

Athens, 6 October 2025

## PRESS RELEASE

### ***Michael Rakowitz & Ancient Cultures***

### ***A Trilogy of Exhibitions Bridging Ancient Cultures and Contemporary Art***

**A collaboration between the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, the Acropolis Museum, the Ephorate of Antiquities of Athens, and NEON**

**Second part | A collaboration between the Acropolis Museum and NEON**

***Lamassu of Nineveh* (2018) | *Michael Rakowitz & Ancient Cultures***

**Curated by: Professor Nikolaos Chr. Stampolidis, General Director of the Acropolis Museum, and Elina Kountouri, Director, NEON**

**Acropolis Museum, Sculptural Installation | Outdoor Garden, west wing**

**6 October 2025 – 31 October 2026**

The Acropolis Museum and NEON Organization present the second part of the *Michael Rakowitz & Ancient Cultures trilogy*: Michael Rakowitz's *Lamassu of Nineveh* (2018), curated by the Professor Nikolaos Chr. Stampolidis, Director General of the Acropolis Museum, and Elina Kountouri, Director of NEON. It is a sculptural installation in the outdoor garden of the Acropolis Museum, on its west wing overlooking Mitseon Street.

The work is a major sculptural extension of Michael Rakowitz's ongoing series *The Invisible Enemy Should Not Exist* (2006-ongoing). The series consists of 'reappearances' of artefacts looted from the National Museum of Iraq in Baghdad following the U.S. invasion in 2003 or destroyed at other sites in its aftermath.

*The Lamassu of Nineveh* (2018) was originally commissioned for the Fourth Plinth in London's Trafalgar Square. Constructed from empty cans of Iraqi date syrup, the sculpture reconstructs the protective Assyrian deity, a Lamassu: a colossal 4.3-metre winged bull with a human face that once stood at the entrance of the Nergal Gate in ancient Nineveh. The original monument, dating from around 700 BCE, was destroyed in 2015 by ISIS, along with many other artefacts in the Mosul Cultural Museum.

The *Lamassu of Nineveh* (2018) installation – situated in the surroundings of the Acropolis Museum – brings the sculpture into immediate dialogue with multiple layers of history and memory: the archaeological excavation visible beneath the Museum, the sacred landscape of the Acropolis above, the modern city around it, and the contemporary architectural space of the Museum itself.

Rakowitz uses empty cans of Iraqi date syrup for his Lamassu installation. These cans represent the once-renowned Iraqi industry that was decimated, as well as the human, economic, and ecological devastation wrought by the Iraq wars and their aftermath. Through objects, Rakowitz refers to the people who live alongside them and to their stories. The Lamassu 'reappears' and continues its role as guardian in the past, present, and future.

The reverse of the Lamassu features a carved cuneiform inscription that was invisible to viewers because it was cemented to the wall of the Nergal Gate. Here, in its removed and displaced state, the cuneiform is exposed. It translates as: 'Sennacherib, king of the world, king of Assyria, had the (inner) and outer wall of Nineveh built anew and raised as high as mountain(s).'

The collaboration between the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, the Acropolis Museum, the Ephorate of Antiquities of Athens, and NEON is an in-depth conversation between contemporary works and ancient exhibits, highlighting eternal topics of cultural heritage, loss and restoration, survival, and the creation of culture. Greek antiquities and artefacts from the ancient civilizations of the southeastern Mediterranean and the Middle East converse with the multidimensional work of internationally acclaimed contemporary artist Michael Rakowitz, which lies at the heart of this project.

The trilogy's opening chapter, *Allspice / Michael Rakowitz & Ancient Cultures*, is hosted in the Acropolis Museum Temporary Exhibition Gallery until 31 October 2025.

The trilogy will culminate with an exhibition at the Old Acropolis Museum.

### Lecture

In the framework of the *Lamassu of Nineveh* exhibition, a lecture by Dr. Alda Benjamen titled *Heritage, Genocide and Memory* will be held on Monday, 6 October 2025, at 18:00 at the Auditorium 'Dimitrios Pantermalis' of the Acropolis Museum, with free admission.

According to Dr. Benjamen, *Lamassu* symbolizes glory while recounting a story of displacement, destruction, and recreation. It embodies the bonds between objects and people – their triumphs, struggles, and livelihoods – through food, art, writing, and memory. It survived the genocide aimed at destroying the ancient heritage and the connections it represents – connections to the past that are multilingual, religious, and cultural. *Lamassu's* recollection reflects the memory of a people and a community, along with the image of an invisible enemy, imaginary and terrible, but unreal.

Dr. Alda Benjamen (b. Kirkuk, Iraq) is an Assistant Professor of History at the University of Dayton, specializing in contemporary Middle Eastern history. Recently, she was an Avimalek Betyousef Faculty Fellow at the Department of History and Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of California (UC) Berkeley. Previously, she was a member of the John W. Kluge Center at the Library of Congress and a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Pennsylvania Museum and the Smithsonian. She has also served as research director of a U.S. Department of State-funded heritage conservation program focused on Iraq's marginalized communities, including Assyrians and Yazidis. Her book, *Assyrians in Modern Iraq: Negotiating Political and Cultural Space* (Cambridge University Press, 2022), is a study of the intellectual history of 20th-century Iraq, based on extensive primary research conducted in situ.

### Second part: A Collaboration between the Acropolis Museum and NEON

*Lamassu of Nineveh* (2018) | *Michael Rakowitz & Ancient Cultures*

Acropolis Museum, Sculptural Installation | Outdoor Garden of the Acropolis Museum, west wing

6 October 2025 – 31 October 2026

### Opening hours:

Monday 9:00–17:00

Tuesday–Wednesday–Thursday 9:00–20:00 \*\*\*

Friday 9:00–22:00

Saturday–Sunday 9:00–20:00

\*\*\* During winter months (November through March), on Tuesday– Wednesday – Thursday the Museum is open 9:00–17:00.

### Free entrance

Information: [neon.org.gr](http://neon.org.gr) & [theacropolismuseum.gr](http://theacropolismuseum.gr)

### NOTES TO EDITORS

Michael Rakowitz (b. 1973, Great Neck, New York, USA) is an Iraqi-American artist working at the intersection of problem-solving and trouble-making. Rakowitz explores the displacement of communities and cultural heritage caused by war and imperialism, activating everyday objects and employing unconventional approaches. He lives and works in Chicago, USA, and he is a Professor of Art Theory and Practice at Northwestern University, IL.

His work has been exhibited worldwide, including at dOCUMENTA (13); P.S.1; MoMA; and Tate Modern, among others. He was awarded the 2018–2020 Fourth Plinth commission in London's Trafalgar Square. From 2019 to 2020, a survey of Rakowitz's work traveled from Whitechapel Gallery in London to Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea in Torino, and to the Jameel Arts Centre in Dubai. He was recently granted a commission on the topic of Archaeology and Migration Flows for the Municipality of The Hague.

NEON is a nonprofit organization that works to bring contemporary culture closer to everyone. It is committed to broadening the appreciation, understanding, and creation of contemporary art in Greece and to the firm belief that this is a key tool for growth and development.

NEON, founded in 2013 by collector and entrepreneur Dimitris Daskalopoulos, breaks with the convention that limits the contemporary art

foundation of a collector to a single place. NEON's space is the city. It acts on a multitude of initiatives, spaces, and civic and social contexts. It seeks to expose the ability contemporary art has to stimulate, inspire, and affect the individual and society at large. NEON constructively collaborates with cultural institutions and supports the programs of public and private institutions to enhance increased access and inventive interaction with contemporary art.

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