

Based in Chicago, Iraqi-American artist Michael Rakowitz (b. 1973) makes work that explores recent contested social, political, and cultural histories. Drawing on personal experiences and research on these subjects, as well as history and popular culture, Rakowitz creates illustrated objects, installations, and performances that invite viewers to contemplate their complicit relationship to the political world around them, recognizing that hospitality and hostility are interlinked.

The artist's first-ever museum survey features early works, a new commission, and major installations, such as *Enemy Kitchen* (2003–ongoing), a pop-up food truck that serves Iraqi dishes made from recipes that Rakowitz and his mother collected through workshops and extensive community liaisons. Also on view are *Spoils* (2011), a project that saw the artist serve Iraqi date syrup and venison on Saddam Hussein's very own china, and *The invisible enemy should not exist* (2007–ongoing), a lifelong project to fabricate at full scale every single item looted from the Iraqi National Museum. The exhibition also includes a portion of Rakowitz's commission for Documenta 13, *What Dust Will Rise?* (2012), for which he worked with stone carvers to re-create items from the State Library of Hesse-Kassel that were lost in the 1941 fire of the Fridericianum, using stone quarried from the ruins of sixth-century sandstone Buddhas destroyed by the Taliban in 2001.

The title of the exhibition, *Backstroke of the West*, is a mistranslation of *Revenge of the Sith*, which was used for a Chinese bootleg version of the film and likely gleaned from a program such as Google Translate. The title speaks to Rakowitz's interest in translation as a means of traversing social and political boundaries as well as how popular culture can be used to access shared cultural narratives.

Collectively, this exhibition tells a story of restitution and reconstitution and positions Rakowitz as one of the most important artists of our time.

The exhibition is organized by Omar Kholeif, Manilow Senior Curator and Director of Global Initiatives at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. It is presented in the Bergman Family Gallery on the museum's second floor.

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