

Details of debut Michael Rakowitz survey revealed

Michael Rakowitz

4 June 2019 – 25 August 2019

#MichaelRakowitz

Enthralling environments tell gripping tales that haunt buildings and objects, revealing the utopian aspirations and the disasters of modern times, in this debut survey of internationally renowned Iraqi-American artist **Michael Rakowitz** (b.1973).

Premiering Rakowitz's most important projects from two decades, eight multifaceted installations draw on architecture, cultural artefacts, cuisine and geopolitics from 750BC to today. Whitechapel Gallery's headline exhibition for summer 2019 coincides with the display in London of the artist's Lamassu sculpture for the Fourth Plinth, part of his epic and ongoing attempt to recreate every cultural artefact lost or destroyed during the Iraq war.

Iwona Blazwick, Director, Whitechapel Gallery and co-curator of the exhibition, says: "From the Assyrian winged bull he placed in Trafalgar Square to the stone books he had carved from the ruins of Afghanistan's Bamiyan Buddhas, sculptor, detective and some time cook Michael Rakowitz turns the disasters of war into beacons of knowledge and hope."

Rhythmically rising and falling, an inflatable tower block opens the exhibition. *Dull Roar* (2005) is based on the 1950s American Pruitt-Igoe housing complex. Built to give people 'sun, space and greenery', it descended into a racially segregated conflict zone and was later detonated, the rubble carted off for use as landfill for luxury homes. Opposite stands a model of Vladimir Tatlin's unrealised utopian tower. *White man got no dreaming* (2008) was made in collaboration with an Aboriginal community in Sydney whose dwellings had been condemned, using materials from their crumbling homes. The project was part of a successful campaign for new housing and typifies the interaction with communities at the heart of Rakowitz's work.

Creativity from destruction characterises the emotionally charged installation *What dust will rise?* (2012). Working with artisans in Afghanistan, Rakowitz carved stone books from the ruins of the Bamiyan Buddhas, two 6th century monumental statues destroyed by the Taliban in 2001 to global outcry. Each sculptural volume is informed by, and a monument to, books destroyed in World War II.

An ardent Beatles fan, Rakowitz discovered their last concerts were to be in the Arab World. In *The Breakup* (2010 - ongoing) he presents Beatles band ephemera to superimpose the story of their break up over the Arab-Israeli conflict and the collapse of Pan-Arabism.

Floating across the floor and walls nearby is a flotilla of plaster casts and rubbings taken from the Art Nouveau facades of 1900s Istanbul. *The flesh is yours, the bones are ours* (2015) pays tribute to the artistry of Istanbul's Armenian craftsmen who shaped the city's facades but suffered persecution and exile.

Press Release

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Life-sized recreations of mural reliefs formerly located at the Northwest Palace of Nimrud and destroyed by ISIS in 2015 are included amongst other objects created over the course of a decade for ongoing project, *The invisible enemy should not exist* (2007 – ongoing). In the aftermath of the US invasion of Iraq thousands of archaeological artefacts were stolen or destroyed. Rakowitz remakes them from packaging such as date syrup cans, fusing pragmatism with poetry to illuminate lost histories. This use of material references the way war and sanctions have decimated the date industry in Iraq, once a lucrative export second only to oil. To coincide with the exhibition *A House With A Date Palm Will Never Starve*, a cookbook of date syrup recipes contributed by international chefs including Yotam Ottolenghi, Anna Jones, Claudia Roden, Anissa Helou, Nawal Nasrallah, Phillip Juma and Alice Waters is published by Plinth and Art Books.

The exhibition culminates with *The Visionaries*. In 2006 the artist quizzed the citizens of post-Soviet Budapest about how they would fill the many derelict building sites that dot their city 'like missing teeth'. Their visionary architecture is displayed as if floating in mid-air, ending the exhibition with a collectively envisioned future.

Notes to Editors

- The exhibition is organized in collaboration with Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rivoli - Torin
- Curated by Iwona Blazwick and Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, together with Habda Rashid at Whitechapel Gallery and Marianna Vecellio at Castello di Rivoli.
- It is accompanied by a fully-illustrated publication with a survey by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, an interview with Michael Rakowitz by Iwona Blazwick alongside essays by Habda Rashid, Nora Razian, Ella Shohat and Marianna Vecellio.
- The book includes a definitive exhibition history and anthology of key texts on the artist

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About Michael Rakowitz

Michael Rakowitz lives and works in Chicago. He is Professor at Chicago's Northwestern University. His work has been exhibited worldwide including dOCUMENTA (13), P.S.1 MoMA, MassMOCA, Castello di Rivoli, the 16th Biennale of Sydney, the 10th Istanbul Biennial, Sharjah Biennial 8, Tirana Biennale and Transmediale 05. He has had solo exhibitions at Tate Modern (London), Junstraum (Innsbruck) and MCA (Chicago). Rakowitz won the 2018 Fourth Plinth commission for London's Trafalgar Square and is presenting his sculpture from *The invisible enemy should not exist* (2007 – ongoing), until 2020.

Visitor Information

Opening times: Tuesday – Sunday, 11am – 6pm; Thursdays, 11am – 9pm

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