

MICHAEL RAKOWITZ:
The Invisible Enemy Should Not Exist
(Room Z, Northwest Palace of Nimrud)
November 2 – December 21, 2018

Reception for the artist:
Friday, November 2, 5 – 7:30 pm



Rhona Hoffman is pleased to present the gallery's third solo exhibition with Michael Rakowitz. Continuing the artist's ongoing project *The Invisible Enemy Should Not Exist*, the exhibition features a representation of the *Northwest Palace of Nimrud's Room Z*, which was destroyed by ISIS in 2015. Also on view is the related video *The Ballad of Special Ops Cody* from 2017.

The gallery's architecture has been transformed into the layout of *Room Z* in King Ashurnasirpal II's 9th century BC palace (near present-day Mosul in northern Iraq), which stood uncovered as a powerful testament to the Assyrian Golden Age from its 1854 excavation by British archaeologists until its tragic destruction in 2015. Working with a team of assistants, Michael Rakowitz has reconstructed the monumental limestone reliefs that once lined the palace walls with depictions of *apkallu* or winged guardians with human heads, who hold offerings of pollen and young date fronds, beneath cuneiform extolling the King's greatness. *Room Z* appears as it stood at the time of its untimely demise with only seven of thirteen panels present. Michael Rakowitz recalls the previous removal of six panels, now located in collections of Western museums, by leaving a blank space and museum label showing those reliefs' provenance. Thus acknowledging the continued history of displacement in Iraq, Michael Rakowitz creates what he calls a palimpsest of different moments of removal.

Unlike the three millennia old stone, the artist's chosen materials are contemporary Middle Eastern newspapers and packaging from northern Iraqi foods like date cookies and date syrup. For Michael Rakowitz, the salvage of these vulnerable materials speaks to the human, economic, and ecological catastrophes wrought by the Iraq War and its aftermath. The vibrant color scheme references archaeologists' understanding of the original appearance of the panels. *Room Z* is the latest chapter in Michael Rakowitz's project *The Invisible Enemy Should Not Exist*, which aims to reconstitute the artifacts stolen from the National Museum of Iraq in the aftermath of the US invasion in 2003 and the continued desire to destroy Mesopotamian cultural heritage. Since 2007, Michael Rakowitz has reconstructed more than 700 monuments and artifacts, most prominently a majestic Lamassu destroyed by ISIS in Nineveh, which currently stands in London's Trafalgar Square as the Mayor of London's Fourth Plinth commission (2018-2020).

The Ballad of Special Ops Cody was produced on the occasion of Rakowitz's solo exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago in 2017. In the stop-motion animation, an action figure voiced by a veteran of the Iraq War confronts Mesopotamian votive statues inside the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago. The video rearticulates a 2005 incident wherein Iraqi insurgents staged a hostage video using a souvenir action figure, Special Ops Cody. Here, the figure offers the statues liberation, urging them to leave their open vitrines and go back to their homes. Using sculpture and film, Michael Rakowitz unites people across cultures in seeing the irreplaceable loss that occurs when we disregard each others' humanity.

RHONA HOFFMAN GALLERY

The artist would like to thank Jean M. Evans, PhD, Chief Curator and Deputy Director, Oriental Institute Museum, and Kiersten Neumann, PhD, Curator, Oriental Institute Museum, University of Chicago.

Reliefs built with the assistance of Yani Aviles, Daniel Baird, J. Michael Ford, Erin Hayden, Frances Lee, Noël Morical, Annie Raccuglia, and Jeff Robinson.

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Michael Rakowitz (b. 1973, New York) is an Iraqi-American conceptual artist who lives and works in Chicago. His work has been exhibited in venues around the globe, including dOCUMENTA (13), The Museum of Modern Art, MoMA PS1, MASS MoCA, 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 in London, Kunstraum Innsbruck, and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. In 2019, Rakowitz will present a solo exhibition at REDCAT in Los Angeles, a major retrospective at Castello di Rivoli in Turin and at the Whitechapel Gallery in London, and will participate in the Sharjah Biennial 14. Michael Rakowitz won the 2018 Fourth Plinth commission and is presenting a monumental work from *The Invisible Enemy Should Not Exist* in London's Trafalgar Square. For the inaugural FRONT International: Cleveland Triennial for Contemporary Art (2018), Michael Rakowitz conceived a city-wide participatory project *A Color Removed*, which he conceived in response to the shooting of Tamir Rice by Cleveland police in 2014.

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