



Amherst College

Part of an Impossible Task: Michael Rakowitz *On View: August 27, 2024 — January 5, 2025*



MICHAEL RAKOWITZ. *AMERICAN GOLEM*, 2022

Found antiques, paper mache sculpture, granite, wood, metal base. Courtesy of the artist and Jane Lombard Gallery. Photo by Arturo Sanchez.

Part of an Impossible Task presents work by Michael Rakowitz that examines the role of cultural artifacts on how individuals and societies define power. **What have monuments meant to people in the past and what do they mean today? How can artists and viewers dismantle the heroic narratives associated with many historic monuments to inspire more nuanced readings of the past?**

This exhibition interrogates both history and its retelling through the artist's two bodies of work: Rakowitz's "reappearances" of panels from the Northwest Palace of Nimrud (Kalhu) after their destruction by ISIS in 2015, which are part of his series *The invisible enemy should not exist*, and works from his 2023 exhibition *The Monument, The Monster, and The Maquette*. Rakowitz's panels from Room H will be displayed near the Assyrian reliefs that Amherst College managed to acquire from the same palace

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Part of an Impossible Task will be transformed in Spring 2025, based on Rakowitz's ongoing research and deepening connections to Amherst College's collections. The continuation of this project at the Mead will open on January 28, 2025

in the mid-nineteenth century. The Mead's panels, and gaps marked by labels with provenance information and quotes, are evidence of a longer history of looting and damage to the palace, built by Ashurnasirpal II in the 9th Century BCE . Collectively, and through the careful research and sense of humor that characterizes Rakowitz's practice, the works expose the complexities inherent in discourses about monuments, and the destruction and displacement of artifacts. *Part of an Impossible Task* provokes us to think critically about museums, their collections, and their evolving role in society.

Selected Works from *Part of an Impossible Task*



Michael Rakowitz.
The Ballad of Special Ops Cody, 2017

Stop-motion video.
Courtesy of the artist and Rhona Hoffman Gallery.



Michael Rakowitz. *Monuments in Spolia 4*, 2022.

Pencil on Vellum. Courtesy of the artist and Jane Lombard Gallery. Photos by Arturo Sanchez.



Michael Rakowitz. *The invisible enemy should not exist (Room H, Northwest Palace of Nimrud), H-22*, 2021.

Middle Eastern food packaging and newspapers, glue, cardboard on wooden structures and labels.
Courtesy of the artist and Rhona Hoffman Gallery.

Artist Biography

Michael Rakowitz (b. 1973, Iraqi-American) is a multidisciplinary artist working at the intersection of problem-solving and troublemaking. Rooted in his cultural heritage, Rakowitz initiated projects such as *RETURN* (2004-ongoing) and *The invisible enemy should not exist* (2007-ongoing) to explore the displacement of cultural artifacts and people due to colonialism, geopolitical conflicts, and other forms of forced removal. His research-based art delves into the complexities inherent in various contemporary art discourses, exploring the meanings of these artifacts, deconstructing heroic narratives, and interrogating the purposes of museums in society. To address these weighty topics, the artist employs the unique appeal of everyday objects such as food wrapping paper to inspire unconventional approaches. His commitment to communities and social issues is also evident in his other projects, in particular *paraSITE* (1997-ongoing), which provides inflatable shelters for the homeless, or *Enemy Kitchen* (2003-ongoing), a collaborative cooking project that uses Iraqi food to bridge cultural divides and bring people together.

Rakowitz is Professor of Art Theory and Practice at Northwestern University. He received a bachelor's degree in Visual Arts from Purchase College, State University of New York, in 1995 and a master's degree from the Art, Culture, and Technology program at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1998. His works have been exhibited at various venues, including *DOCUMENTA* (13), Galerie Barbara Wien, P.S.1, MoMA, MassMOCA, Whitechapel Gallery, and the National Design Triennial at Cooper-Hewitt. He currently lives and works in Chicago.

