



art21.org/michaelrakowitz



Michael Rakowitz

ABOUT

Born

1973 (Great Neck, NY)

Education

Purchase College, BFA
 Massachusetts Institute of Technology, MS

Lives and Works

Chicago, Illinois

About the Artist

Michael Rakowitz draws upon extensive research on cultural objects and events in order to weave together complex histories and unlikely symbols in his sculptures, installations, participatory workshops, films, and architectural interventions. His Iraqi-Jewish heritage and the damage caused by long conflicts between the West and the Middle East also serve as important influences for his work.

Rakowitz critiques the ongoing forces of colonization, bringing attention not only to the value of cultural artifacts that have been lost, looted, or destroyed, but also to the people who have suffered from continuing violence.

TEACHING CONNECTIONS

Media and Materials

community engagement
 food
 installation
 sculpture

Key Words and Ideas

activism
 ancestry
 colonization
 community
 haunting
 immigration
 studio

Related Artists

Tanya Aguiñiga
 John Akomfrah
 Allora and Calzadilla
 Firelei Báez
 Kevin Beasley
 Tania Bruguera
 Minerva Cuevas
 Abigail DeVille
 Olafur Eliasson
 Richard Mosse
 Postcommodity
 Rose B. Simpson
 Nancy Spero
 Pedro Reyes
 Hank Willis Thomas

“If we’re to have conversations about what decolonization truly looks like, it’s accompanied by repair and it’s accompanied by accountability. That work is actually something that’s never done.” —Michael Rakowitz

How to Use This Guide

Art21 encourages active engagement when teaching with our films. The questions and activities below are recommendations for incorporating Art21 films featuring Michael Rakowitz into your classroom. Each class will likely require different adaptations for best results.

NOTE: Please view all films before sharing them with your students.

Before Viewing

Establish key ideas, in anticipation of viewing the film(s):

- ① What does 'haunting' mean? What emotions does the word bring up?
- ② Why might an artist want to reference their heritage or ancestry?
- ③ What are some of the differences between creating art alone and with others? How might you divide the work if you wanted to create art with other people?

While Viewing

Support active viewing, and pause the film to clarify particular ideas:

- ① How do the themes of haunting and ghosts surface in Rakowitz's work? What does Rakowitz want the viewer to be aware of?
- ② In what ways does Rakowitz's familial heritage influence his work?
- ③ What do studio assistants in Rakowitz's studio do? How do they contribute to his projects? How did the pandemic influence that structure?

After Viewing

Follow-up on key ideas and synthesize information learned from the film(s):

- ① Why does Rakowitz use terms like 'ghosts' and 'haunting' to describe colonialism and the history of empires? How does that word choice influence your understanding of his work?
- ② How does Rakowitz use food in his work? What can food communicate better than other materials?
- ③ What are some benefits of having studio assistants? Why is it important to acknowledge their labor and support?

Related Activities

Engaging students in creative activities after watching Art21 films can reinforce learning and stimulate ideas. Art21 encourages educators to adapt these activities to their classrooms.

- ✓ Ask students to create an abstract work that connects to their cultural heritage. Prompt students to think expansively for sources of inspiration (music, food, weather, etc.). Their abstract work can reference one or as many connections as they want.
- ✓ Reflect on recent or historical events and figures. Choose a person or event to create a work that informs the present by critiquing the past. What does this event or person want people in the present to know? To change? To do? Create a work in any medium, including writing, performance, or musical composition, that illustrates this critique.