

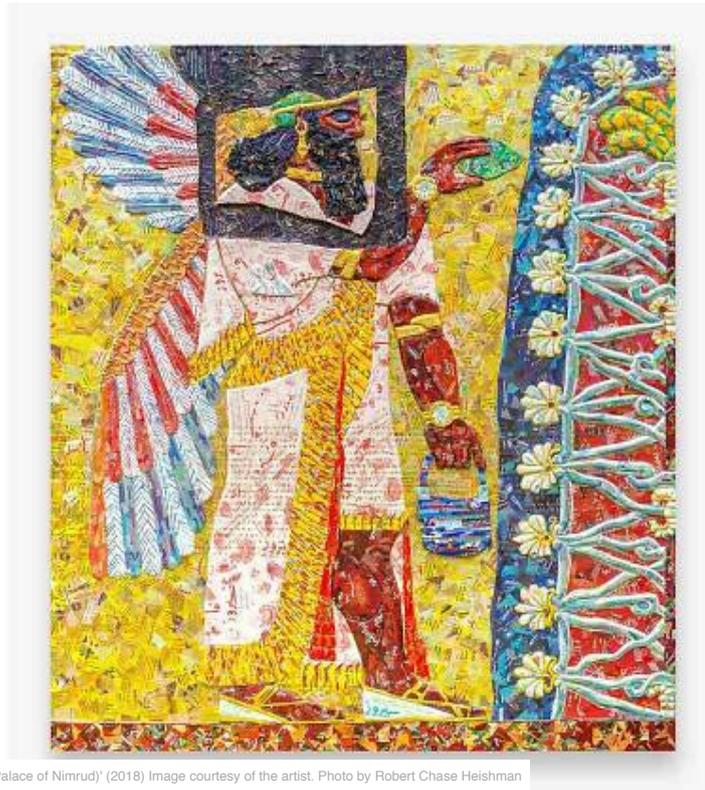
# Galerie Barbara Wien

Schöneberger Ufer 65 10785 Berlin [www.barbarawien.de](http://www.barbarawien.de)

Chris Waywell *Michael Rakowitz* review in: TimeOut, June 2019, <https://www.timeout.com/london/art/michael-rakowitz-review>

## Michael Rakowitz review

Art [@Whitechapel Gallery](#), Whitechapel  Until Sunday August 25 2019 ★★★★★



Michael Rakowitz 'The invisible enemy should not exist (NW Palace of Nimrud)' (2018) Image courtesy of the artist. Photo by Robert Chase Heishman

You might know Iraqi-American artist Michael Rakowitz from his current Fourth Plinth commission 'The Invisible Enemy Should Not Exist'. It's a recreation of a huge winged statue from the ancient city of Nineveh, destroyed by Daesh in 2015. Rakowitz's version, though, is no monolith: it's made of Middle Eastern wrapping paper and packaging materials, like a school papier-mâché project gone mad. Life goes on, it suggests: however wonkily. There's a lot of that kind of stuff in this show.

The first work you encounter is a grey inflatable tower block. It has a crude wooden viewing platform around it, so you can look at it *from all angles* (Rakowitz's MO). It wheezes upright, then detumesces. It's quite soothing. It's a model of Pruitt-Igoe, a notorious St Louis housing project that got so dangerously run down and violent that the authorities dynamited it in the 1970s. Its inclusion here initially seems tenuous: it's a terrible story of ghettoisation and neglect, if hardly unique. But Pruitt-Igoe was the work of architect Minoru Yamasaki and *he* went on to design the Twin Towers. It's typical Rakowitz: create something that seems a bit crass, then let the viewer uncover its complexity. He does something similar with 'What Dust Will Rise?' – Talmudic texts destroyed during WWII recreated from stone quarried in the Bamiyan Valley, where the Taliban famously blew up two monumental Buddhas in 2001. The twist is that the original books weren't destroyed by the Nazis, but by RAF bombing. For Rakowitz, explosive destruction punctuates history: it's up to us to try and piece together what it all means.

Things get considerably dafter with 'The Breakup', which parallels the release of 'Sgt Pepper' and the Arab-Israeli Six Day War, which happened within days of each other in 1967. Rakowitz assigns each of the Fab Four a player in the conflict (John is Egypt, Paul is Israel, George is Iraq and Ringo is – naturally – Jordan). It feels arbitrary and silly, till I realised – as a fellow Beatles nut – that I know tons about the internal power struggles of four blokes from Liverpool and almost nothing about a conflict that killed thousands of people and led to half a century of displacement, violence and suffering.

This is a show full of complicated ideas, histories and perspectives. It repays attention, but be warned: the one thing that it tells us is that we might not have all the time in the world.

By: Chris Waywell