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Schöneberger Ufer 65 10785 Berlin www.barbarawien.de

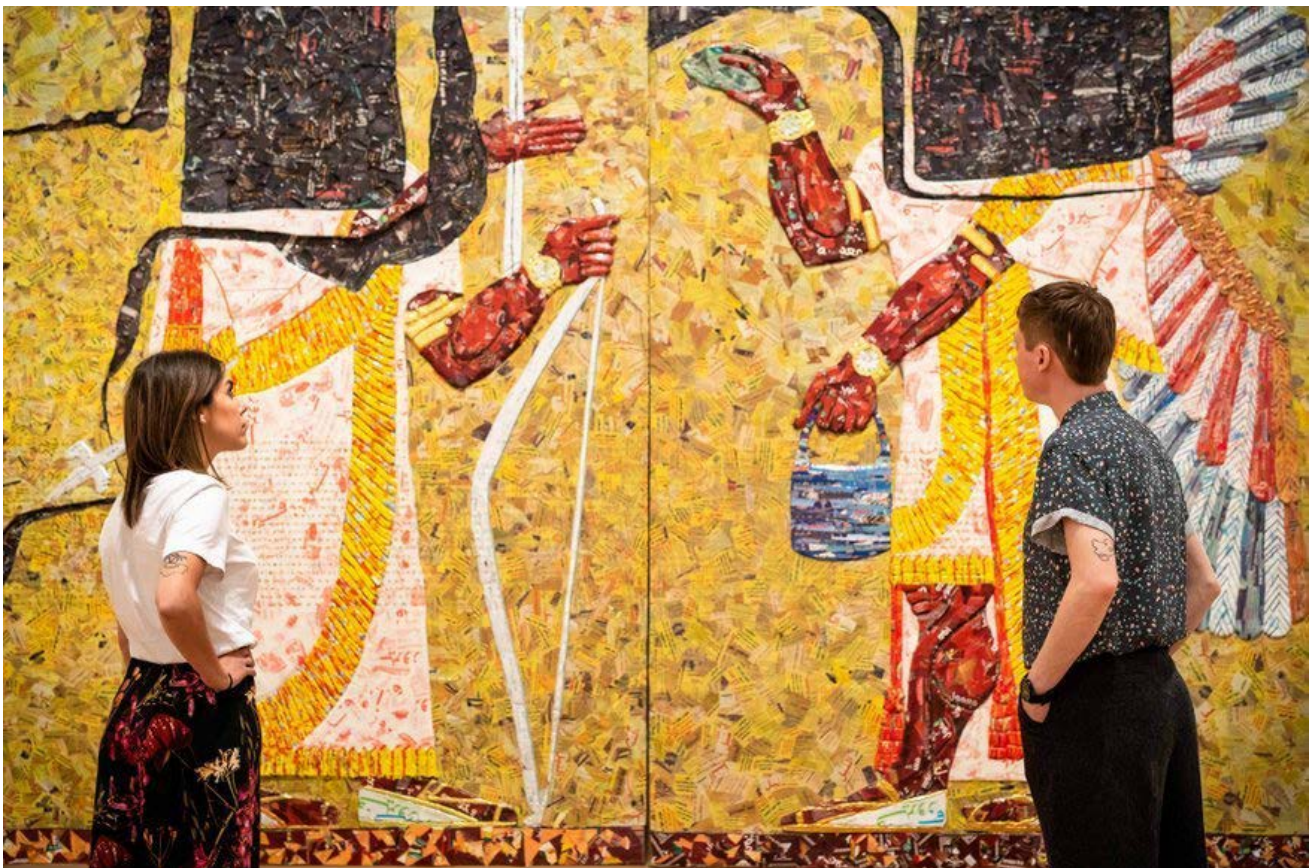
Tabish Khan *Michael Rakowitz: Fourth Plinth Artist Makes Us Weep By Recreating Objects Destroyed By ISIS* in: Londonist, June 4, 2019, <https://londonist.com/london/art-and-photography/michael-rakowitz>

Michael Rakowitz: Fourth Plinth Artist Makes Us Weep By Recreating Objects Destroyed By ISIS

Michael Rakowitz, Whitechapel Gallery ★★☆☆☆



BY TABISH KHAN



Much like his Fourth Plinth sculpture, these are recreations of frieze destroyed by ISIS. Food packaging is used to replicate the original colours. Photo John Nguyen/PA Wire. Courtesy Whitechapel Gallery

I'm in Whitechapel Gallery studying illustrations of stolen Iraqi archaeology while listening to [Smoke On The Water](#). I don't have headphones on – it's playing in the gallery itself – and it's not the classic Deep Purple version, but a cover that's been given an Arabic twist. What's the

It's typical of the tentative links that artist Michael Rakowitz — responsible for the [current Fourth Plinth sculpture](#) — teases out in this exhibition, and it provides a personal touch to the big issues of cultural history and destruction, major themes in Rakowitz's work.



These are rubbings and casts of Turkish architecture designed by Armenians before the Ottoman genocide of Armenians. Photo John Nguyen/PA Wire. Courtesy Whitechapel Gallery

He draws similar parallels between the break up of The Beatles and the decline of Pan-Arabism (the idea of creating a single Arab nation). How are the Fab Four linked to the Middle East? It turns out Paul McCartney was planning a concert in North Africa to reunite The Beatles but it never happened. Palestinian DJs fondly recall playing Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band before the [Six-Day War](#) transformed the region. I had no idea, and that's the point — Rakowitz wants to show us all a history that we had no clue existed.

A mountain of research goes into each of Rakowitz's projects, cleverly represented here with scribbles in his handwriting across glass cases which house newspapers. One paper features Egyptian President Nasser, and the other covers the death of The Beatles' manager Brian Epstein. So, yes there's a lot of reading, but unlike other research-heavy exhibitions, it's not necessary to read it all as the artwork does most of the talking.



A Soviet style tower with an Aboriginal flag is a monument to an Aboriginal community torn apart by developers. Photo John Nguyen/PA Wire. Courtesy Whitechapel Gallery

One particularly powerful work features stone recreations of Jewish books that were destroyed by the Nazis. They've been lovingly recreated by Afghan craftsmen, using stone from near where the Taliban destroyed a Buddhist statue. It's a monument to reclaiming history — the world is full of so much destruction but we can take back a part of what's been lost through creativity. Learning that the tools used to craft these books were created from old tanks left over from previous wars in the region, gives the works a poetic meaning that makes me want to weep.

Just as tear-worthy are works that are similar to that on the Fourth Plinth — friezes destroyed by ISIS have been rebuilt and 'painted' the colours they would have been originally, thousands of years ago. The 'repainting' has been done using the packaging of foods sourced from that region. It's heartbreaking to know the original versions have been lost forever.

It's a real skill to take such rich histories, cultures, art and architecture and present them so that they are accessible, and also leave a lasting impact on visitors. It's a skill that Michael Rakowitz has clearly mastered.

[Michael Rakowitz at Whitechapel Gallery](#) is on until 25 August 2019. Tickets are £12.95 for adults.

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