

Ruth and Elmer Wellin Museum of Art  
Hamilton College

# WELLIN

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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**MICHAEL RAKOWITZ: NIMRUD AT THE WELLIN MUSEUM OF ART AT HAMILTON COLLEGE PRESENTS ALL NEW WORK, ON VIEW FOR THE FIRST TIME**

**The Exhibition Has Been Extended through June 18, 2021  
By Appointment for the Hamilton College Community and Virtually for the General Public**



Installation view of *Michael Rakowitz: Nimrud* exhibition at the Ruth and Elmer Wellin Museum of Art at Hamilton College (October 19, 2020 – June 18, 2021) Photograph by John Bentham. Courtesy of the Wellin Musuem of Art.

**Clinton, NY—***Michael Rakowitz: Nimrud* continues at the Wellin Museum of Art at Hamilton College through June 18, 2021, featuring all new work, including a major commission created for the exhibition. Using Arab-language newspapers and wrappers from food products imported from the Middle East, Rakowitz, an Iraqi-American visual artist (b. New York, 1973) is recreating Room H from the Northwest Palace of the ancient Assyrian city of Nimrud (Kalhu), constructed by Ashurnasirpal II between 883 and 859 BCE and first excavated by British archaeologist Austen Henry Layard between 1845 and 1851. The exhibition is curated by Katherine Alcauskas, Chief Curator at the Chazen Museum of Art at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, and former Collections Curator and Exhibitions Manager at the Wellin Museum.

Says Tracy L. Adler, Johnson-Pote Director of the Wellin Museum, “Although access to our physical space is limited for safety reasons, we are able to share the exhibition with our online community through a newly commissioned video, a virtual tour, and other dedicated programming. I look forward to furthering the

mission of the Wellin during this difficult time, examining complicated and challenging social issues through the lens of art and the voices of contemporary artists, and building community through open dialogue.”

Accompanying Room H is an installation of sculptures created for this exhibition reproducing lost, destroyed, missing, or at-risk artifacts from the Middle East.

Explains Alcauskas, “Rakowitz’s work implicates the museum as a colonial entity and calls attention to the paradoxical mission of preserving damaged and incomplete objects, arresting their function and immobilizing their historic context. It also underscores the different treatment granted to refugees versus ‘treasures’ of art history; whereas museums across the United States might readily accept artifacts into their collections, paradoxically immigrants are not as welcome in the country itself.”

Due to the COVID-19 lockdown, and delays in the production of the new work, the installation of Room H will be completed in phases, and its completion is expected in the spring of 2021. New panels will be arriving at the Wellin Museum in February 2021.

#### **More information about *Michael Rakowitz: Nimrud***

In his recent work, Rakowitz has focused on the Northwest Palace at Nimrud (Kalhu) in his ongoing effort to complicate the narrative around cultural patrimony, especially as it pertains to the Middle East. In the mid-nineteenth century, nearly 400 of the 600 Assyrian reliefs were removed from what is now Iraq and were acquired by private collections and public institutions throughout the Western world, such as the British Museum, London; Musée du Louvre, Paris; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Brooklyn Museum; Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven; and numerous small liberal arts colleges in the northeastern United States, including Hamilton College (a stele now in the Wellin’s collection entered the College’s collection during that period).

Part of a reception suite, Room H was originally lined with seven-foot-tall carved-stone reliefs, including winged male figures and an inscription detailing the ruler’s many achievements. For this exhibition, Rakowitz has re-created only those panels that were in situ in Room H when the remains of the palace were destroyed by the jihadist group the Islamic State (ISIS) in 2015. Areas from which the reliefs had already been removed by 19th century archaeologists are left blank, resulting in what Rakowitz calls “a palimpsest of different moments of removal.”

In various series created over the last twenty years, Rakowitz has presented physical objects and their representations (from ancient artifacts to imported dates) as a metaphor for the displacement of Iraqis and their attendant culture, especially in periods of political conflict. Past projects have explored this issue in the contexts of World War II, the Six-Day War, and the Iraq War, for example.

Says Alcauskas, “Addressing themes such as the fraught relationship between preservation and destruction, the nature of authenticity, and historical archaeological practices that have filled museum storerooms throughout Europe and the U.S., Rakowitz reacts not only to our present moment but also to the centuries, if not millennia, of looting of ancient sites—both legally sanctioned and illegal, often occurring in times of foreign occupation.”

To make his vivid reproductions of the ancient carved-stone reliefs, Rakowitz uses Arabic-language newspapers and packaging for food products imported from the Middle East to the U.S. and sold in local Middle Eastern grocery stores in Chicago, where the artist lives and works. This material references the panels’ original bright colors while acknowledging, particularly in the inclusion of modern Arabic writing, the current-day Middle Eastern populations that exist both in and outside of Iraq, in the diaspora. Room H—one of several the artist has made to date—is part of an ongoing series entitled “The invisible enemy

should not exist.” (The name of the series is a literal translation of *Aj-ibur-shapu*, the main processional avenue that led to ancient Babylon.)

Accompanying Room H at the Wellin is a selection of never before exhibited small-scale sculptures from the same series, which the artist began in 2007 and continues to expand upon. The sculptures replicate artifacts stolen from the National Museum of Iraq in Baghdad during the U.S. invasion in April 2003—an event Rakowitz considers a global tragedy on account of the loss of an important shared heritage. Alongside those works that “reappear” looted artifacts are examples of a newer but related subseries entitled *May the Obdurate Foe Not Be In Good Health*—an alternative translation of *Aj-ibur-shapu*—based on art objects from ancient Damascus and Palmyra that have been stolen or destroyed during the ongoing civil war in Syria or are in danger of being lost. The artist has begun to call these sculptures “reappearances” rather than reconstructions, “ghosts” rather than simply replacements of the originals in order to call attention to their irreplaceability.

Adds Adler, “Michael Rakowitz is a global figure in the art world whose work addresses history, politics, and cultural heritage, particularly as it relates to the Middle East. By recreating the monuments and artifacts that have been removed and stolen from the region, he confronts the reality of this removal and the loss it evinces. As a teaching museum, the Wellin Museum aims to have difficult and timely conversations, and to complicate the narrative around what it means to societies when their identities are disassociated from the spiritual and cultural artifacts that define them. We need to recognize the role that museums historically played as storehouses of cultural objects imported from around the world and implement real change in our policies and objectives. As museums seek to redefine themselves in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as spaces of engagement and education, there is a necessary reckoning associated with that transformation.”

### Sponsorship

Room H was commissioned by the Ruth and Elmer Wellin Museum of Art at Hamilton College. It was underwritten by a grant from the Daniel W. Dietrich '64 Fund for Innovation in the Arts. The Ruth and Elmer Wellin Museum of Art's programs are made possible, in part, by the Daniel W. Dietrich '64 Arts Museum Programming Fund; the Johnson-Pote Museum Director Fund; the John B. Root '44 Exhibition Fund; the Edward W. and Grace C. Root Endowment Fund; and the William G. Roehrick '34 Lecture Fund.

### About Michael Rakowitz

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 in visual studies from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1998. Exhibitions of his work have been organized by the Malmö Konsthall, Sweden (2019); Whitechapel Gallery, London (2019); Castello di Rivoli (2019); and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (2017). In 2018, Rakowitz was awarded the commission for a public project on Trafalgar Square’s Fourth Plinth, where he displayed his re-creation—made from cans of Iraqi date syrup—of an ancient Assyrian *lamassu* figure that was destroyed by the Islamic State in 2015. His full CV is available on Jane Lombard Gallery's website here: <http://www.janelombardgallery.com/michael-rakowitz>

### Video

An exhibition video produced by filmmaker Brett Novak is available on the Wellin Museum’s website at <https://www.hamilton.edu/wellin/exhibitions/detail/michael-rakowitz-nimrud>

### Publication

*Michael Rakowitz: Nimrud* will be accompanied by a fully illustrated, hard-cover publication, featuring essays by Katherine Alcauskas, Chief Curator at the Chazen Museum of Art at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, and former Collections Curator and Exhibitions Manager at the Wellin Museum; as well as writer and arts organizer Rijin Sahakian, and an interview with the artist. The book will be published by the Wellin

Museum of Art at Hamilton College, and will be available in Fall 2021, to allow for the completed exhibition to be photographed and included in the book.

### **How to Experience the Exhibition**

To experience the exhibition virtually, visit the exhibition page on the Wellin's website at <https://www.hamilton.edu/wellin/exhibitions/detail/michael-rakowitz-nimrud>, where a wide range of videos, virtual tours, talks, and other resources are available.

The Wellin Museum of Art at Hamilton College is open by appointment only, for members of the Hamilton College community (students, faculty, and staff), with health and safety protocols in place. The new policies are devised to protect staff and visitors, following the health and safety guidelines of the State of New York and the CDC, and in careful compliance with Hamilton College and its COVID-19 Task Force.

The college has implemented a multi-layered system to minimize health risks, including physical distancing, wearing face coverings, extensive cleaning and disinfecting of common spaces, and other measures.

### **About the Ruth and Elmer Wellin Museum of Art**

Designed by Machado Silvetti, the Ruth and Elmer Wellin Museum of Art at Hamilton College opened in October 2012. Through its exhibitions, public programs, and educational outreach, the Museum promotes interdisciplinary approaches and the cross-fertilization of concepts and ideas vital to a liberal arts education. The Museum works with emerging and established artists and collaborates with Hamilton students and faculty to develop programming exploring a wide range of disciplines. The Museum features a 27-foot-high visible archive, 6,200 square feet of exhibition space, and other amenities that foster common exchange and learning. [www.hamilton.edu/wellin](http://www.hamilton.edu/wellin)

### **Social Media**

Join the conversation on social media by tagging @wellinmuseum and using the hashtags #WellinMuseum and #RakowitzWellin when posting.

### **Media Contact**

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