

Wafaa Bilal: 168:01

Organized and Circulated by the Art Gallery of Windsor

Curator: Srimoyee Mitra

On view at the AGW: January 29 – April 10, 2016



Project and Touring Timeline:

The Art Gallery of Windsor is organizing a major solo exhibition by internationally renowned artist Wafaa Bilal, presented at the Art Gallery of Windsor from January 29- April 10, 2016. This exhibition is being offered for a national and international tour to interested venues beginning in May 2016 to September 2018.

The Exhibition

The Art Gallery of Windsor is proud to present a major solo exhibition by Iraqi-born, New York-based artist Wafaa Bilal. During the war in Iraq in 2003, the College of Fine Arts at the University of Baghdad lost their entire library to looters who set fire to the collection. Over 70,000 books were reduced to ashes and the building was destroyed. To this day, students still have few books from which to study. At the Art Gallery of Windsor, Bilal has constructed a makeshift library of empty white books. Throughout the duration of the exhibition, the white books will slowly be replaced with visitor donations from a wish-list compiled by faculty at the College of Fine Arts at the University of Baghdad. At the end of the exhibition, all the donated books will be sent to the University of Baghdad to help rebuild their library.

The title of the exhibition references one of the most well-known examples of historic cultural loss - the *Bayt al-Hikma*, or House of Wisdom, a major academic centre where scholars studied the humanities and sciences during the Islamic Golden Age. *Bayt al-Hikma* was destroyed by a Mongol siege that laid

waste to all the libraries in Baghdad in the 13th century. According to some accounts, the library was thrown into the Tigris River to create a bridge of books for the Mongol army to cross. The pages bled ink into the river for seven days—or 168 hours, after which the books were drained of knowledge. *168:01* represents the civilian spirit to begin the process of rebuilding, the immediate second after cultural loss.

Selected Press Links:

- The Cultural Frontline on BBC World Service: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03gyq3l>
 - CNN: <http://www.cnn.com/2016/02/04/arts/books-for-baghdad-university/index.html>
 - CBC National News: <http://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2683050860>
 - The National Post: <http://news.nationalpost.com/life/travel/artist-uses-exhibit-in-windsor-ont-to-resurrect-baghdad-library>
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About the Artist: Wafaa Bilal

<http://wafaabilal.com/>

Iraqi-born artist Wafaa Bilal, an Associate Arts Professor at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, is known internationally for his media-based performances and artworks that provoke dialogue about international politics and internal dynamics. For his 2007 installation, *Domestic Tension*, Bilal spent a month in a Chicago gallery with a paintball gun that people could shoot at him over the Internet. The Chicago Tribune called it "one of the sharpest works of political art to be seen in a long time" and named him 2008 Artist of the Year. Bilal's work is constantly informed by the experience of fleeing his homeland and existing simultaneously in two worlds – his home in the "comfort zone" of the U.S. and his consciousness of the "conflict zone" in Iraq. Using his own body as a medium, Bilal continued to challenge our comfort zone with projects like *3rdi* and *...and Counting*. Bilal's most recent body of work, *Canto III*, premiered in a solo booth at the New York Armory Show in 2015 and went on to be shown in the 2015 Venice Biennale.

In 2008 City Lights published "Shoot an Iraqi: Art, Life and Resistance under the Gun," about Bilal's life and the *Domestic Tension* project. He holds a BFA from the University of New Mexico and an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. His work can be found in the permanent collections of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA; Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago, IL; MATHAF: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha, Qatar; amongst others.

Exhibition Contents:

The exhibition consists of 10 photographs from *The Ashes Series* and the major installation of *168:01*. This installation is composed of a 40-foot long modular book shelf and 1000 white, hard cover books.

Exhibition Square Footage:

Estimated 3500 square feet, depending on the borrower's exhibition space capacity

List of Works with dimensions

- 1) Ashes series of photographs (10 works, 40 inches X 50 inches)
 - 2) Bookshelf (40-foot Long, composed of 10 modular shelves, each measuring 6 feet high X 4 feet wide)
 - 3) 900 hard cover white books (6 ¼" X 8 5/8")
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Publication

A new 70-page, multi-authored publication with essays by Gregory Sholette, Ian Alden Russell and Srimoyee Mitra will be available through the course of the exhibition.

Available Bookings:

- fall 2016
- winter 2017
- summer 2017
- winter 2018
- summer 2018

Exhibition Rental Fee and Inclusion:

Please contact us regarding the exhibition rental fee

- 1) Crating and production costs
- 2) Exhibition graphics will be provided in electronic formats for the borrower use.
- 3) Five complimentary copies of the publication
- 4) Includes assistance from the exhibition curator for layout as per the proposed exhibition groupings and themes.

Borrower`s responsibilities:

- 1) Condition Reporting works on arrival and departure
- 2) Expenses related to artist`s travel and accommodation
- 3) Insurance
- 4) Production of didactic materials from the digital files.

Further Information:

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