

Michael Rakowitz

The Monument, The Monster, and The Maquette

May 6 – June 18, 2022

The Monument, the Monster and the Maquette comprises new work from Michael Rakowitz. An artist who often works in public space interrogating urbanism, architecture and memory, Rakowitz's two new sculptures expose the relationships between monuments in the US that have been removed and those that remain.

The word monument is derived from the Latin verb *monere*, meaning "to remind," "to advise," and "to warn." It is from *monere* that we also get words like *demonstrate*, to show something; *remonstrate*, to make a forcefully reproachful protest; and *monster*. Monsters have functioned allegorically throughout history, often sent from above as a warning to humankind.

America's public spaces are occupied by markers that function less as memorials than as warnings, sculpting centuries of settler colonialism and white supremacy. Looking closely at the history of these monuments, it becomes clear that artists like Henry M. Shady, who designed the Ulysses S. Grant Memorial in Washington, DC, and the recently removed Robert E. Lee Monument in Charlottesville, Virginia, created work valorizing both sides of the American Civil War. What does it mean that the same pair of hands made these two works, or that the same foundry, Roman Bronze Works in New York City, supplied these sculptures to the North and the South? Does a shadow of the removed sculpture exist in the one that remains? What keeps one sculpture standing while another is melted down?

As part of his research, Rakowitz has collected small pieces by these and other historical artists, foundries and quarries, originally made for American homes. Cobbling them together, he forms American Golem, a monstrous figure of mismatched parts, wrapped in written truths and facts that point to the reckonings that need to happen in private spaces, commensurate with the struggles currently unfolding in public¹.

¹The word "golem" appears in the Old Testament as *golmi*, meaning "raw" material, suggesting that humans are always unfinished. Stories from the Middle Ages describe a being fashioned from clay or mud for the purpose of protecting the Jews of Prague or Chelm from antisemitic attacks. Inscribing the word *emet*, meaning "truth" in Hebrew, on the golem's forehead activated the monster. Crossing out one letter changed the word to *mét*, meaning "dead," and caused deactivation.

A wooden bell form used by a foundry that supplied the Southern states with church bells, many of which were eventually melted down to become Confederate cannons, embodies the creature's torso and recalls the plinths of so many public monuments. Jeffersonian mantelpieces, which would have displayed many of these objects in American living rooms, shape the beast's legs, referencing the Arch of Janus in Rome and culminating in wooden lion's feet from furniture sourced from antique stores in the American South.

An inflatable sculpture, Behemoth, invokes the redacted monuments shrouded in black tarps in cities like Charlottesville and Chicago. Perpetually rising and falling, it suggests the ongoing cruelty of deferral and debate around the removal of these monuments, and the desire to preserve them instead of the communities that continue to fight for liberation.

The Monument, the Monster and the Maquette was researched and built with the assistance of Annie Raccuglia, Nick Raffel, Derek Sutfin/Gravity Exhibitions, and Landmark Creations. With deepest gratitude to Reevah Agarwaal, Julia Birka-White, Kerry Gaertner Gerbracht, Ben Gill, Robert Chase Heishman, Rhona Hoffman, Anastasia Karpova-Tinari, M. Carmen Lane, Frederic Rakowitz, Richard Rakowitz, Grace Schwartz, Elise Seigenthaler, Erin L. Thompson, Lori Waxman, Renée Sunny, and Jude Nissim

Michael Rakowitz (b. 1973, Long Island, NY) 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 Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, 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 Kunstraum Innsbruck, and Waterfronts - England's Creative Coast. 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 2018-2020 Fourth Plinth commission 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. Upcoming solo exhibition venues include Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago; Galerie Barbara Wien, Berlin; Stavanger Art Museum, Norway; and Green Art Gallery, Dubai. He was recently granted a commission for a public project on the topic of Archaeology and Migration Flows for the Municipality of The Hague. Rakowitz lives and works in Chicago.