

BALTIC



14-18-NOW

WW1 CENTENARY ART COMMISSIONS

Media Release: June 2023

Michael Rakowitz: *The Waiting Gardens of the North*

15 July 2023 – 26 May 2024

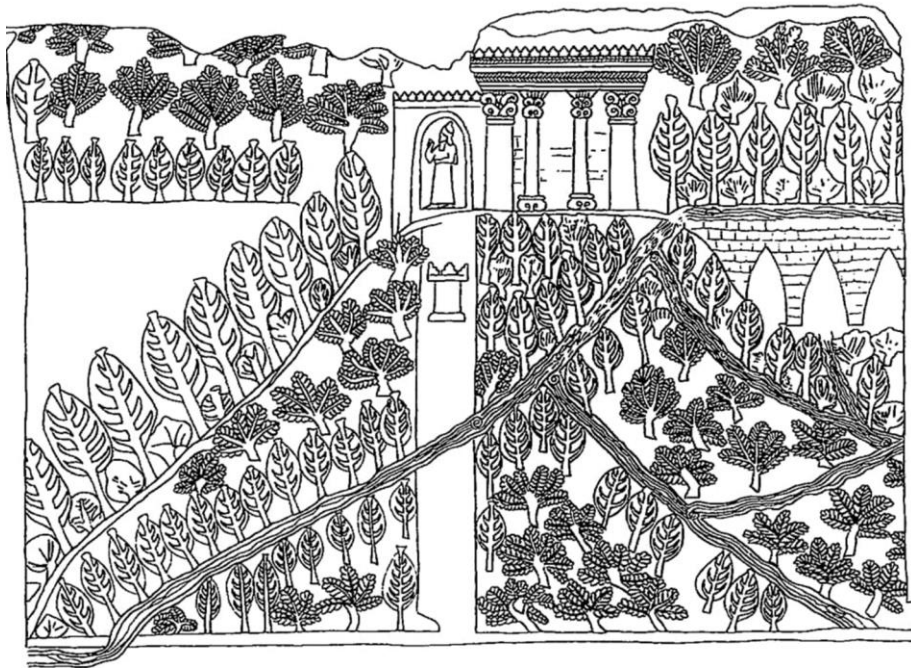
On 15 July 2023, Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead will open the exhibition *The Waiting Gardens of the North* by renowned Iraqi-American artist Michael Rakowitz. Commissioned by Baltic in partnership with the IWM 14-18 NOW Legacy Fund, this major project presents an evolving indoor garden tended by communities who have experienced forced displacement and are seeking refuge.

The IWM 14-18 NOW Legacy Fund is a national partnership programme of over 20 artist commissions dealing with war and conflict. Led by Imperial War Museums, the IWM 14-18 NOW Legacy Fund was created following the success of 14-18 NOW, the official UK arts programme for the First World War centenary. The £2.5 million commissioning programme has been made possible thanks to the success of Peter Jackson's critically acclaimed film *They Shall Not Grow Old*, co-commissioned by IWM and 14-18 NOW.

Rakowitz's exhibition has been conceived as a garden that will continue to grow and develop during its run. Alongside newly created artworks, the installation will present a collection of plants at different stages of their growing process. Born out of collaboration with residents of Gateshead and Newcastle who have experienced forced displacement, Rakowitz's garden amongst ruins acts as a metaphor for the overlapping histories of imperialism, war, displacement, trauma, and adaptation, that people, cultural objects, and plants carry with them. Collaboration with organisations such as The Comfrey Project, West End Refugee Service (WERS), Scotswood Garden, Dilston Physic Garden, Herb Hub, and Baltic's Language Café has been instrumental in the realisation and ongoing activation of the project.

The Waiting Gardens of the North is centered around a relief panel from the North Palace of Ashurbanipal (668–631 BCE) in Nineveh depicting the Assyrian gardens, which preceded the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. The original panel has been in the collection of the British Museum since 1856. The exhibition sees Rakowitz recreate this panel in a monumental scale, using his signature collage technique with food packaging, locally sourced from West Asian, South Asian and African grocery stores.

The panel shows a luxurious hillside landscape watered by an aqueduct. The installation extends beyond the two-dimensional representation in the panel, inspired by the layout of the Southwest Palace of Nineveh with its ruins now holding and growing plant life. The artist's interdisciplinary practice of excavation, cooking, sculpting, and activism is interwoven in the installation, highlighting the ways in which heritage can be both a source of identity and a site of conflict, particularly when cultural signifiers are looted, destroyed and erased.



Plants including date palms, olive trees, fig trees, quince trees, pear trees, and tamarisk, believed to have been planted in the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, will inhabit the space with their lifecycles made visible. Acting as an outside greenhouse, the garden's development will benefit from the Level 4 gallery's large ceiling well windows. The plants, herbs and flowers have been selected as they naturally grow in colonised countries of migrant communities who now live locally in NewcastleGateshead.

Building on Baltic's Gallery of Sanctuary status – awarded in February 2022 – which recognises its efforts in supporting sanctuary seekers, *The Waiting Gardens of the North* is developed in collaboration with community gardens and organisations that support people seeking sanctuary in the North East of the UK: the Comfrey Project, the West End Refugee Service (WERS), Scotswood Garden and Dilston Physic Garden.

A community of exchange will be built daily as gallery visitors encounter the friends and guests Baltic has invited and worked alongside to take care for and activate the living indoor garden. The installation will also host spaces for rest and sensory experiences such as distillation, tea-drying and smells from spices and herbs, and an area for community meals and activities.

The exhibition will be activated by monthly events including conversations, local walks, workshops, musical interventions, community meals, and a commission developed by Baltic's Young Producers. Baltic's Schools Programme will develop toolkits for primary and secondary schools inspired by the project. An after-school club will support newly arrived children to connect with their local peers through gardening and art. When the exhibition ends the plants will sprawl into Newcastle and Gateshead through a network of community and school gardens, as well as continuing to live in other areas of Baltic's building.

The Waiting Gardens of the North is developed in collaboration with key North East community organisations that promote horticultural knowledge and work with people seeking sanctuary:

The Comfrey Project: An organisation based in Gateshead that provides a safe, welcoming place for people who have fled conflict and persecution to improve their physical and mental wellbeing, develop new skills and put down roots in their new community through Social and Therapeutic Horticulture.

West End Refugee Service (WERS): A charity based in Newcastle that provides support and opportunities for people seeking asylum and refugees in Tyneside.

Scotswood Garden: Established in 1995, Scotswood Natural Community Garden is located on the site of a school playing now part of Newcastle College's facilities at the John Marley Centre. Growing areas were created in 2012 that are managed using Permaculture principles. The garden is recognised as a Land Project by the Permaculture Association, part of a network of community gardens that share expertise and encourage partnership working.

Dilston Physic Garden: Dilston is a living physic garden, a dedicated enterprise for education and scientific research on the use of medicinal plants for health, medicine and the mind. The garden was created 25 years ago on former pastureland on the south bank of the Tyne Valley nestled above the flowing Dyvel's Water.

Herb Hub: Funded by Big Local Gateshead, Herb Hub is an innovative project working with local communities, to cultivate herbs with recognised benefits on mood and memory. In partnership with Dilston Physic Garden, Herb Hub aims to empower people to improve their wellbeing, through herb horticulture, knowledge and craft.

The exhibition garden design and maintenance is developed in collaboration with the gardeners at Wallington National Trust and Seaton Delaval Hall.

Caro Howell, Director-General of Imperial War Museums (IWM) says:

This poetic new commission by Rakowitz, Waiting Gardens of the North, is a powerful celebration of community, culture and resilience. The IWM 14-18 NOW Legacy Fund builds on IWM's rich history of commissioning art on the topic of conflict and through this programme, we are honoured to support this ambitious and impactful exhibition with Baltic.

Events & Public Programme

A series of related programmed events, workshops and opportunities will take place at Baltic from August 2023 to May 2024. Full details will be announced at www.baltic.art. The programme include:

Saturday 5 August 2023 from 10am-6pm

Swap & Share Plants / Free entry, drop-in

Bring along plants, seeds and cuttings to share or gardening books you no longer want to Baltic Front Room. All plants are free and happy to go to new homes.

Saturday 5, Saturday 12, Sunday 20 & Sunday 27 August 2023 at 10am

Gateshead/Newcastle Heritage Walks

Book at www.baltic.art

The heritage walk will explore themes linked to Michael Rakowitz's exhibition in Baltic's Level 4 Gallery around the colonial history of the Quayside and surrounding area.

Wednesday 13 September 2023, 6.30pm

Michael Rakowitz: In Conversation

Bookable from 15 July 2023 at www.baltic.art

Renowned artist Michael Rakowitz discusses *The Waiting Gardens of the North* in-conversation with a guest speaker from Northumbria University, chaired by Baltic Professor, Andrea Phillips.

Wednesday 1 & 2 November 2023 from 10am-6pm

Baltic Family Days / Free entry, drop-in

Families and visitors are invited to take part in creative activities inspired by *The Waiting Gardens of the North* in the exhibition space on Level 4 and across the whole building.

ENDS

Press Contacts

Dana Chan, dana@suttoncomms.com
Craig Astley, craig@baltic.art

Notes to Editors

Michael Rakowitz Biography

Michael Rakowitz (b. 1973, Long Island, NY) is an Iraqi-American artist based in Chicago, working at the intersection of problem-solving and troublemaking. His work has appeared in venues worldwide including dOCUMENTA (13), P.S.1, MoMA, MassMOCA, Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Palais de Tokyo, the 16th Biennale of Sydney, the 10th and 14th Istanbul Biennials, Sharjah Biennial 8, Tirana Biennale, National Design Triennial at the Cooper-Hewitt, Transmediale 05, FRONT Triennial in Cleveland, and CURRENT: LA Public Art Triennial.

He was awarded the 2018-2020 Fourth Plinth commission in London's Trafalgar Square. He is the recipient of the 2020 Nasher Prize; the 2018 Herb Alpert Award in the Arts; a 2012 Tiffany Foundation Award; a 2008 Creative Capital Grant; a Sharjah Biennial Jury Award; a 2006 New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship Grant in Architecture and Environmental Structures; the 2003 Dena Foundation Award, and the 2002 Design 21 Grand Prix from UNESCO.

Solo projects and exhibitions include Creative Time, Tate Modern in London, The Wellin Museum of Art, MCA Chicago, Lombard Freid Gallery and Jane Lombard Gallery in New York, SITE Santa Fe, Galerie Barbara Wien in Berlin, Rhona Hoffman Gallery in Chicago, Malmö Konsthall, Tensta Konsthall, and Kunstraum Innsbruck, and Waterfronts - England's Creative Coast.

About Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art

Baltic is a major international centre for contemporary art situated on the south bank of the River Tyne in Gateshead, England and has welcomed over eight million visitors since opening to the public in July 2002. BALTIC presents a distinctive and ambitious programme of exhibitions and events, and is a world leader in the presentation and commissioning of contemporary visual art.

Housed in a landmark ex-industrial building, BALTIC consists of 2,600 square metres of art space, making it the UK's largest dedicated contemporary art institution. BALTIC has gained an international reputation for its commissioning of cutting-edge temporary exhibitions. It has presented the work of over 460 artists of 60 nationalities in 220 exhibitions to date. Baltic is supported by Arts Council England, Gateshead Council and Northumbria University. www.baltic.art

About IWM 14-18 NOW Legacy Fund

The IWM 14-18 NOW Legacy Fund is a national partnership programme of over 20 artist commissions inspired by the heritage of conflict. Led by Imperial War Museums, the IWM 14-18 NOW Legacy Fund was created following the success of 14-18 NOW, the official UK arts programme for the First World War centenary.

To mark the end of the First World War centenary, Imperial War Museums and 14-18 NOW worked together to co-commission the critically acclaimed film **They Shall Not Grow Old** by Academy Award winner Peter Jackson, which was seen by nearly 5 million people globally. Following the unprecedented success of the film, 14-18 NOW and IWM agreed that a share of the film's royalties would be used to support a new programme of artist commissions, the IWM 14-18 NOW Legacy Fund. A total of £2.5 million is being made available to artists and cultural organisations across the UK.

Through the IWM 14-18 NOW Legacy Fund, IWM is now working in partnership with cultural organisations from across the UK to commission over 20 ambitious new artworks inspired by the heritage of conflict and created by world-leading and emerging contemporary artists. These new commissions will forge new opportunities for artistic engagement, bring art to audiences in new and relevant ways by connecting people, places and experiences, and kick-start cultural dialogue as we recover from the wide-reaching impacts of COVID-19. The commissions will go on public display across the UK from 2022.

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/partnerships/subject-specialist-network/14-18-now-legacy-fund>