

# Michael Rakowitz

Barbara Wien, Berlin

“The images you’re seeing on television, you are seeing over and over and over. It’s the same picture of some person walking out of some building with a vase... Is it possible that there were that many vases in the whole country?” This was Donald Rumsfeld speaking to chuckling reporters in the aftermath of the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The smug military-industrial punch line appears on a plate next to a papier-mâché model of one of the many — more than twenty it turns out — objects looted from Iraq museums during the “stuff happens” phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The vase is part of Michael Rakowitz’s wrenching, visually engrossing exhibition “The Invisible Enemy Should Not Exist,” which pays tribute to the late director of Baghdad’s Museum, D.G. Youkhanna, and includes text from interviews with the archeologist, biographical drawings and a soundtrack referencing his time in an incongruous music project, a hard-rock cover band called 99%.

An exhibition about the plunder of Iraq by an American artist, featuring low-fi replicas of Mesopotamian heritage with a cover version of Deep Purple’s “Smoke on the Water” wafting in the background, has all the ingredients for an aesthetic disaster on the scale of the invasion itself. However, Rakowitz’s attention to detail and moral awareness results in an experience that deftly modulates despair and defiance. The grandeur of the works he reproduces is anguishingly clear in his cardboard reconstructions, as in the sensuality of his rendering of the face of the so-called “Mona Lisa of Nimrud,” and in the vibrant dialogue of motion and colors in a stele depicting men battling lions. There is also a welcome acknowledgment of the complicity inherent in the display of looted works in a commercial space: one art market mirroring another more illicit market unleashed by neoliberal violence. Youkhanna may not have been able to reach his goal of recovering all of the lost works, but Rakowitz makes an honorable job of tracing the legacy he stewarded.

by William Kherbek

# Wild Style

Peres Projects, Berlin

Despite its title, this group exhibition felt sophisticated and refined, bringing together contemporary works with unidentified African artists from 200 BC to the present, and exploring depictions of the human figure. A combination of painting, sculpture, works on paper and a live new-media video stream provided an eclectic multimedia experience that reinforced the unique specificity of each medium.

The dialogue between Melike Kara’s painting *Untitled* (2016) and the terracotta sculpture *Male Figure* (first century BC to fifth century AD) saw vibrant hues of dark blue outlining cross-legged, crawling and crouching figures; these were counterbalanced by the ornate detail of the ancient sculpture, arm raised as if in prayer. A similar saturation of color was present in Donna Huanca’s *Apache Tears* (2016), in which oil, acrylic and pigment were combined on digitally printed canvas: gestural sweeps of cobalt blue buzzing with energy.

Picasso’s interest in ethnographic sculptures and his regular visits to the Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro comes to mind as an obvious reference. The turn of the twentieth century saw a fascination with African sculpture, and particularly African masks, which went on to inform the making of masterpieces such as Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger* (1907).

Standout works included Athena Papadopoulos’s painting *A Rupturing Cesspit, Boogie Woogie* (2016) — a bright red monochrome using hair dye, lipstick, nail polish and bleach to portray wild and wonderful images of scantily clad women, overlaid with hand-drawn caricatures and self-portraits of the artist herself. Cecile B. Evans’s *Working on What The Heart Wants* (2015) also saw sexy, idealized women meandering across the surface plane. Constructs of sexuality and shifting visions of beauty through time and over continents were conjured. Consisting of computer code that exists only online in a transitory cloud, the work was streamed directly into the gallery. From the first century up through Picasso and into the cloud: now that’s wild.

by Louisa Elderton

# Nathalie Du Pasquier

Kunsthalle Wien

Integrating thirty-five years of production in painting, sculpture, drawing and pattern design, Nathalie du Pasquier’s survey charts an exercise in object permanence. Compositions of simple household items like cups, plates, bottles, tools and motors are assembled with abstract geometric forms in repeated permutation, neutralizing their hierarchy. Left in their raw state or painted with solid colors and graphic patterns, the objects are turned into sculptures or models for paintings, and at times the process is even disassembled and reversed.

Pasquier, a founding member of the Milan-based Memphis group, is best known for her bright pattern designs, but had early ambitions as an architect. Both in dimension and form, her sculptures and still-life paintings resemble models for buildings. Rectilinear shapes, triangles, cones and circles are deftly stacked and balanced with respect to their gravitational pull — their final structures symphonic and stable. Simulating a city environment, four rooms display various aspects of her oeuvre. However, with the prevalence of decorative domestic objects like couches, tables, carpets and wallpapers, this city feels more like a sprawling network of interiors — perhaps a version of one of the artist’s drawings of unrealized homes, which are also on view.

While the majority of works go unnamed and undated, clear distinctions can be seen in Pasquier’s characteristic treatment of dreamscapes, painterly realism, geometric perspective, and shadow over time, alternating between the beauty of ghosts and reality. Her fascination with the transformative potential of objects is also present in the still-life paintings that include glass objects, which cause forms seen in their path to morph, accenting the shape-shifting and fracturing of vision via mediated materials.

Pasquier’s singular focus and the breadth of visual complexity she achieves through variation are invigorating. At what point did “decorative” become a dirty word in perpetuity, one wonders? Reclaiming the term within this exhibition, Pasquier proves that in fine art, the “decorative” can offer so much more.

by Arielle Bier

From top, clockwise:  
**Nathalie Du Pasquier**  
 o.T. (2000)  
 Courtesy of the Artist and  
 Exile Gallery, Berlin

“Wild Style,” installation view  
 at Peres Projects, Berlin  
 Courtesy of Peres  
 Projects, Berlin  
 Photography by  
 Andreas Gehrke

**Michael Rakowitz**  
 Seated Female statue  
 from Hatra (IM58086)  
 (Recovered, Missing,  
 Stolen Series) (2014)  
 Courtesy of the Artist and  
 Barbara Wien, Berlin  
 Photography by Nick Ash

