

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Wafaa Bilal (b. 1966, Najaf, Iraq; lives in New York, NY), Rendering of *Thumbsat Satellite*, 2023. © Wafaa Bilal. Courtesy of the artist.

Multimedia Material:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/bbvtcepz9wnqjc49qa1xx/AKrE73adoC4Dep1H3ZzRyrQ?rlkey=grv88tq2evgsfrm3pmdn34irv&st=rhshxuay&dl=0>

## **MCA Chicago announces *Wafaa Bilal: Indulge Me***

CHICAGO—The Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) Chicago today announced the upcoming exhibition [\*Wafaa Bilal: Indulge Me\*](#). Opening on February 1 and running through October 19, 2025, *Indulge Me* is a major survey of renowned artist Wafaa Bilal (b. 1966, Najaf, Iraq; lives in New York, NY). Crucially, the exhibition will take a comprehensive look at Bilal’s myriad practice, highlighting the development of his work across decades and placing it in conversation with broader art histories. It will also explore cultural cannibalism—that is, how culture (specifically the culture of the other) is used, disassembled, and consumed.

Working in performance, sculpture, and with online and interactive technologies, Bilal’s interdisciplinary practice investigates the dynamic between international and interpersonal politics while highlighting the tension between the United States, which he has deemed the “comfort zone,” and the “conflict zone” of Iraq. Through methods such as using his own body to interrogate notions of power and using innovative technologies to rectify acts of cultural destruction, Bilal shows us what it means to consciously engage across cultures while highlighting negative global implications of consumption, exploitation, and profiteering.

The exhibition will be organized into five immersive sections, each of which focuses on a major work from Bilal's practice. Artworks on display include a reconstruction of a room in Chicago's FLATFILE Gallery that the artist confined himself to for a month-long performance in *Domestic Tension* (2007). During this performance, Bilal invited the audience to shoot at him with a paintball gun that was operated virtually by viewers who could also interact with him via camera feed and live chat. Over the course of thirty days, a total of 60,000 shots were fired by "shooters" from 128 countries. Also included in the MCA exhibition is a large-scale, towering video displaying images from Bilal's year-long performance *3rdi* (2010–11), wherein Bilal surgically implanted a camera into the back of his head that, every minute on the minute, captured photographs. The photos included in the MCA display will correspond to the minute, hour, and day they were taken.

*Wafaa Bilal: Indulge Me* will also present *Thumbsat Satellite* (2024), which comprises a golden bust of Saddam Hussein fixed to a satellite and launched into Earth's orbit as part of the exhibition. Developed as a critique of the former Iraqi president's rumored desire to launch a bust of himself into space, the work will also feature a number of in-gallery components, including a model of the satellite and bust and a way for visitors to track the artwork's location through live-captured images before it is destroyed upon re-entry into the atmosphere.

Additionally, the exhibition will feature *In a Grain of Wheat: Cultivating Hybrid Futures in Ancient Seed DNA*, Bilal's response to ISIS's destruction of the Winged Bull of Nineveh sculpture, or Lamassu, in 2015. The piece involves inserting high-resolution 3D scans of the sculpture into the DNA of heirloom Iraqi wheat seeds. A commission by the MCA will see the project activated in a new, sculptural form, which will consider if it is possible for a wheat seed to transform terrorist violence into restorative agency.

The exhibition is accompanied by a major publication, the first to survey multiple projects by the visionary artist.

A series of exhibition-related programs will be announced closer to the opening.

*Wafaa Bilal: Indulge Me* is curated by Bana Kattan, Pamela Alper Associate Curator, with Iris Colburn, Curatorial Associate.

## SUPPORT

Lead support is provided by the Harris Family Foundation in memory of Bette and Neison Harris, Zell Family Foundation, and Cari and Michael Sacks.

Support is generously provided by the Margot and W. George Greig Ascendant Artist Fund.

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

**Wafaa Bilal (b. 1966, Najaf, Iraq; lives in New York, NY)** is known internationally for his online performative and interactive works provoking dialogue about international and interpersonal politics. Bilal's work explores tensions between the cultural spaces he occupies—his home in the “comfort zone” of the US and his consciousness in the “conflict zone” in Iraq. For his 2007 installation, *Domestic Tension*, Bilal spent a month in Chicago's FLATFILE Gallery where people could shoot him via a remote-access paintball gun. The *Chicago Tribune* called it “one of the sharpest works of political art to be seen in a long time”—naming him 2008 Artist of the Year. That same year, City Lights published *Shoot an Iraqi: Art, Life and Resistance Under the Gun* about Bilal's life and *Domestic Tension*. His work was part of the Iranian pavilion at the 2015 Venice Biennale.

Bilal's work is in the 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; among others. He holds a BFA from the University of New Mexico, an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and was conferred an honorary PhD from DePauw University. Bilal is currently an Arts Professor at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts.

## **ABOUT THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART CHICAGO**

The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization accredited by the American Alliance of Museums. The MCA interweaves exhibitions, performances, collections, and educational programs while providing a place for audiences to contemplate and discuss contemporary art in pursuit of a creative and diverse future. The MCA believes in the values of inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility (IDEA) as a platform to enact structural change. The museum is generously supported by its Board of Trustees; individual and corporate members; private and corporate foundations, including the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation; and government agencies. Museum capital improvements are supported by a Public Museum Capital Grant from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. The MCA is a proud member of Museums in the Park and receives major support from the Chicago Park District.

The [MCA is located at 220 E. Chicago Avenue](#) and is open 10 am to 5 pm Wednesday to Sunday and Tuesdays (free for IL residents) from 10 am to 9 pm. The museum is closed on Mondays. Admission is free for all youth 18 and under, members of the military and veterans, and MCA members. Find more information about MCA's exhibitions, programs, and special events at [mcachicago.org](http://mcachicago.org) or at 312.280.2660.



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