

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 11, 2024

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Wafaa Bilal, *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's *Wafaa Bilal: Indulge Me* opens February 1

CHICAGO—The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago's upcoming exhibition [*Wafaa Bilal: Indulge Me*](#) will open on February 1 and run through October 19, 2025. *Indulge Me* is a major survey of renowned artist Wafaa Bilal (b. 1966, Najaf, Iraq; lives in New York, NY). The exhibition covers five major works from Bilal's immersive, interdisciplinary practice, which investigates the complex dynamic between international and interpersonal politics, with a particular focus on US–Iraq relations. Whether putting his own body on the line to interrogate notions of power or inventing new technological methods 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.

Artworks on display include a reconstruction of a room in Chicago's FlatFile Gallery, which 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 online, who could also interact with him via camera feed and live chat. Over the course of thirty-one days, around 65,000 shots were fired by shooters from 136 countries.

Also included in the MCA exhibition is a large-scale, towering projection installation 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 a photograph of whatever was behind him. The images included in the MCA display will correspond to the minute, hour, and day they were taken. Nearby in the galleries is Bilal's 2008 video game *Virtual Jihadi*, installed at playable computer stations which are themselves housed in a large installation designed to look like an early 2000s internet café. As visitors play the game, they are confronted by ideas such as the use of technology to sanitize war, the popularization of video games as military recruiting tools, and the comfortable distance that modern day weaponry creates from the reality of harm.

Also present is Bilal's *Thumbsat Model* (2024), which comprises a one-inch golden bust of Saddam Hussein fixed to a small satellite. One edition of this work will be launched into Earth's orbit as part of the exhibition, and another edition will be displayed in the gallery. 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 way for visitors to track the artwork's location in orbit through live-captured images before it is destroyed upon re-entry into the Earth's atmosphere.

Additionally, the exhibition will feature Bilal's *In a Grain of Wheat* project—his response to ISIS's destruction of the Winged Bull of Nineveh sculpture, or lamassu, in 2015. The piece involves inserting a high-resolution 3D scan of the sculpture into the DNA of a strain of wheat. A commission by the MCA will see the project activated in a new sculptural form, furthering the artist's aim of transforming terrorist violence into restorative agency.

The MCA is planning a full suite of programs to commemorate Bilal's first major survey, including a talk between the artist and Pamela Alper Associate Curator Bana Kattan at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a tour exclusive to MCA members. In 2025, patrons will be able to enjoy lollipops in the shape of Saddam Hussein to reinforce the notion of consumption, a theme highlighted in the exhibition and one that surfaces in Bilal's practice time and time again.

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

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

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.

SUPPORT

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

Generous support is provided by Creative Capital Foundation, The Joyce Foundation, and the Margot and W. George Greig Ascendant Artist Fund.

Creative Capital

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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 or at 312.280.2660.

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