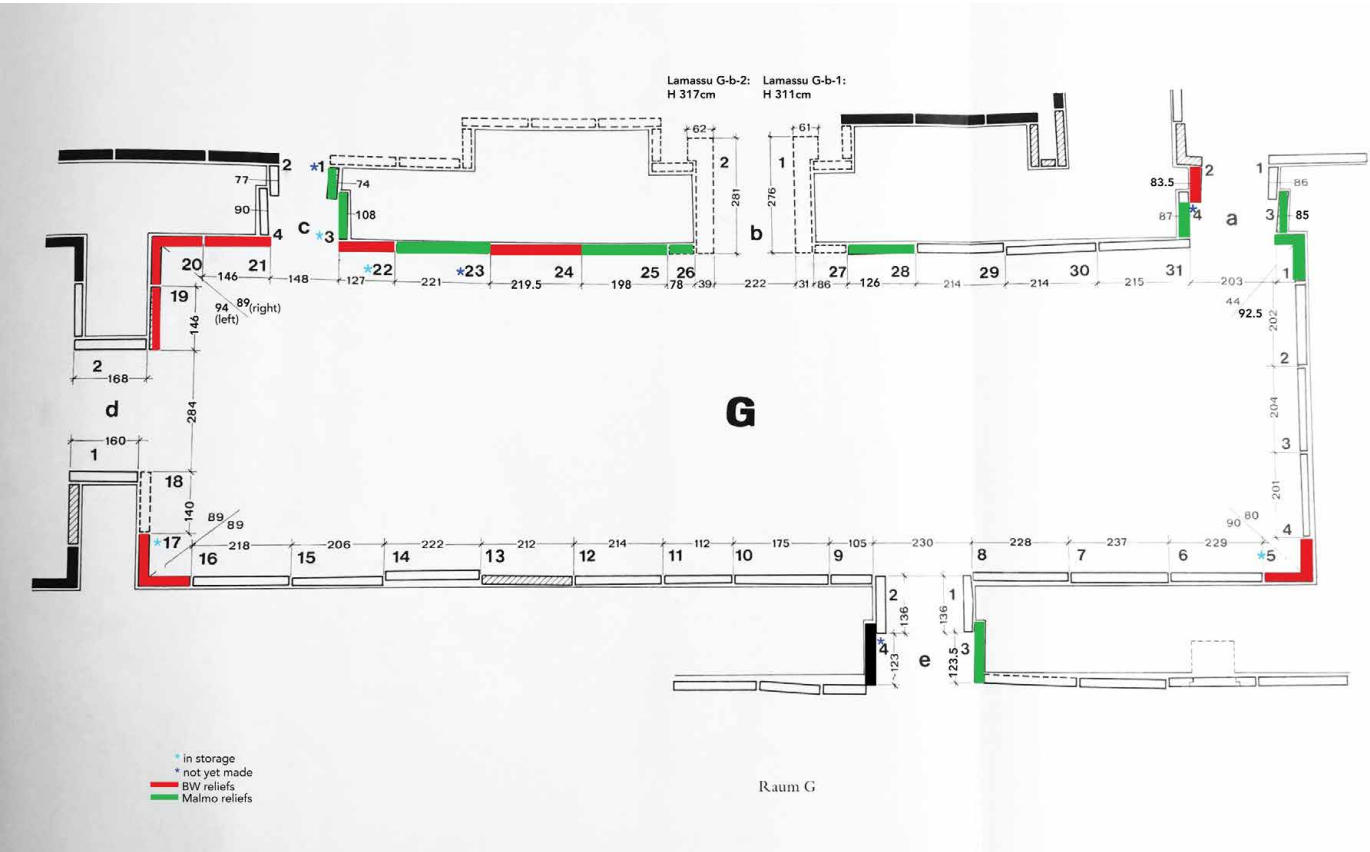
Michael Rakowitz
The invisible enemy should not exist (Room G)

Past exhibitions:

- Solo show at Malmö Konsthall, Sweden (2019/2020)
- Solo show at Tensta Konsthall, Stockholm, Sweden (2020)
- Solo show at CAC - Contemporary Art Center, Vilnius, Lithuania (2020/2021)

Upcoming exhibitions:

- Solo show at FRAC Lorraine, Metz, France (opening February 2022)
- Group show at Kiasma, Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki, Finland (opening April 2022)



The invisible enemy should not exist (Room G, Northwest Palace of Nimrud, Panel 19)
2018
Relief from Middle Eastern packaging and newspapers, glue, cardboard on wooden structures, museum label
Relief aus Verpackungsmaterial und Zeitungen aus dem Nahen Osten, Klebstoff, Pappe auf Holzstrukturen, Museumsschild
237 x 146 x 8.5 cm
SOLD



The invisible enemy should not exist (Room G, Northwest Palace of Nimrud, Panels 20)
2018
2 part relief from Middle Eastern packaging and newspapers, glue, cardboard on wooden structures, museum label
2-teiliges Relief aus Verpackungsmaterial und Zeitungen aus dem Nahen Osten, Klebstoff, Pappe auf Holzstrukturen, Museumsschild
237 x 94 x 8.5 cm ; 237 x 89 x 8.5 cm
NFS



The invisible enemy should not exist (Room G, Northwest Palace of Nimrud, Panel 21)
2018
Relief from Middle Eastern packaging and newspapers, glue, cardboard on wooden structures, museum label
Relief aus Verpackungsmaterial und Zeitungen aus dem Nahen Osten, Klebstoff, Pappe auf Holzstrukturen, Museumsschild
237 x 146 x 8.5 cm
SOLD



The invisible enemy should not exist (Room G, Northwest Palace of Nimrud, Panel c-1)
2019
Relief from Middle Eastern packaging and newspapers, glue, cardboard on wooden structures, museum label
Relief aus Verpackungsmaterial und Zeitungen aus dem Nahen Osten, Klebstoff, Pappe auf Holzstrukturen, Museumsschild
237 x 74 x 8.5 cm
SOLD



The invisible enemy should not exist (Room G, Northwest Palace of Nimrud, Panel c-3)
2019
Relief from Middle Eastern packaging and newspapers, glue, cardboard on wooden structures, museum label
Relief aus Verpackungsmaterial und Zeitungen aus dem Nahen Osten, Klebstoff, Pappe auf Holzstrukturen, Museumsschild
237 x 108 x 8.5 cm
SOLD

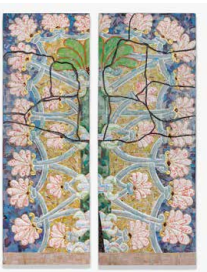


The invisible enemy should not exist (Room G, Northwest Palace of Nimrud, Panel 22)
2019
Relief from Middle Eastern packaging and newspapers, glue, cardboard on wooden structures, museum label
Relief aus Verpackungsmaterial und Zeitungen aus dem Nahen Osten, Klebstoff, Pappe auf Holzstrukturen, Museumsschild
237 x 127 x 8.5 cm
SOLD

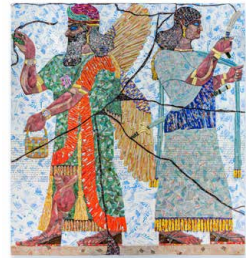


The invisible enemy should not exist
(Room G, Northwest Palace of Nimrud, Panel 23)
2019
Relief from Middle Eastern packaging and newspapers, glue, cardboard on wooden structures, museum label
Relief aus Verpackungsmaterial und Zeitungen aus dem Nahen Osten, Klebstoff, Pappe auf Holzstrukturen, Museumsschild
237 x 221 x 8.5 cm

SOLD

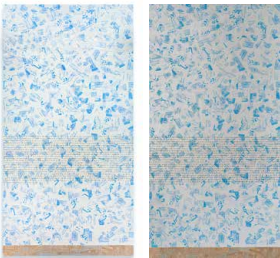


The invisible enemy should not exist
(Room G, Northwest Palace of Nimrud, Panels 5)
2019
2 part relief from Middle Eastern packaging and newspapers, glue, cardboard on wooden structures, museum label
2-teiliges Relief aus Verpackungsmaterial und Zeitungen aus dem Nahen Osten, Klebstoff, Pappe auf Holzstrukturen, Museumsschild
237 x 80 x 8.5 cm ; 237 x 90 x 8.5 cm



The invisible enemy should not exist
(Room G, Northwest Palace of Nimrud, Panel 24)
2019
Relief from Middle Eastern packaging and newspapers, glue, cardboard on wooden structures, museum label
Relief aus Verpackungsmaterial und Zeitungen aus dem Nahen Osten, Klebstoff, Pappe auf Holzstrukturen, Museumsschild
237 x 219.5 x 8.5 cm

SOLD



The invisible enemy should not exist
(Room G, Northwest Palace of Nimrud, Panels e-3 & e-4)
2019
2 reliefs from Middle Eastern packaging and newspapers, glue, cardboard on wooden structures, museum labels
2 Reliefs aus Verpackungsmaterial und Zeitungen aus dem Nahen Osten, Klebstoff, Pappe auf Holzstrukturen, Museumsschilder
237 x 123.5 x 8.5 cm ; 237 x 123 x 8.5 cm
Installation variable / variabel



The invisible enemy should not exist
(Room G, Northwest Palace of Nimrud, Panel 28)
2019
Relief from Middle Eastern packaging and newspapers, glue, cardboard on wooden structures, museum label
Relief aus Verpackungsmaterial und Zeitungen aus dem Nahen Osten, Klebstoff, Pappe auf Holzstrukturen, Museumsschild
237 x 126 x 8.5 cm

SOLD



The invisible enemy should not exist
(Room G, Northwest Palace of Nimrud, Panels 17)
2019
2 part relief from Middle Eastern packaging and newspapers, glue, cardboard on wooden structures, museum label
2-teiliges Relief aus Verpackungsmaterial und Zeitungen aus dem Nahen Osten, Klebstoff, Pappe auf Holzstrukturen, Museumsschild
237 x 89 x 8.5 cm ; 237 x 89 x 8.5 cm



The invisible enemy should not exist
(Room G, Northwest Palace of Nimrud, Panels 25 & 26)
2019
2 reliefs from Middle Eastern packaging and newspapers, glue, cardboard on wooden structures, museum labels
2 Reliefs aus Verpackungsmaterial und Zeitungen aus dem Nahen Osten, Klebstoff, Pappe auf Holzstrukturen, Museumsschilder
237 x 198 x 8.5 cm ; 237 x 78 x 8.5 cm
Installation variable / variabel



The invisible enemy should not exist
(Room G, Northwest Palace of Nimrud, Panels a-2, a-3, a-4 & I)
2019
4 reliefs from Middle Eastern packaging and newspapers, glue, cardboard on wooden structures, museum labels
4 Reliefs aus Verpackungsmaterial und Zeitungen aus dem Nahen Osten, Klebstoff, Pappe auf Holzstrukturen, Museumsschilder
237 x 87 x 8.5 cm ; 237 x 83.5 x 8.5 cm ; 237 x 85 x 8.5 cm ;
237 x 44 x 8.5 cm & 237 x 92.5 x 8.5 cm
Installation variable / variabel





Installation Malmö Konsthall, Sweden 2019/2020



Installation Malmö Konsthall, Sweden 2019/2020



Installation Malmö Konsthall, Sweden 2019/2020



Installation Malmö Konsthall, Sweden 2019/2020





**The invisible enemy should not exist
(Room G, Northwest Palace of Nimrud, Panels 25 & 26)**

2019

2 reliefs from Middle Eastern packaging and newspapers, glue, cardboard on wooden structures, museum labels
2 Reliefs aus Verpackungsmaterial und Zeitungen aus dem Nahen Osten, Klebstoff, Pappe auf Holzstrukturen,
Museumsschilder

237 x 198 x 8.5 cm ; 237 x 78 x 8.5 cm

Installation variable / variabel



The invisible enemy should not exist
(Room G, Northwest Palace of Nimrud, Panels 25 & 26)
2019
Detail Panel 25: 237 x 198 x 8.5 cm

The invisible enemy should not exist
(Room G, Northwest Palace of Nimrud, Panels 25 & 26)
2019
Detail Panel 26: 237 x 78 x 8.5 cm





Installation Tensta Konsthall, Stockholm, Sweden 2020

The invisible enemy should not exist

(Room G, Northwest Palace of Nimrud, Panels a-2, a-3, a-4 & I)

2019

4 reliefs from Middle Eastern packaging and newspapers, glue, cardboard on wooden structures, museum labels

4 Reliefs aus Verpackungsmaterial und Zeitungen aus dem Nahen Osten, Klebstoff, Pappe auf Holzstrukturen, Museumsschilder

Detail Panels a-4 & a-2





The invisible enemy should not exist
(Room G, Northwest Palace of Nimrud, Panels a-2, a-3, a-4 & I)
2019
Detail Panels a-3 & I



The invisible enemy should not exist
(Room G, Northwest Palace of Nimrud, Panels a-2, a-3, a-4 & I)
2019
Detail Panel a-4: 237 x 87 x 8.5 cm

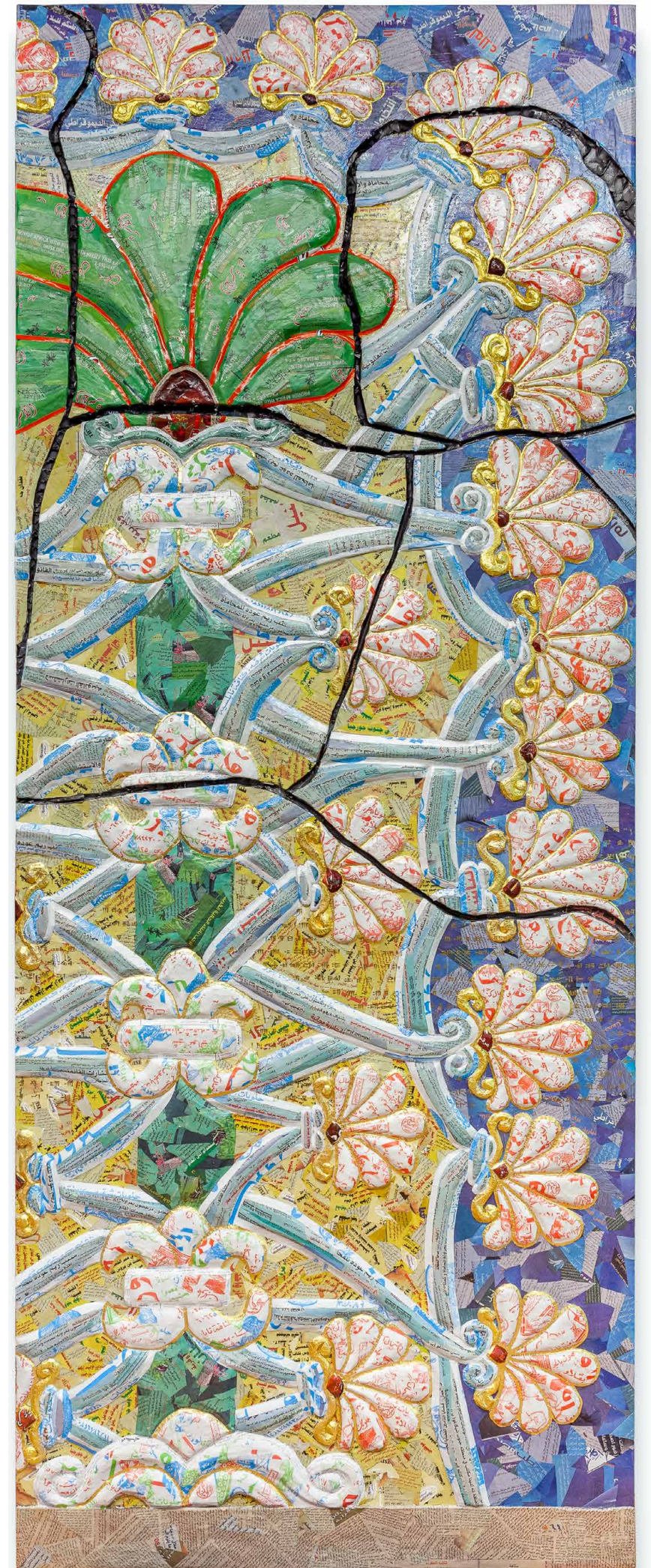
The invisible enemy should not exist
(Room G, Northwest Palace of Nimrud, Panels a-2, a-3, a-4 & I)
2019
Detail Panel a-2: 237 x 83.5 x 8.5 cm



The invisible enemy should not exist
(Room G, Northwest Palace of Nimrud, Panels a-2, a-3, a-4 & I)
2019
Detail Panel a-3: 237 x 85 x 8.5 cm

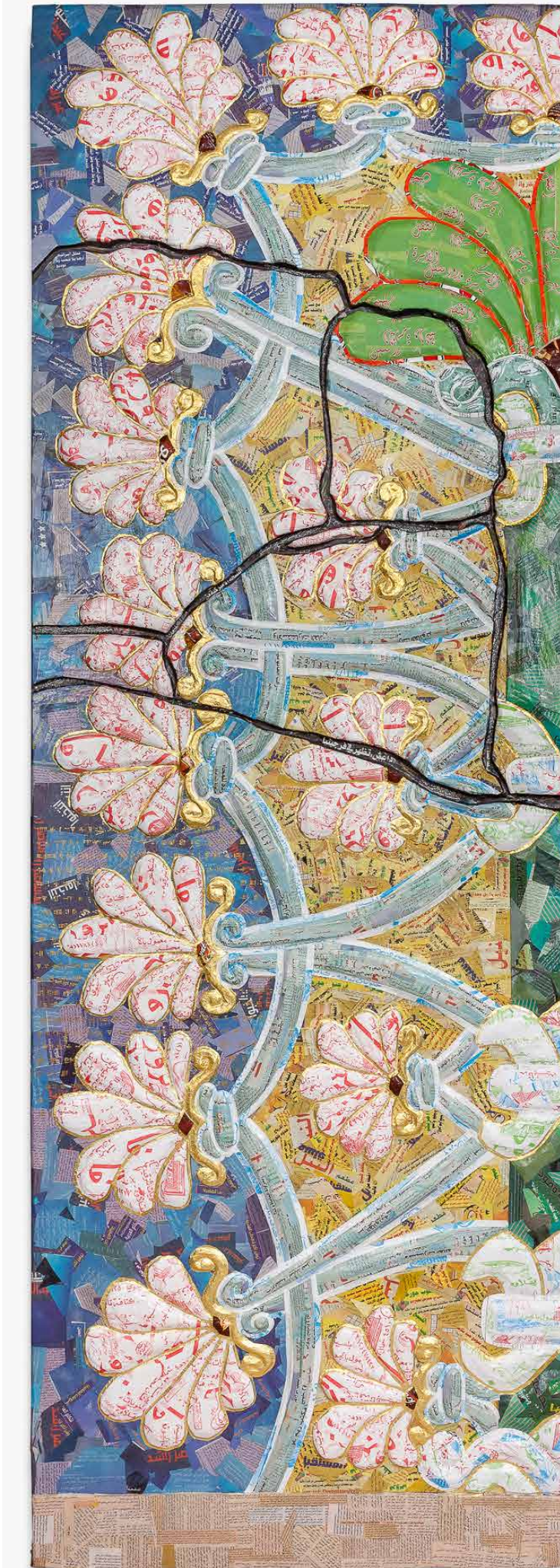


The invisible enemy should not exist
(Room G, Northwest Palace of Nimrud, Panel a-2, a-3, a-4 & I)
 2019
 Detail Panels I: 237 x 44 x 8.5 cm ; 237 x 92.5 x 8.5 cm





The invisible enemy should not exist (Room G, Northwest Palace of Nimrud, Panels 5)
2019
2 part relief from Middle Eastern packaging and newspapers, glue, cardboard on wooden structures, museum label
2-teiliges Relief aus Verpackungsmaterial und Zeitungen aus dem Nahen Osten, Klebstoff, Pappe auf Holzstrukturen,
Museumsschild
237 x 80 x 8.5 cm; 237 x 90 x 8.5 cm



The invisible enemy should not exist (Room G, Northwest Palace of Nimrud, Panels 5)
2019

The invisible enemy should not exist
(Room G, Northwest Palace of Nimrud, Panels e-3 & e-4)

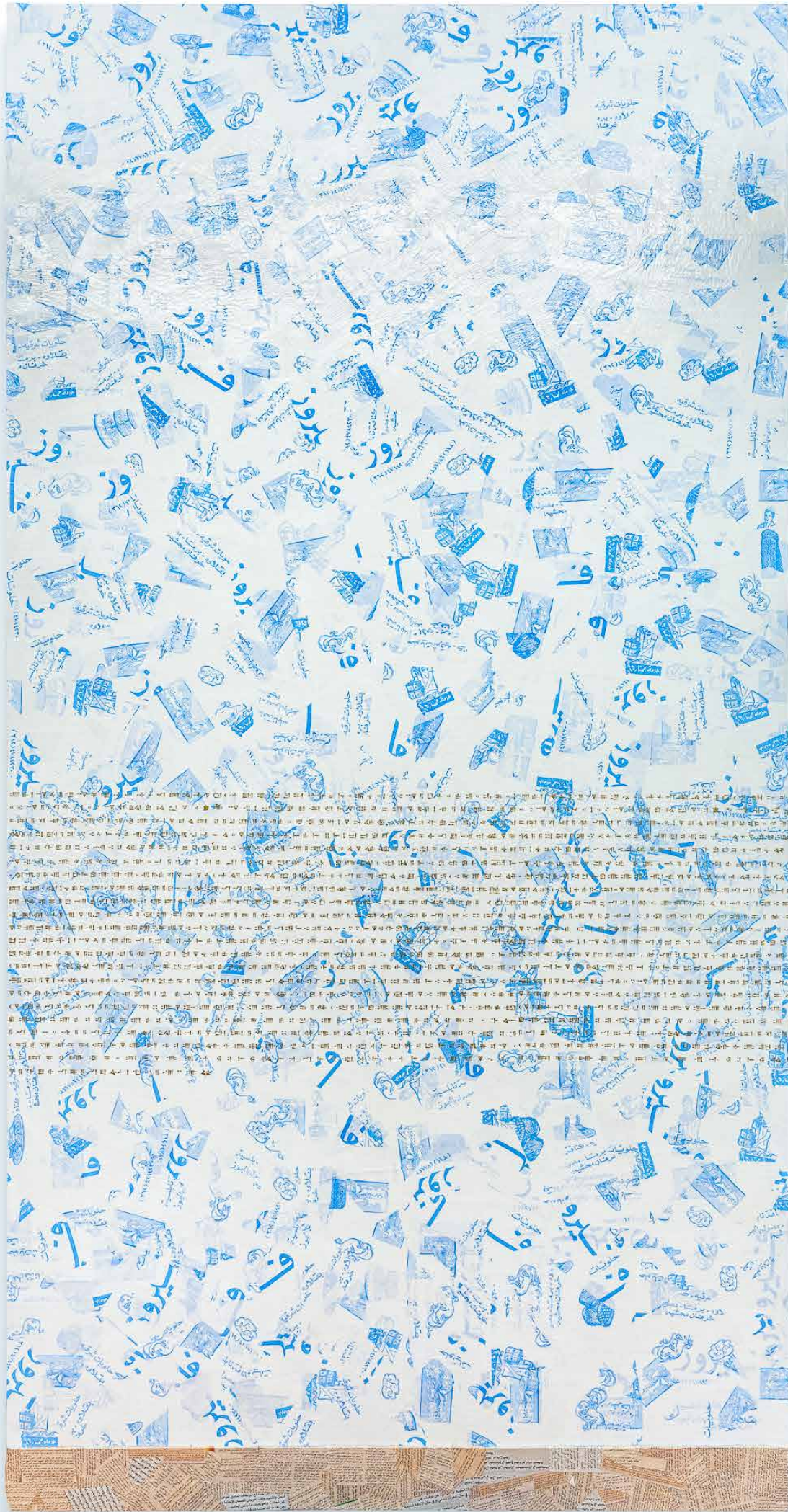
2019

2 reliefs from Middle Eastern packaging and newspapers, glue, cardboard on wooden structures, museum labels
2 Reliefs aus Verpackungsmaterial und Zeitungen aus dem Nahen Osten, Klebstoff, Pappe auf Holzstrukturen,
Museumsschilder

237 x 123.5 x 8.5 cm ; 237 x 123 x 8.5 cm

Installation variable / variabel





The invisible enemy should not exist
(Room G, Northwest Palace of Nimrud, Panels e-3 & e-4)
2019
Detail Panel e-3: 237 x 123.5 x 8.5 cm

The invisible enemy should not exist
(Room G, Northwest Palace of Nimrud, Panels e-3 & e-4)
2019
Detail Panel e-4: 237 x 123 x 8.5 cm





Installation Tensta Konsthall, Stockholm, Sweden 2020

The invisible enemy should not exist (Room G, Northwest Palace of Nimrud, Panels 17)

2019

2 part relief from Middle Eastern packaging and newspapers, glue, cardboard on wooden structures, museum label
2-teiliges Relief aus Verpackungsmaterial und Zeitungen aus dem Nahen Osten, Klebstoff, Pappe auf Holzstrukturen,
Museumsschild

237 x 89 x 8.5 cm; 237 x 89 x 8.5 cm





The invisible enemy should not exist (Room G, Northwest Palace of Nimrud, Panels 17)
2019

**For further information on Michael Rakowitz,
interviews, videos & lectures:**

<https://www.barbarawien.de/artist.php?artist=34>

Reference works from the project
The invisible enemy should not exist
2007 – ongoing

The invisible enemy should not exist (Room N, Northwest Palace of Nimrud)
2018

Installation with 13 reliefs from Middle Eastern packaging and newspapers, glue, cardboard on wooden structures, museum labels

Each relief approx. 230 cm high, 70 - 200 cm wide and 10 cm deep

Overall dimensions of the reconstructed room approx. 40 sqm

The invisible enemy should not exist unfolds as an intricate narrative about the artifacts stolen from the National Museum of Iraq, Baghdad, in the aftermath of the US invasion of April 2003, and the continued destruction of Mesopotamian cultural heritage by groups like ISIS. The centerpiece of the project is an ongoing series of sculptures that represent an attempt to reconstruct the thousands of looted and destroyed archeological artifacts.

The title of the project takes its name from the direct translation of Aj-ibur-shapu, the ancient Babylonian processional way that ran through the Ishtar Gate, excavated in Iraq in 1902-14 by German archeologist Robert Koldewey and then put on permanent exhibition at the Pergamon Museum, Berlin. In the 1950s, the Iraqi government rebuilt the gate; close by stands a reconstruction of the ancient city of Babylon, created by Saddam Hussein as a monument to his own sovereignty. During the war, the reconstructed Ishtar Gate is the site most frequently photographed and posted on the Internet by US servicemen stationed in Iraq.

Alluding to the implied invisibility of the museum artifacts, the reconstructions are made from the packaging of Middle Eastern foodstuffs and local Arabic newspapers—moments of cultural visibility found in cities across the United States and Europe where Iraqis have sought refuge from the fighting that continues to ravage their country. The objects are created together with a team of assistants using the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute database, as well as information posted on Interpol's website. Since 2007, more than 700 artifacts have been reconstructed as part of this project. *The invisible enemy should not exist* was extended into public space in March 2018 when a reconstruction of the Lamassu, destroyed by ISIS in Nineveh, was installed on the Fourth Plinth in London's Trafalgar Square, where it will stand until 2020.

In 2015, ISIS completely destroyed the Northwest Palace of Nimrud, including the iconic reliefs found throughout the building. For this project, Michael Rakowitz reconstructs room N of the palace: the side room of a banquet hall where Ashurnasirpal II would receive guests. Particularly known as a king under whom art flourished in the Assyrian Empire, the reliefs depict benevolent spirits blessing the king and the kingdom with pine cones, dates and other flora from Assyria (present-day northern Iraq). In reconstructing a space of hospitality and refuge, this iteration of *The invisible enemy should not exist* seeks to be site-specific, presented in a celebration of artistic and cultural expression in Europe, at a time where those fleeing ancient cities like Nineveh and Nimrud are still searching for safety and rest.

The color schemes of the reconstructed reliefs follow those believed by archaeologists to have been painted on the limestone when the panels were carved in the 9th century BC. Packaging is culled from products produced in northern Iraq, like date cookies and date syrup. The salvage of these materials makes present the human, economic and ecological disasters caused by the 2003 Iraq War and its aftermath. Iraqi dates were once considered the best in the world and constituted the country's second largest export after oil. In the late 1970s, the Iraqi date industry listed over 30 million date palms in the country. By the end of the war, only 3 million remained.



The invisible enemy should not exist (Room N, Northwest Palace of Nimrud)
Installation view at Art Basel Unlimited 2018



The invisible enemy should not exist (Room N, Northwest Palace of Nimrud)
Installation Art Basel Unlimited 2018



The invisible enemy should not exist (Room N, Northwest Palace of Nimrud)
Installation Art Basel Unlimited 2018



The invisible enemy should not exist (Room N, Northwest Palace of Nimrud)
Installation Art Basel Unlimited 2018



Michael Rakowitz, *The invisible enemy should not exist*, Fourth Plinth at Trafalgar Square, London, 2018-2020

The invisible enemy should not exist

2007 - ongoing

Lamassu for the Fourth Plinth at Trafalgar Square, London, 2018-2020

For the Fourth Plinth, Rakowitz has recreated the Lamassu. This winged bull and protective deity guarded the entrance to Nergal Gate of Nineveh (near modern day Mosul) from c700 BC until it was destroyed by ISIS in 2015.

The reconstructions in *The invisible enemy should not exist* project are made from recycled packaging from Middle Eastern foodstuffs. The Lamassu is made from 10,500 empty Iraqi date syrup cans.





May the Arrogant Not Prevail

2010

Found Arabic packaging and newspaper, glue, cardboard, and wood
493.4 × 597.5 × 95.3 cm

Installation Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, 2017-2018



The invisible enemy should not exist

2007 - ongoing

Tables with artifacts from cardboard, Middle Eastern packaging and newspapers, glue, museum labels, sound and 4 drawings, dimensions variable

Tische mit Artefakten aus Pappe, Verpackungsmaterial und Zeitungen aus dem Nahen Osten, Klebstoff, Museumslabel, Ton und 4 Zeichnungen, Maße variabel

Installation Galerie Barbara Wien, Berlin, 2016

Tate Collection, London, UK

Press

long enough for you to recognize the scene, but too brief to really stick with you. Though the footage evoked a wide emotional spectrum, it all blended into one unquestionably intense, yet oddly flat, rush of affect. And before you knew it, it was over.

Was it worth the wait? As the rather handsome attendant led me out of the room through a different door from the one I'd entered, I realized he'd been watching my ride on a screen installed by the exit—a strangely titillating invasion of a private moment. All in the service of safety, of course. To recall one of the axioms of s/m culture detailed in *Fifty Shades*, among the primary tasks of the dom is to ensure the ultimate well-being of the sub: Relax, Big Brother is watching you! And just as sex generally, and s/m in particular, is not about reaching climax but about how you get there, Fujiwara's brief ride was exactly sufficient to tinge the elaborate buildup with an unexpected excitement. For what the artist had designed was above all an arc of the anticipation and satisfaction of submitting to a role defined only by adherence to rules. Like a herd inside a paddock, exhibition-goers were joined together in being restricted, for once unable to move on, but lingering in the gallery with nothing to do while waiting except perhaps revel in their own disempowerment.

Empathy I is an elegant comment on the mechanics of mass amusement and the pervasive desire for the passivity of spectatorship—a desire so intense it verges on fetishism. But, notwithstanding its title, the work makes a bleak pronouncement: Far from fostering empathy, it's all about *me me me*. Even as visitors were guided through what was a decidedly conveyor-belt experience, the very blandness of the work's stock-image world made it about individuality; it allowed you to be you, in all your specificity. This microdose of life's ups and downs, experienced within the safe confines of a contrived framework, points to the kind of Disneyland existentialism that is ubiquitous in consumer culture: a collective craze for the circumscribed thrill. In Fujiwara's exacerbated version of this familiar fantasy of Dasein without any of the responsibility that comes with it, the illusion cracks, and self-consciousness creeps in. On your way out, all you could take with you was the emptiness.

—Kristian Vistrup Madsen

Michael Rakowitz

BARBARA WIEN

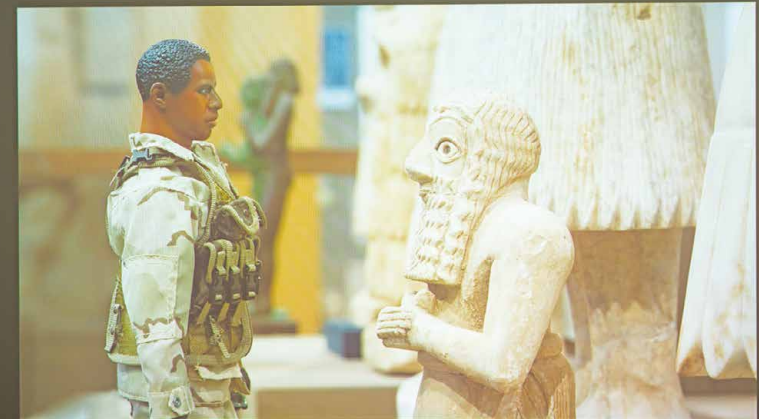
If the literary theorist Viktor Shklovsky were alive today, Michael Rakowitz might be one of his star pupils. Over the years Rakowitz has received great acclaim for projects that push gestures of *ostranenie*, or estrangement, to operatic dimensions: In New York he once served an Iraqi-inspired dish on plates looted from Saddam Hussein's palaces (*Spoils*, 2011), and for Documenta 13 he presented copies of books that were burned in the Fridericianum in Kassel during World War II; the copies were carved from travertine collected in the hills of Bamiyan, Afghanistan, where the Taliban blew up two massive sixth-century sandstone Buddhas in 2001 (*What Dust Will Rise?*, 2012). For Rakowitz, the practice of, lifting an object or material from its given context and embedding it in an unexpected setting or giving it an unwonted purpose lends itself to a multidimensional confrontation that is powerful not only for the highly politicized and controversial terms of this dislocation but also for foregrounding destruction as the defining motif in the history of civilizations.

The Assyrians returned to Nimrud (near modern-day Mosul, Iraq) after the fall of their empire at the end of the seventh century BCE and lived among its ruins for a brief period of time. Rakowitz's exhibition “The Ballad of Special Ops Cody and other stories” invited viewers to

inhabit loss in a more recent chapter in the history of the same Mesopotamian city. The three large reliefs on view were replicas of panels lining the walls of Nimrud's Northwest Palace, which was demolished by ISIS in 2015. Like some of the other works in Rakowitz's series “The invisible enemy should not exist,” 2007–, they are meticulous reconstructions made from Arabic-language periodicals published in the US and Europe as well as from the packaging for various Middle Eastern foodstuffs, including tea, date-filled cookies, and chicken bouillon cubes. Despite the gravity of the subject matter, the boisterously bright hues of these designs were, in fact, not entirely out of place, since two of the panels depict winged deities thought to be wielding the spathe, or sheathing bract, of a male date palm and a bucket of water for the express purpose of fertilizing a female tree, while the third panel, showing a stylized sacred tree, denotes abundance and prosperity. Rakowitz appeared to have restored even their long-vanished colors to the reliefs, but he also “kept” both the cracks and the missing pieces by having black newsprint stand in for them. A museum-style label attached to one panel coolly informed us that the bottom part of the relief was destroyed by ISIS, whereas the missing head—a big black square made of advertising pages from Arabic-language weeklies—has long been in a private collection in New York. No matter how different the motivations of ISIS and a crafty nineteenth-century antiquities dealer may have been, the destruction of cultural heritage is an unfortunate constant across time and space.

Commissioned for the 2017–18 survey of Rakowitz's work at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, the fourteen-minute-long stop-motion video *The Ballad of Special Ops Cody*, 2017, also draws a parallel—albeit more didactically—between modern warfare in the Middle East and the pillaging of ancient Mesopotamian civilizations. Special Ops Cody, a souvenir action figure whose photograph was in 2005 almost successfully passed off by Iraqi insurgents as that of a captive American soldier, finds himself at the entrance of the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute and launches into an existentialist monologue voiced by a real-life Iraq veteran, Gin McGill-Prather. On encountering a vitrine full of ancient Mesopotamian figurines and recognizing severely injured Iraqis in the idols' damaged faces, he begins to question why *they* are there, quickly homing in on the hypocrisy at the heart of colonization: “They were broken, but we destroyed them. You were broken, so we keep you, locked up, fragile, temperature-controlled. . . .” While the material legacies of great civilizations are preserved with care and at a considerable cost, the generations that came after them can barely earn pity from the rest of the world.

—Gökcan Demirkazık



Michael Rakowitz,
*The Ballad of Special
Ops Cody*, 2017,
HD video, color,
sound, 14 minutes
42 seconds.

The Ghost of Iraq's Lost Heritage Comes to Trafalgar Square as Michael Rakowitz Unveils His Fourth Plinth Sculpture

We spoke to the Iraqi-American artist about his version of the ancient Assyrian sculpture destroyed by Islamist extremists and what he thinks of the rehabilitation of George W. Bush.

Naomi Rea, March 27, 2018



Michael Rakowitz in front of "The Invisible Enemy Should Not Exist" in Trafalgar Square. Photo by Caroline Teo.

The lions in Trafalgar Square in London will get a strange and powerful companion that is part lion, part bull, and part eagle, when the Iraqi-American artist Michael Rakowitz unveils his Fourth Plinth commission on Wednesday, March 28.

Rakowitz has recreated a full-scale version of the sculpture of a Lamassu, a protective deity which guarded the Nergal Gate at the entrance of the ancient Assyrian city of Nineveh for more than a millennium. The winged creature stood

fast from 700BC until 2015, when it was destroyed by Daesh after the Islamist extremists gained control of the site near Mosul in northern Iraq.

Rakowitz's Lamassu will stand on the plinth for two years until March 2020, the 12th work in a series of temporary commissions that began in 1998 and have included work by Rachel Whiteread, Elmgreen & Dragset, Yinka Shonibare and Mark Wallinger.



Fabrication. Photo: ©Gautier DeBlonde.

His contemporary take on the human-headed deity with wings is part of a project the artist started in 2006, called "The Invisible Enemy Should Not Exist." The series sees him reconstruct Iraqi artifacts that have been listed as as missing, stolen, destroyed, or having unknown status since the US-led coalition toppled Saddam Hussein in 2003. "It's a commitment," Rakowitz told artnet News, "and it's one that will outlive me and my studio, unfortunately, because there are over 8,000 artifacts that are still missing from the Iraq Museum alone."

Full Metal Jacket

Rakowitz has clad his sculpture with empty cans of date syrup, referencing Iraq's now-decimated date industry, once the country's second strongest economic driver after oil. War in Iraq has wiped out the country's date palms, which numbered close to 30 million in the 1970s. By the end of the Iraq War in 2003, less than 3 million remained standing. A cookbook of date syrup recipes, aimed at bringing Iraqi ingredients back to the UK, will be published to

accompany the Fourth Plinth project, which is funded by the Mayor of London and Arts Council England.

Rakowitz's Lamassu is accurate in scale and detail, right down to the long hidden cuneiform that was never photographed before the original was destroyed. When Rakowitz heard that Ali Yasin Jubouri, a researcher at the University of Mosul, had a more authoritative depiction of the inscription than what the artist was working from, he adjusted his sculpture accordingly for the now exposed part. "Its visibility is the kind of thing that lets you know that something very wrong and very violent has been visited on this thing," Rakowitz said.

The sculpture is meant to be a symbol of resilience despite Iraq's plight after over decades of conflict, but it is also a reminder of the loss of culture and of human life. "It's meant to do two things; to be a ghost that's supposed to haunt, but also a spectral presence that's supposed to offer some kind of light," he said.



Michael Rakowitz's Lamassu. Photo: ©James O Jenkins.

The work is a testament of art's power to combat compassion fatigue.

Rakowitz draws a parallel between his sculpture and the millions of refugees currently fleeing from Iraq and Syria. It was only when the Iraq Museum was being looted that he started to see any "pathos" coming from abroad, he recalled. "Whether you were for or against the war, there was an agreement that this was a catastrophe. And it wasn't just a localized one, this was a human catastrophe," he said. At first he was angry that this universal outrage did not translate into outrage about the lost lives in Iraq. "But then I understood that for many people these were the surrogates for those Iraqis, for those lives that had been lost."

Dubya the "War Criminal"

Talk about the war in Iraq inevitably leads to the then US President, George W. Bush, whose image has improved since Trump has come to power in the US. The artist is unimpressed. "I think it's reprehensible. This is a war criminal, in the truest sense," Rakowitz said, adding that something could be learned from the way the UK discredited former Prime Minister Tony Blair for his support of the war. "I won't look at [Bush's] paintings, I won't acknowledge the memes that are all so cuddly about his relationship with Michelle Obama and all this other shit that is part of a fucked up celebrity culture. There shouldn't be this rehabilitation of his image, there should be a rehabilitation of Iraq."

When it comes to the current president, Rakowitz sees Trump as "a symptom of the deterioration of empathy and any kind of vision for how things can be, and being driven by a kind of hyper-capitalism and neo-liberalism that has totally wrecked the planet and all life on it."

The artist revised his opinions about Iraqi cultural heritage held in the British Museum after hearing from the late Iraqi archaeologist Donny George, a former director of the Iraq National Museum, who was instrumental in recovering about half of the antiquities looted in 2003. George had to flee Iraq in 2006. After the looting, critics began to see the artifacts held in the British Museum and other institutions in Europe and the US as refugees like them, unable to return to an unsafe homeland. "This is not to excuse or to be an apologist for any of those questionable circumstances under which things were attained," Rakowitz said, "but it shows the way that meaning shifts and the way that we as people end up in different places as well."



Rakowitz, "The Invisible Enemy Should Not Exist." Photo: ©James O Jenkins.

Rakowitz's Lamassu combines a vision of hope for the future, whilst never forgetting the tragic events of the past decade and a half. On the Fourth Plinth his sculpture will look towards the southeast, towards Nineveh, hoping to one day return, something that might resonate with London's Iraqi population. "I see it as something that will become a citizen of London, it will become an actor in a public space for the next two years, and hopefully complete its journey going back to Iraq afterwards."

<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/michael-rakowitz-fourth-plinth-1254095>



INTERVIEW - 29 MAR 2018

Michael Rakowitz: The Invisible Enemy

With his fourth plinth commission unveiled in London, the artist talks archaeological magic tricks and Saddam Hussein’s obsession with Star Wars

BY EVAN MOFFITT

Evan Moffitt *The winged Assyrian lamassu you’ve just installed on Trafalgar Square’s fourth plinth is a form you first used in The Invisible Enemy Should Not Exist [2007–ongoing]. Can you tell me about that project? Who is the ‘invisible enemy’ of the title?*

Michael Rakowitz The fourth plinth work is an extension of *The Invisible Enemy*, which – along with drawings and a soundtrack – comprises a life-sized reconstruction of the more than 8,000 artefacts from the Iraq Museum in Baghdad that are missing, stolen, destroyed or of ‘status unknown’, after it was looted in 2003. That list has, unfortunately, grown to include the artefacts and archaeological sites that have been stolen or destroyed in Iraq since then.

The project began when I was at Berlin’s Pergamon Museum in September 2006. I knew the Pergamon Altar was there, but I wasn’t aware they had the Ishtar Gate, too. When I saw the gate, I was completely blown away. I thought about why it was in Berlin, about the terms under which it was taken. The guidebook noted that the gate was the centrepiece of ancient Babylon, built around 575 BCE, and located on a processional way used during new year celebrations called The Invisible Enemy Should Not Exist. It was the coolest street name I’d ever heard. And it was perfect because it spoke to this idea of the ‘phantom threat’: US President George W. Bush’s fabricated existence of weapons of mass destruction and the conflation of the 9/11 attacks with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

Babylonians would bring votive statues down this road to the temples. The statues, which often appear in collections of Mesopotamian art, are understood to have been surrogates for the worshippers. Those artefacts, now stolen, represent the dead. I saw how outrage over lost artefacts could become outrage for lost lives.



Michael Rakowitz, *The Invisible Enemy Should Not Exist*, 2017, maquette proposal for fourth plinth commission. Courtesy: the artist and Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago; photograph: James O. Jenkins

EM *Why did you make your reproduction of the Ishtar Gate at partial scale?*

MR The surviving remnants of the original Ishtar Gate were taken in 1899 by the German archaeologist Robert Koldewey and installed at the Pergamon Museum in 1927. Consequently, in the 1950s, the Government of Iraq commissioned a plaster-and-wood reconstruction. That facsimile became one of the most popular photo-ops for US soldiers; if you Googled ‘Ishtar Gate’ in 2007, the first image you saw was this pathetic reproduction with a US soldier in front of it. So, in 2010, when I was invited to show some of the objects from *The Invisible Enemy* in an exhibition at Berlin’s Haus der Kulturen der Welt, i decided to make a reconstruction of the reconstruction.

EM *Just as you created that work for an institution in Berlin, where the stolen Ishtar Gate still resides, your fourth plinth commission is installed not far from the British Museum, where many of the stolen Assyrian lamassus are on permanent view. What are your thoughts about addressing complicity on a structural level?*

MR My artistic predecessors have cleared the ground by establishing institutional critique as a form, and there are institutions that are interested in providing space for those critiques. Most curators of Mesopotamian art are forbidden from engaging with the contemporary politics of the region. The British Museum has been thinking about these things for a long time – though the Elgin Marbles aren’t being repatriated anytime soon. I’m very conscious of the context of Trafalgar Square, a place that valorizes Admiral Lord Nelson and the Royal Navy. The fourth plinth was constructed in 1841 for a statue of King William IV; insufficient funds meant it was never completed, however, and the plinth remained empty. In 1849, the British archaeologist Austen Henry Layard uncovered a lamassu from the sands of Iraq. So, while one sculpture ‘disappeared’ at the beginning of that decade, another appeared at the end of it – a kind of archaeological magic trick.

My lamassu has its ass pointed in the direction of the British Museum and it’s facing south-east, towards Nineveh, with its wings raised, hoping to return. When the piece is deinstalled in 2020, I’d like it to be donated either to Nineveh or to the Iraq Museum: that’s the kind of circular ecology I want to achieve.

EM *The Middle Eastern food packaging you’ve used in the series raises a number of questions about authenticity and cultural patrimony, especially in terms of migration and diaspora. If you’re living far away from home, sometimes the most ‘real’ fragments of your culture might be the foodstuffs you buy at a local market.*

MR Right. That was something I first explored in *Return* [2004–ongoing], a project for which I imported Iraqi dates to the US for the first time in over 40 years. In 2004, I had gone to Sahadi Importing Co. in Brooklyn to buy date syrup, because my mother used to lament that the only date syrup you could buy in the US was from Israel, and they had a tendency to over-filter it to the point where it lost its grit. My grandfather used to make date syrup himself, the Iraqi way: thick and unctuous. I picked up a beautiful red can that was labelled ‘Product of Lebanon’, but the shop’s owner, Charlie Sahadi, told me it was from Baghdad. He explained that the date syrup was made in the Iraqi capital, put into large plastic vats, brought over the border to Syria and canned, then driven to Lebanon where it was labelled and sold to the rest of the world. That was how Iraqi producers had circumvented sanctions between 1990 and 2003.

This was in 2004, not long after Bush had declared ‘Mission Accomplished’ in Iraq, yet anything with a bill of Iraqi origin was still subject to intense scans, for which the importer would be charged. Sahadi said it would be bad business, but I thought it would be good art. I set up shop on Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn, in the heart of

New York’s Arab community and, while we were waiting for the Iraqi dates, I stocked it with date products purportedly from other countries, like Lebanon or Sweden. Their beautiful packaging concealed where the items came from, as if the products themselves were terrified of being discovered on enemy territory. When I began reconstructing artefacts, I had no desire to replicate them with their original materials; I wanted to capture their physical aura, but to declare them spectral presences, using discarded materials to invoke their loss. So, I began to use packaging, that material of marginality.



Michael Rakowitz, *Enemy Kitchen*, 2003–ongoing, documentation from 2012. Courtesy: the artist and Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago

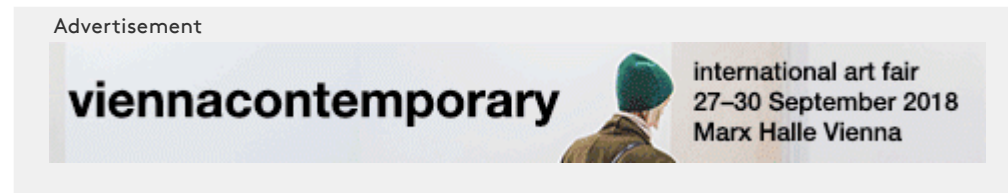
EM *The circulation of date products or smuggled antiquities mirrors the migration narratives from Iraq and other war-torn countries in the Middle East. In piecing those narratives together with lost objects, you’re sifting through all kinds of historical fragments – antiquities but also texts and documentation. In your project for documenta 13, What Dust Will Rise? [2012], you assembled disparate, cataclysmic objects: shards of the Bamiyan Buddhas, atomic minerals from the Manhattan Project, a brick from Pruitt-Igoe, granite from the World Trade Center. How did you make those selections?*

MR The Taliban’s destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in 2001 was a particularly cataclysmic moment for me. As a teenager, I was an apprentice stone carver, and my first work was a tribute to the Buddhas. I researched how the Hazara people in Bamiyan adored those colossi and wanted to rebuild them, but UNESCO and the International Council on Monuments and Sites refused. So, I travelled to Bamiyan with an Afghan stone carver named Abbas al-Adad and we offered the locals a week-long, stone-carving workshop. I thought that if we re-introduced the techniques, locals could do whatever they wanted, without relying on Western institutions.

The Fridericianum in Kassel, where *What Dust Will Rise?* was shown, had been an important library but twice had its collections destroyed during the Nazi occupation of Germany: first in 1933, during a Nazi book burning, and again in 1941, when the building was bombed. The chief archivist showed me partially burned parchments

that looked like human skin. One of the reasons so much ancient Mesopotamian writing survives is that cuneiform tablets were made of clay, so fires just baked them like a kiln. One fire preserves, another destroys.

EM Often, in your work, a historical fragment isn't just a physical object but a form of arcane information. Some of my favourite pieces from your show at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago – *The Breakup* [2010], for instance, or *The Worst Condition Is to Pass Under a Sword Which Is Not One's Own* [2010] – mine obscure histories in unusual ways.



<<http://www.viennacontemporary.at/en/>>

MR I grew up with an obsessive thirst for information. My father is a huge baseball fan so, as kids, we collected baseball cards and memorabilia. When John Lennon was killed, I began to collect The Beatles' albums, including bootlegs like the *Let It Be* sessions [1970]. I became obsessed with finding the moment, in those recordings, when the band started to fall apart. In 2009, I was invited to do a project in Jerusalem, and decided to use the break-up of The Beatles to indirectly narrate the city's history: how enlightenment had given way to collapse and division into four separate quarters. A radio station in Ramallah invited me to do a programme, since radio waves are one of the only things that can travel over the wall, and the chief producer there told me that *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* [1967] had been released just days before the Six-Day Arab-Israeli War and had become a kind of soundtrack for her family: those triumphant guitar chords at the beginning signalled Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's arrival to liberate the Palestinians; the crashing piano at the end intoned his failure.

The Worst Condition began in 2007, when I saw that a soldier from the 101st Airborne Division based in Mosul had listed an 'Iraqi fedayeen Saddam Darth Vader helmet' on eBay; I'm registered to receive site alerts for anything Iraq-related. He had found a cache of helmets and Iraqis told him that Saddam had been a huge fan of the Star Wars films [1977–ongoing]. On the eve of the first Gulf War, Saddam had the Iraqi army march underneath his victory arch in Baghdad to the film's theme song, over and over again. The helmet led me to investigate not only Saddam himself, but the designers of his weapons, monuments and uniforms, in an attempt to understand the way Hollywood fantasies can fuel the military-industrial complex.



Michael Rakowitz, *May the Arrogant Not Prevail*, 2010, installation view, MCA Chicago. Courtesy: MCA Chicago; photograph: Nathan Keay

EM Presumably, Saddam was collecting Star Wars memorabilia around the same time that US President Ronald Reagan was launching his own Strategic Defense Initiative – known as the 'Star Wars' campaign – in 1983.

MR Exactly. Gerald Bull, who was one of the architects of that campaign, went on to design a supergun for Saddam based on the first-edition cover illustration of Jules Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon* [1865], featuring a ridiculously big cannon capable of shooting things into space.

EM Do you seek to destabilize cultural and geographical distinctions in your work as a means of eroding notions of the 'enemy'?

MR When I imagine Saddam Hussein’s son, Uday, re-enacting scenes from *Star Wars* in the same way I did in my backyard as a kid, it chafes at ideas of good and evil; that kind of pathos is important. In my work *Enemy Kitchen* [2003–ongoing], refugees and US Marines skewer meat from a food truck to make kebabs in a kind of collaborative performance. Hands that once held weapons in Iraq are now creating nourishment. After all, ‘hospitality’ and ‘hostility’ share the same root word.

paraSITE [1998–ongoing] came from a similar interest in hospitality, and in recognizing the other as a potential friend. The project was inspired by the detritus used by Palestinian refugees to reconstruct homes that the Israelis had bulldozed, as well as my observation, on a residency in Jordan, that the Bedouin change the form of their tents every night in response to the desert’s wind patterns. When I returned to the US, I saw a homeless person sleeping underneath a building vent, using the heating system to stay warm. So, I designed custom inflatable shelters for homeless people in New York and Boston that could link up to those vents – harnessing the power of the wind, so to speak. The project addressed topics of exile and exodus that my own family and many others had experienced, but also a very local problem.



Michael Rakowitz, *Bill S.’s Shelter with Twelve Windows*, 1998, from the ‘paraSiTE’ series, mixed-media installation, dimensions variable. Courtesy: the artist

EM One could consider *Enemy kitchen* and *paraSiTE* to be works of social practice. Do you see it as your responsibility as an artist to address issues of social and material need?

MR Art should demand the right to be dangerous, weird and impolite; I don’t think artists have a responsibility except to stay true to that impetus. I want to create open systems in which the work can unfold on its own.

EM *Many of your projects are ongoing; is that what you mean by ‘open systems’? Can they ever have an end and, if so, what would that be? The end of looting or of homelessness?*

MR Personally, I feel committed to the notion that a project shouldn’t disappear until the problem it addresses disappears. I still do *paraSiTE* every winter because there are so many people in need of shelter. Dealing with homelessness helps me understand all my projects, to the extent that it reverberates with broader issues of unbelonging and displacement.

Michael Rakowitz is an artist based in Chicago, USA. In 2017, he had a solo show at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago. His commission for the fourth plinth, London, UK, was unveiled on 28 March and his work will be included in the FRONT Triennial, Cleveland, USA, opening in June 2018.

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Main image: ‘The worst condition is to Pass Under a Sword which is Not One’s Own’, 2010, exhibition view, Tate Modern, London. Courtesy: the artist; photograph: Tate photography

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