

# Press Release

## Nasher Sculpture Center Announces Michael Rakowitz as Winner of the 2020 Nasher Prize

*Chicago Artist Receives \$100,000 in Recognition of Outstanding Contributions to Sculpture*

Dallas, TX (September 4, 2019) – The Nasher Sculpture Center announces American artist Michael Rakowitz as the recipient of the 2020 Nasher Prize. Now in its fifth year, the Nasher Prize is an international award for sculpture, established to honor a living artist who elevates the understanding of sculpture and its possibilities. Rakowitz will be presented with an award designed by Renzo Piano, architect of the Nasher Sculpture Center, at a ceremony in Dallas on April 4, 2020.

Since his career began in the late 1990s, Michael Rakowitz’s dynamic body of work has involved intensive research, resulting in an array of objects, environments, films, and publications that seek to reclaim, reposition or refocus complicated aspects of material and cultural histories or events. He has especial interest in refugee and migrant populations, particularly from the Middle East. Often durational in nature, his projects frequently enlist the participation of collaborators or the public to create objects or events, making the work as much participatory as it is material.

“In Michael Rakowitz, the Nasher Prize jury has selected a laureate whose 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,” says Director Jeremy Strick. “Interrogating objects and materials—their history and associations—Rakowitz weaves dense webs of meaning in distinct bodies of work rich with insight and surprise.”

Rakowitz’s earliest works established his place within conversations about art’s possibilities as a material and conceptual spur for social change. In 1997, he developed the first examples of his ongoing series *paraSITE*, custom-built, inflatable shelters designed for and in collaboration with homeless individuals. By attaching to the exterior intake vents of a building’s heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems, the small provisional structures allow the warm air leaving the building to simultaneously inflate and heat the personal shelter. In addition, the structures made visible the enduring presence of homelessness at a time when cities were using architectural barriers and new laws to limit the homeless population’s access to public space. More than 90 *paraSITE* structures have been made and distributed in cities including Boston and Cambridge, MA, New York City, Baltimore, Ljubljana, Berlin and Chicago.

Following the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, Rakowitz’s work shifted to consider his own heritage as an American descendent of the Iraqi Jewish diaspora. His mother’s parents left Iraq when the country’s Jewish population began to face discrimination and violence in the early 1940s, eventually settling in New York. Rakowitz began to investigate both his family’s history within the scope of recent events, as well as that of other immigrants, exiles, and refugees displaced by the Iraq War, most notably in a project called *RETURN* (2006) for which he reopened his grandfather’s former import/export business in a Brooklyn storefront, where packages and letters

could be sent and received from Iraq, and world-renowned Iraqi dates were imported to the US for the first time in nearly three decades. After the looting of the Iraq Museum shortly after the US invasion, Rakowitz also began to research the archeological artifacts and sites that were being destroyed or compromised due to political conflict.

His ongoing project *The invisible enemy should not exist*, begun in 2007, seeks to recreate the some 7000 artifacts that were looted or destroyed in the raiding of the National Museum of Iraq, Baghdad during the political turmoil after 2003, as well as artifacts decimated by ISIS in 2015 during a destructive spree on cultural sites and institutions throughout Iraq. For this, Rakowitz solicits the help of communities of people to remake each of the artifacts, life size, using images from the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute database. Using packaging from Middle Eastern food products and Arabic newspapers in combination with simple sculptural means, such as papier-mâché, the ancient objects are recreated as colorful, text- and image-laden sculptures that the artist has described as "ghosts".

Rakowitz's latest iteration of *The invisible enemy should not exist* is currently on view, until 2020, in London's Trafalgar Square as part of the city's Fourth Plinth commission. The work features a recreation of a *lamassu*—a figure resembling a winged bull with human features, which guarded the gates of the ancient city of Nineveh since 700 BCE, until it was destroyed in the 2015 destruction by ISIS. Rakowitz's lamassu is made using Iraqi date syrup cans, in reference to a substance that is not only a cornerstone of Iraqi cooking but had also been the second most important Iraqi product after oil and an industry that was nearly crushed due to embargoes against the country and the decimation of Iraq's date palms during the war and its aftermath.

In addition to his use of its packaging for *The invisible enemy should not exist*, food itself plays a key role in Rakowitz's work. Since 2003, he has maintained a project called *Enemy Kitchen*, an Iraqi cooking workshop presented in various places, including New York City public schools and a food truck in Chicago staffed by Iraqi refugees and émigrés as chief chefs and US combat veterans as sous-chefs and servers. "Preparing and then consuming this food opens up a new route through which Iraq can be discussed—in this case, through that most familiar of cultural staples: nourishment. Iraqi culture is virtually invisible in the US, beyond the daily news, and *Enemy Kitchen* seizes the possibility of cultural visibility to produce an alternative discourse," says the artist. He also recently published a cookbook of recipes, all utilizing Iraqi date syrup, called *A House with a Date Palm Will Never Starve*. With contributions from his mother and 40 prominent chefs, the cookbook extends the space of Rakowitz's reconstruction of the lamassu, built from 10,500 Iraqi date syrup cans, beyond the Fourth Plinth and into cupboards and bellies as a way to taste the sculpture.

Rakowitz is the fifth artist to receive the Nasher Prize; previous winners are Isa Genzken (2019), Theaster Gates (2018), Pierre Huyghe (2017) and Doris Salcedo (2016). The 2020 Nasher Prize jury that selected Rakowitz is comprised of **Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev**, Director of Castello di Rivoli, Italy; **Phyllida Barlow**, artist; **Pablo León de la Barra**, Curator at Large, Latin America, Guggenheim Museum; Lynne Cooke, Senior Curator, National Gallery of Art; **Briony Fer**, Professor, History of Art, University College London; **Yuko Hasegawa**, Chief Curator, Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo; **Hou Hanru**, Artistic Director, MAXXI, Rome; and **Sir Nicholas Serota**, Chair, Arts Council England.

"Michael Rakowitz's work bridges, on the one hand, social sculpture—what we've come to call relational aesthetics—and embodied *material* work on sculpture, with a great sense of humor and a great sense of empathy," says Nasher Prize juror Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev. "Michael's work is about healing and about how to take the problem of cultural destruction and transform that into a resource for a very optimistic vision of the reconstruction of our society."

In conjunction with the Nasher Prize, the Nasher Sculpture Center annually presents a series of public programs exploring the climate of contemporary sculpture. Called Nasher Prize Dialogues, the talks gather interdisciplinary luminaries to discuss the most compelling topics regarding contemporary sculpture. By galvanizing international discourse, Nasher Prize Dialogues are an apt extension of the Nasher Prize's mission to advocate for and advance a vital contemporary art form. The most recent talks have taken place in Copenhagen, Denmark in partnership with CHART; Reykjavik, Iceland in partnership with the Reykjavik Art Museum; in Glasgow, UK in partnership with The Common Guild and Glasgow International 2018; and in Dallas in partnership with The Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza.

The 2020 Nasher Prize is generously co-chaired by Nancy Carlson and Adriana Pareles who help garner support for the prize and its attendant programs, including the Nasher Prize Dialogues.

### **About Michael Rakowitz**

Michael Rakowitz was born in 1973 in Great Neck, New York; he lives and works in Chicago, Illinois and is professor of art theory and practice at Northwestern University. He studied at Purchase College, State University of New York, where he received a BFA in 1995 and at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, graduating with a Master of Science in Visual Studies in 1998. His recent retrospective opened at the Whitechapel Gallery, London, in 2019, traveling to Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rivoli-Torino and, in 2020 is scheduled to open at the Jameel Art Centre, Dubai. It was preceded by *Backstroke of the West*, a survey exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago in 2018.

He has exhibited in venues including dOCUMENTA(13), The Museum of Modern Art, New York; MoMA/PS1, New York; Tate Modern, London; MassMOCA; Castello di Rivoli; the 10th and 14<sup>th</sup> Istanbul Biennials; the Sharjah Biennials 8 and 14 ; the Tirana Biennale; and Transmediale 05. He was invited to exhibit in the 2019 Whitney Biennial but withdrew in protest of the museum's vice chairman, Warren G. Kanders, who is chief executive of a company that manufactures body armor and tear gas, before the Biennial's participating artists were announced; after additional protests by other artists and activists following the exhibition opening, Kanders resigned.

Rakowitz is the recipient of many awards and honors, including the 2018 Herb Alpert Award in Visual Arts, a 2012 Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Biennial Award, a 2008 Creative Capital Grant, the Sharjah Biennial Jury Award, a 2006 New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship Grant in Architecture and Environmental Structures, the 2003 Dena Foundations Award, and the 2002 Design 21 Grand Prix from UNESCO.

**For high resolution images, please follow this link:**

### **About the Nasher Sculpture Center**

Located in the heart of the Dallas Arts District and designed by architect Renzo Piano, the Nasher Sculpture Center is home to the Raymond and Patsy Nasher Collection, one of the finest collections of modern and contemporary sculpture in the world, featuring more than 300 masterpieces by Calder, de Kooning, di Suvero, Giacometti, Gormley, Hepworth, Kelly, Matisse, Miró, Moore, Picasso, Rodin, Serra, and Shapiro, among others. On view in the light-filled galleries and amid the garden grounds is a rotating selection of works from the Collection, as well as important exhibitions of modern and contemporary sculpture, including *Sightings*, a series of small-scale exhibitions and site-specific installations that explore new work by established and emerging artists. In addition to the indoor and outdoor gallery spaces, the Center contains an auditorium, education and research facilities, a cafe, and a store. For more information, visit [www.NasherSculptureCenter.org](http://www.NasherSculptureCenter.org).

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