

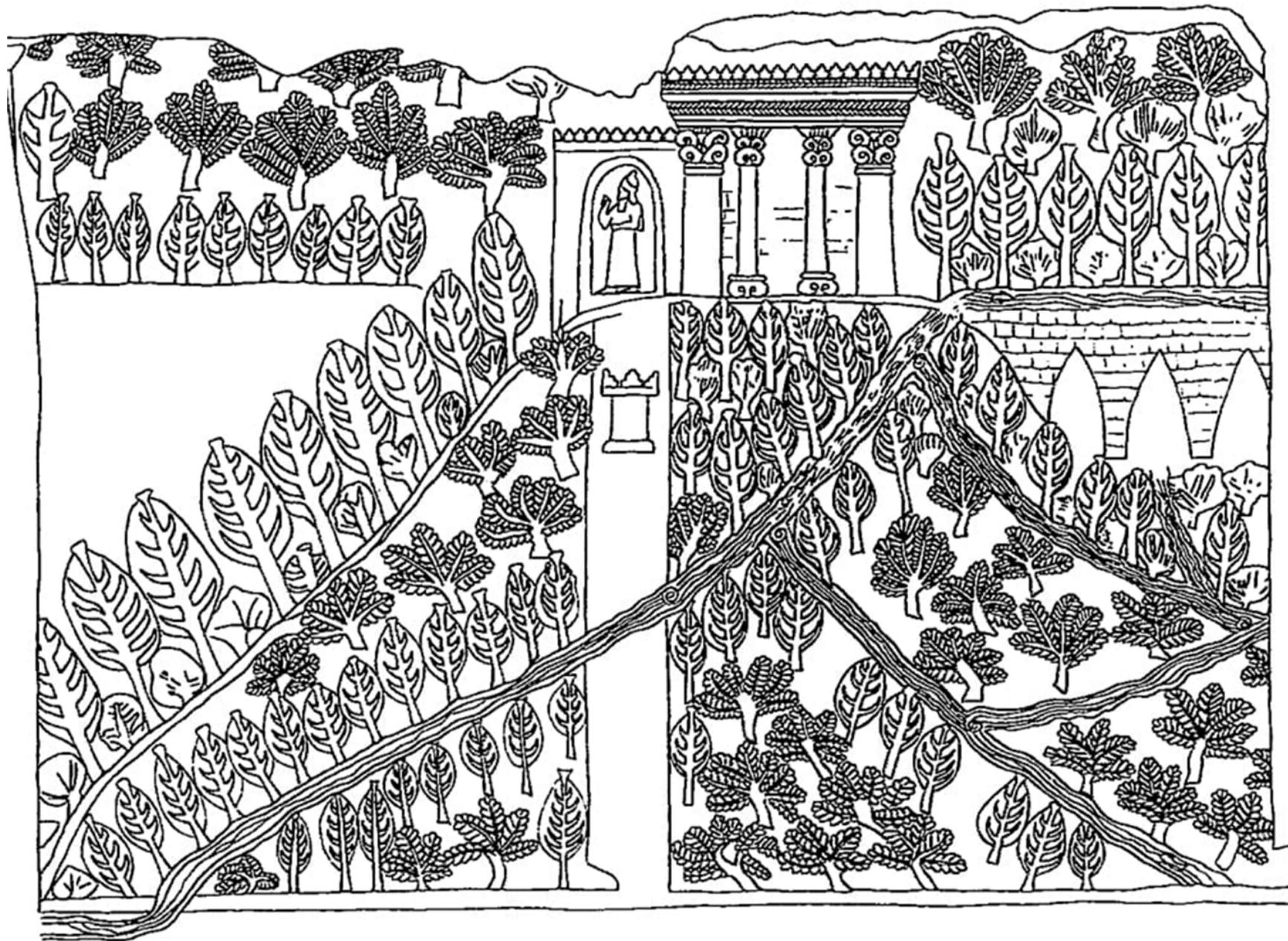
**Michael Rakowitz:**  
***The Waiting Gardens***  
***of the North***

**Primary Schools Toolkit**

**BALTIC**



**14-18-NOW**  
WW1 CENTENARY ART COMMISSIONS



Inspired by the relief panel from the North Palace of Ashurbanipal, this is the initial drawing of Michael Rakowitz' panel currently exhibited in *The Waiting Gardens of the North* at Baltic.

# Introduction

*The Waiting Gardens of the North* by renowned Iraqi-American artist Michael Rakowitz has been commissioned by Baltic in partnership with the [IWM 14-18 NOW Legacy Fund](#), this major project responds to conflict by, figuratively and literally, nurturing a community and an evolving indoor garden landscape.

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 people living in Gateshead and Newcastle with experience of forced displacement, Rakowitz's ruined garden acts as a metaphor for the overlapping histories of displacement, war, oppression, trauma and adaptation, that people, cultural objects and plants carry with them. Collaborating with the organisations [The Comfrey Project](#), [West End Refugee Service \(WERS\)](#), [Scotswood Garden](#), [Dilston Physic Garden](#), Herb Hub, and [Baltic's Language Café](#) has been instrumental to realising the project and its ongoing activation.

*The Waiting Gardens of the North* is centred around a relief panel from the [North Palace of Ashurbanipal \(645BC-635BC\) in Nineveh](#) depicting the Assyrian gardens, believed to have preceded what is now known as the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. The original panel has been housed in 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 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, replicating the layout of the palace in Nineveh with its ruins now holding and growing plant life. The artist's interdisciplinary practice of excavation, cooking, sculpting and activism is interweaved in this 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.

# About this toolkit

This resource has been created by Baltic freelance artists Katie Watson, Bethan Maddox and Cath Campbell and is designed for educators working with pupils in Key Stage 1 and 2. Within each section there are activities and lesson ideas inspired by the themes within the exhibition and Michael Rakowitz's past works. You can follow each one as a stand-alone activity or build them into a series of lessons. On this page you will find links to a series of filmed interviews about the exhibition which you will find useful to share with your pupils to inspire their creations.

## **Katie Watson**

Collage Figures  
Relief Portraits

## **Bethan Maddox**

Paper Gardens  
Precious Objects

## **Cath Campbell**

Garden on a Plate  
Ziggurat Building

## **Interview links**

### [Episode 1](#)

Michael introduces the conceptual framing and the community connections which have inspired elements of the exhibition.

### [Episode 2](#)

Focuses on the garden in depth, the plant selections and we also meet Nicola our Head Gardener.

### [Episode 3](#)

Focuses on the usefulness of the garden and how it is being used through collaborations with Dilston and Herb Hub.

### [Episode 4](#)

Is all about cooking starting with Michael's love of cooking and his memories of his grandparents' house, using cooking as a portal.

# Collage Figures

Pupils can take turns to pose and draw around each other on large sheets of cardboard and then use these silhouetted figures to fill with sections of collaged images, block colours, found packaging, cut up paintings, patterns.

## You will need:

- Large cardboard sheets
- Coloured paper
- PVA glue (slightly watered down)
- Scissors
- Pens
- Acrylic paint
- ‘Stamps’ (found objects could be used as D.I.Y stamps like corks, plants, shells, patterned cardboard, bobbins, pen caps, forks, lego)
- Collected materials from home (food packaging, photographs, fabrics, meaningful objects – these could be scanned and printed)

# Activity

**Step 1:** Gather your collage materials: This is going to be part collecting and part mark-making...

Collecting: Encourage children to bring in materials from home to incorporate into their collages – this could include food packaging, photographs, fabrics, meaningful objects, rubbings. This mimics Rakowitz’s way of constructing images and allows pupils to make work which feels expressive and personal.

Mark-making: Use paint and ‘stamps’ to make patterns on sheets of paper. Do this activity 3 times with different colour combinations of paper and paint each time. Leave to dry.

**Step 2:** Take turns to draw around each other onto cardboard sheets. The easiest way to do this is to lie down on top of the cardboard or against a wall...and pose! Students should be encouraged to be creative with their poses.

**Step 3:** Split your portrait into sections. Draw these lines out using a pen. You can follow lines of clothing or divide the shape in an abstract way. The lines can be patterns, form clothing or abstract and random.

**Step 4:** Cut your patterned paper and other collected media from step 1 into small tiles (square/rectangle are simplest), keeping each colourway in a separate pile or container.

**Step 5:** Use PVA glue to stick your tiles into the sections. Use one colourway of tile per section.

**Step 6:** The cardboard figures can be cut out by an adult and displayed, or students can decorate the backgrounds with a garden theme like Michael Rakowitz.

**Your finished artwork will have explored these 4 things:**

Identity – who you are

Pattern – a design that repeats

Mark-making – creating patterns, lines, textures and shapes

Collage – a process of finding, collecting, arranging and sticking

# Key Questions

Michael Rakowitz makes sculptures to express his identity and show everyone who he is, what can you use/make to show people who you are?

What pose will you do?

What could you bring in to use for your collage to make it personal? The wrappers from your favourite foods? A photograph of your pet? Rubbings from your favourite building?



# Relief Portraits

Pupils can make clay or salt dough portraits. The heads can be self-portraits, an imagined character, an animal, someone they know... anything they choose.

## **You will need:**

- Clay or salt dough
- Acrylic paint
- Thick card (A3)
- Tissue paper in assorted colours
- PVA glue (50:50 water/glue ratio)
- Cling film

# Activity

**Step 1:** Making a template: Pupils will start by drawing their head and shoulders on a piece of A3 card. This form should take up most of the piece of card. Pupils can draw around their face facing forwards or side profile.

**Step 2:** Prepare your surface: Cover this template with cling film to make it easier to position and move the clay or salt dough around in step 3.

**Step 3:** Making a base: Using this shape you have drawn as a template, use clay/salt dough to fill the shape. A flat uniformed layer of around 1cm is a good start. A rolling pin can be used to get an even surface.

**Step 4:** Build up a relief: Using more clay or salt dough, pupils can build up their portraits. Practice different techniques: rolling out the clay into long sausage shapes to make hair and other facial features. Then using found objects such as building blocks or forks, stamp patterns into the clay to add detail. Pupils can also use toothpicks and straws to stamp more intricate patterns. This is a good exercise for pupils to practice their mark-making and if they aren't happy with the result, the material can be squashed up and re-rolled.

Once the forms are complete, the clay or dough must dry before it can be painted. For clay, air-drying will take 2-3 days and salt dough will take around 2-7 days, depending on thickness.

**Step 5:** Once the figures are dry, the pupils can begin painting. Encourage pupils to look at Michael Rakowitz's colour palette and provide similar colours. This means the work will look more harmonious when displayed together.

# Key Questions

Michael Rakowitz uses sculpture to show people how he feels.

What are the ways we can show people how we feel?

How can we show feelings through colour?

How can we show feelings through texture?

How can we show feelings with our face?

Portrait – A piece of art which portrays a person

Relief – A sculpture in which the three-dimensional elements are raised from a flat base

Sculpture - A three-dimensional form with width, height and depth. Sculpture techniques can be carving, assembling, moulding, casting and constructing

# Paper Gardens

This is a collaborative activity- each pupil will make their own paper tree or plant - exploring cutting, folding and paper sculpting techniques. Pupils will create a communal installation in the classroom/ school by placing their finished paper plants on the floor or on furniture. Working together the class can create a paper garden to walk around or sit within. It can be a space for exploration or reflection, and a way to talk to pupils about nature, their experiences in nature and a way to reflect on the ideas within Rakowitz' work.

## **You will need:**

- 2 sheets of coloured paper (per pupil) size can be dependent upon the final space to exhibit
- Pencil
- Scissors
- Glue
- Images of plants or trees or real plants as examples
- Space to exhibit the paper garden

# Activity

**Step 1:** Take 2 pieces of coloured paper and fold them lengthways (so that you have a long thin piece of paper - one sheet inside the other).

**Step 2:** Make note of where the fold is and draw half a plant - starting from the fold line (you will open the paper up later so that you have a symmetrical plant - you must draw from your fold line, or the piece will not work. Encourage pupils to make a plant with a large base so that it is more stable to stand.

**Step 3:** Holding both sheets of paper together, cut out your plant. Once cut out, separate the two sheets.

**Step 4:** Open the two paper plants and press flat. Using a glue stick, run a long line of glue up the fold line of one plant. Take the other paper plant and carefully place it on top - taking care to line up the two paper plants together.

**Step 5:** Once the glue has dried, place your hand between the two pieces of paper and press the top layer back on itself - do this to every side - this will help to create an X shaped base to make the plants stand up. Pupils may want to make another plant - they may have learned things in making their first one, and more paper plants will create a fuller garden.

Once pupils have finished making their paper plants find a space in the classroom to place the work - encourage pupils to think about the placing of their plants. Do they want lots together or spaced apart? Perhaps place a cushion or chair in the middle and encourage pupils to go and sit alone inside the paper garden. Talk as a group about what it is to make collaborative sculpture - to work together to make one larger work made from your own smaller works. This links into Michael Rakowitz's exhibition at Baltic - which will be grown and tended to by the community. There are many ways to think of a community: Rakowitz's work looks at connection and aims to create opportunities for people to come together to look after something larger.

# Key Questions

Do you have a favourite plant?

Can you try and recreate this in paper?

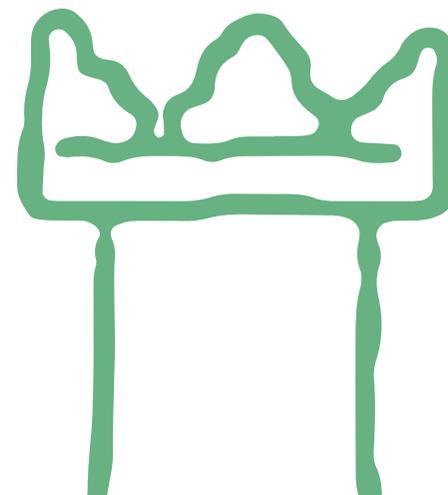
Why do you think so many plants grow tall and thin?

What are the common shapes that pupils have made in paper?

How does it feel to sit in the paper garden surrounded by everyone's work?

How does it feel to see this 'collaborative installation' together?

Does it change how you see your work when it is surrounded by other pupils' work?



# Precious Objects for the Paper Garden

This activity allows pupils to understand the placement of Rakowitz' sculptures in the exhibition at Baltic. Rakowitz along with people who attend our Language Cafe recreated ancient, precious cultural objects along with precious items of the own using disposable materials - food packaging and cardboard.

## **You will need:**

- Paper
- Drawing pencils
- Collage materials
- Images of Rakowitz' collaged sculptures

# Activity

**Step 1:** Discuss with pupils things that are precious - objects that show who we are (they could be toys, ornaments, jewellery, buildings... anything!) Think of a personal object that they have lost or that they would hate to lose.

**Step 2:** Watch the video links and look at images of Rakowitz' sculptures and discuss how they are made - look at the materials - can you guess what the materials are / what food used to be packaged in them?

**Step 3:** Once pupils have chosen an object, draw that object onto card - make sure your drawing is large enough so that you can add detail.

**Step 4:** Pupils are to then explore the collaging materials and choose different materials to add colour to their artwork. Tear or cut small pieces of collaged material and stick onto your object.

**Step 5:** Rakowitz plays with colour in his collage to help create distinction and decoration - encourage pupils to think about detail that they want to highlight with their collage.

**Step 6:** Afterwards everyone is to share their work, and if you have made a 'Paper Garden' then these works can also be placed within your garden.

# Key Questions

What things are precious to you?

What things help you to express yourself?  
Is it your clothes? Toys?

What makes an object special?

What objects in your life would you hate to lose?

Why do you think Rakowitz wanted to recreate  
lost or stolen objects?

Why do you think Rakowitz uses food packaging  
to make his work?



# Garden on a Plate

In this activity pupils will be making their own sculptural 'Garden on a Plate', focussing on what a sanctuary for wildlife might look like.

## **You will need:**

- Paper plates
- Coloured paper
- Scissors
- Glue
- Pencil
- Ruler
- Optional: markers or coloured pencils for decoration

# Activity

**Step 1:** Discuss with the class the concept of sanctuary and what it means to create a safe and welcoming space for both people and wildlife.

**Step 2:** Ask the class to choose a type of wildlife that they would like to create a sanctuary for, such as birds, bees, butterflies, or animals.

**Step 3:** Consider what elements will attract and support these animals. For example, you might include flowers that provide nectar for bees and butterflies, or birdhouses and nesting materials for birds, ponds, shade and food for animals.

**Step 4:** Each child will be given a paper plate for their garden – they can begin by sketching areas on their plate for their plants, water, trees etc.

**Step 5:** They will then make their garden from paper – exploring ways of making paper into 3D shapes using folding, rolling, cutting and sticking to make miniature sculptures. Students should be encouraged to experiment with different techniques such as origami, accordion folding and quilling to create texture and depth in their paper sculpture.

**Step 6:** They can use markers or coloured pencils to add details and decoration to their sculptures.

**Step 7:** Their small sculptures and drawings should be carefully stuck onto the plate.

When they have made their garden, they should draw and cut out their wildlife and place them within the space to finish the artwork.

# Key Questions

What is a sanctuary, and why is it important for people and wildlife?

Why is it important to create safe and welcoming spaces for people and wildlife?

What elements are needed to create a garden?

How can we use paper to create sculptures?

What creatures would you like to see take sanctuary in your garden, and how have you created a space for them?

Do you know if there is a community garden near you?



# Miniature Ziggurats

In this activity, pupils will learn about ziggurat buildings and their cultural significance. They will then go on to create their own ziggurat sculptures.

## **You will need:**

- Small boxes of different sizes
- Thin cardboard sheets
- Scissors, glue, and masking tape
- Paints and brushes
- Reference images such as pictures of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon and ziggurats

# Activity

**Step 1:** Show images of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon and explain their significance as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

**Step 2:** Ask about the structure and explore what ziggurats are and their cultural and historical importance in ancient Mesopotamia. Explain that the children will work in pairs or small groups to build their own ziggurat using recycled boxes and cardboard. The structures will be made by stacking different sized boxes to create the ziggurat shapes.

**Step 3:** Pupils will experiment with folding cardboard in a range of ways to create joins and stairs. Glue or tape the tiers together, starting with the largest one at the bottom and the smallest one at the top.

**Step 4:** Once the structures are complete, the children can decorate and paint them to make them more visually appealing. The ziggurats can reflect ancient structures or can explore more modern styles, and the class can discuss the similarities and differences.

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Once the structures are complete, the children can decorate and paint them to make them more visually appealing.

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# Key Questions

What is the structure called?

How is it made?

What does it look like?

Why is it this shape?

What makes something a 'Wonder of the World'?

Why were these structures made?

How was it made?

What do you think that they were made from?

What does it look like?

Why is it this shape?

What do you think people said about these structures?



# Contact Us

[schools@balticmill.com](mailto:schools@balticmill.com)

**Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art**  
**Gateshead Quays**  
**South Shore Road**  
**Gateshead**  
**NE8 3BA**



[@BalticGateshead](#)

[www.baltic.art](http://www.baltic.art)

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