

The New York Times

Michael Rakowitz Wins Nasher Prize for Sculpture

The prize comes with \$100,000, which Mr. Rakowitz would use for his continued work centering on Iraq.

By Peter Libbey

Published Sept. 4, 2019 Updated Sept. 8, 2019



Michael Rakowitz's "The invisible enemy should not exist (Lamassu)" here on display in Trafalgar Square in London, is a re-creation of a sculpture destroyed by ISIS.
via Michael Rakowitz

Michael Rakowitz, a Chicago-based artist dedicated to resurrecting the past and drawing attention to the neglected, has been awarded the 2020 Nasher Prize, the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas announced on Wednesday. As a part of the award, which honors a living artist for their contributions to

sculpture, he will receive \$100,000.

“There’s a part of me that is simultaneously grateful and really happy about it, but then there’s another part of me that hopes that, one way or another, I can earn this someday,” Mr. Rakowitz said in an interview. The beginning of his career in the late-1990s, he added, “doesn’t feel like long ago at all.”

Jeremy Strick, the director of the Nasher Sculpture Center, said in a statement that Mr. Rakowitz’s work “wrestles in unique and revelatory ways with many of the complex questions of history, heritage and identity that are so much at the forefront of contemporary culture and politics.” By rigorously exploring the history of materials and objects, he added, Mr. Rakowitz “weaves dense webs of meaning in distinct bodies of work rich with insight and surprise.”

For an artist whose projects, including the “paraSITE” series and the ongoing “The invisible enemy should not exist,” often go on for decades, the recognition and financial support that comes with the prize is particularly important. “An award like this allows me to continue to make these works,” Mr. Rakowitz said. “It allows me to go on.”

The benefits, he explained, also extend beyond that: “There’s also the ability to be able to support, in whatever small way I can, the different community organizations and the different activist groups I engage with in my work.”

He’s aware, too, of the impact that the award has on the team of assistants he works with. “It’s nice to be able to know that this can continue for another year or so without feeling an uncertainty about where the support might come from,” he said.

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Mr. Rakowitz is currently working on a continuation of his “The invisible enemy should not exist” project. For that work, he and his team are artistically reconstructing pieces of the Northwest Palace at Nimrud (an archaeological site in Northern Iraq) that were destroyed by the Islamic State, also known as ISIS and ISIL, in 2015.

In February Mr. Rakowitz withdrew from the 2019 Whitney Biennial as an act of protest against the involvement of Warren B. Kanders, a museum vice chairman whose company, Safariland Group, produces equipment for law enforcement agencies and the military. Mr. Kanders stepped down from the board in July.

Mr. Rakowitz’s reconstructions of bas-reliefs and other related objects from Room G of the palace will go on display at the Malmo Konsthall in Sweden in September. “There’s a huge Iraqi population there and they’re already planning community meetings and banquets to happen within that space,” he said.

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A version of this article appears in print on Sept. 8, 2019, Section C, Page 3 of the New York edition with the headline: Michael Rakowitz Wins Nasher Sculpture Prize