

PI ARTWORKS ISTANBUL

Michael Rakowitz

The invisible enemy should not exist

(Section 1, Room C, Northwest Palace of Nimrud)

28 October – 25 December 2021



Panel CB-1, 2021, relief from newspapers, food packaging, relief sculptures on wood panel
225 x 198 x 10 cm (detail)

Pi Artworks Istanbul is pleased to announce the Chicago-based and award-winning artist Michael Rakowitz's first solo exhibition in Istanbul.

Michael Rakowitz's "The invisible enemy should not exist" is an ongoing series that he began in 2007. The goal: to recreate the missing and destroyed artifacts taken from the National Museum of Iraq, more than 7,000 in total—a cultural pillaging that occurred in the early 2000's during the Iraq War and its wake. Then, in 2015, Rakowitz extended the series to include the "reappearance" of the relief panels from Kalhu (Nimrud), room by room. Kalhu was the site of an Assyrian palace, a treasure of ancient Mesopotamia (located in current-day Numaniyah, south of Mosul, Iraq); the relief panels that remained at Kalhu were destroyed by ISIS in 2015, sending shock waves throughout the world and causing grief in the local community. In Rakowitz's recreations of the rooms at Kalhu, he leaves out the looted reliefs which now sit at reputable, colonialist institutions throughout the West. These blank spaces carry weight.

As Rakowitz deftly nods towards in his work with these empty spaces, the robberies and devastations of Kalhu, and places like it, began long before ISIS. It began with 19th century imperialist practices—be they political, archeological, or excavational. The Western mentality that any and all cultural history is theirs for the taking, coupled with the present-day dehumanization by the West of the people said history birthed is the hypocrisy and catalyst that led to this series. Up to today, Rakowitz, with his studio, has rebirthed about 900 of the objects lost forever from the National Museum of Iraq, and they have reappeared 7 rooms from Kalhu/Nimrud: Room N, G, Z, H, and sections from Room F and S. And, now Rakowitz's Section 1 of Room C from Nimrud can be seen at Pi Artworks in Istanbul.

Rakowitz is an artist for the dispossessed, for the erased, and displaced. And, it is not only in the content of the work that he speaks to this, but also in its materiality. To bring these artifacts and panels back to something of its original colorful form, Rakowitz uses a papier-mâché

technique with Middle Eastern product packaging and Arabic-English newspapers. This not only references back to prior and seminal series of his, but it also speaks to the very birth of this series itself—the idea of consumption by the West of this region’s riches and history, paired with the simultaneous discarding of the worth and identity of its people, their “wrappers”, their context. Rakowitz adorns these artifacts proudly with identity marking labels and papers. They literally wear a tag announcing where they came from. They are impenetrable to dispossession. Further, like much of Rakowitz’s work, meaning and effect is manifold; it should not be lost that this is also a work that is about political justice, as it is about environmental justice, metaphorically and literally, cultural justice, and so on.

At Pi Artworks is the reappearance of the reliefs that remained at ‘Room C’ of the palace of Nimrud before ISIS destroyed it in 2015. As in all of his recreated rooms, he shows us a reimagining of what the Iraqi people would have been able to see of their history in present day Numaniyah, Iraq, the day before it was destroyed. Notably and importantly, this includes those gaps which Rakowitz marks with labels; whether they are whole relief panels that are missing, or cut-off heads and pieces reflected in Rakowitz’s use of black spaces on the recreated reliefs, the effect of Rakowitz’s project is multitudinous. He shows both the damage done by colonial powers, the missing and lost history that was surreptitiously taken in the empty spaces and the spaces filled in black on the panels, as well as, of course, what has gone to dust because of ISIS in the reappearance of the panels themselves. Because of the enormity of what “The invisible enemy should not exist” series sets out to do, it will continue on for decades longer and as Rakowitz has said himself, it will, in all likelihood, outlive both himself and his studio—as all the great cultural relics do.

Michael Rakowitz (b.1973) is an Iraqi-American artist working at the intersection of problem-solving and troublemaking. His work has appeared in venues worldwide including dOCUMENTA (13), P.S.1, MoMA, MassMOCA, Castello di Rivoli, Palais de Tokyo, the 16th Biennale of Sydney, the 10th and 14th Istanbul Biennials, Sharjah Biennial 8, Tirana Biennale, National Design Triennial at the Cooper-Hewitt, Transmediale 05, FRONT Triennial in Cleveland, and CURRENT:LA Public Art Triennial. He has had solo projects and exhibitions with Creative Time, Tate Modern in London, The Wellin Museum of Art, MCA Chicago, Lombard Freid Gallery and Jane Lombard Gallery in New York, SITE Santa Fe, Galerie Barbara Wien in Berlin, Rhona Hoffman Gallery in Chicago, Malmö Konsthall, Tensta Konsthall, and Kunstrraum Innsbruck. He is the recipient of the 2020 Nasher Prize; the 2018 Herb Alpert Award in the Arts; a 2012 Tiffany Foundation Award; a 2008 Creative Capital Grant; a Sharjah Biennial Jury Award; a 2006 New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship Grant in Architecture and Environmental Structures; the 2003 Dena Foundation Award, and the 2002 Design 21 Grand Prix from UNESCO. He was awarded the Fourth Plinth commission (2018-2020) in London’s Trafalgar Square. From 2019 - 2020, a survey of Rakowitz’s work traveled from Whitechapel Gallery in London, to Castello di Rivoli Museo d’Arte Contemporanea in Torino, to the Jameel Arts Centre in Dubai. Rakowitz is represented by Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago; Jane Lombard Gallery, New York; Barbara Wien Galerie, Berlin; Pi Artworks, Istanbul; and Green Art Gallery, Dubai. He lives and works in Chicago.

Objects and reliefs built with the assistance of Maryam Faridani, J. Michael Ford, Erin Hayden, Elnaz Javanidizaji, Frances Lee, Wen Liu, Talal Al Najjar, Annie Raccuglia, Nick Raffel, Jeff Robinson, Deniz Turkoglu, and Zespo.

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