SCHMUCKER ART GALLERY ANNOUNCES NEW ACQUISITION:
Wafaa Bilal, *The Ashes Series: Chair*, 2003-2013, archival inkjet photograph, 40 x 50 inches

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Schmucker Art Gallery is excited to announce the most recent acquisition made possible by the Michael J. Birkner ’72 and Robin Wagner Art and Photography Acquisition Fund, with additional support provided by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for Middle East and Islamic Studies. The acquisition, a critically acclaimed photograph titled *Chair*, is the work of Iraqi-born contemporary artist Wafaa Bilal. The photograph reveals the artist’s intense and haunting response to the mass-syndicated images released in the aftermath of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

In *Chair*, one photograph of ten in *The Ashes Series*, Bilal meticulously fabricated models based on mass media photographs of the destruction in Iraq and removed the figures originally seen occupying the spaces. Human ash then was strewn carefully on the models before Bilal photographed them. The artist used 21 grams of ash, the mythical weight lost by the body when the soul departs. The photographs of these reconstructions emphasize the loss of human life and devastation in the aftermath of war. Based on a photograph of one of Saddam Hussein’s ruined palaces, *Chair* depicts the dictator’s penchant for ornate imitation Louis XIV furniture in the midst of the rubble-filled room. In the background, orange light breaks through a cavity in the wall and draws attention to a blasted column seemingly riven by a projectile.

Wafaa Bilal’s photograph will be on display in Schmucker Art Gallery from September 9 through October 22, 2016 in an exhibition titled *Bodies in Conflict*, curated by Laura Bergin ’17. The exhibition considers how the human figure is represented in prints, photographs and paintings of modern war and political conflict. Because Bilal’s *Chair*, a scene of wartime devastation covered in human ashes, simultaneously evokes the presence and absence of the human body, Bergin has selected it as the centerpiece of this exhibition. Bergin will examine how the artist’s interest in journalistic photographs compares to other visual documentation of the aftermath of other wars, from the Civil War, through World War I and II, as well as the Korean and Vietnam wars. Seen alongside these historical materials, Bilal’s photograph provides a personal and cross-cultural perspective on contemporary conflict. In addition to curating this exhibition, Bergin will deliver a public lecture in the gallery and write an essay for the accompanying exhibition catalogue.

Wafaa Bilal is known internationally for his provocative online performance and interactive works. The artist was forced to flee Iraq at the age of 25, and his work reflects his fraught sense of belonging to two worlds – his home in the “comfort zone” of the U.S., and his consciousness of the “conflict zone” in Iraq. Bilal graduated from the University of New Mexico and earned an MFA at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. His work is represented in major public collections,
including Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Qatar; Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago; Milwaukee Art Museum; and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California. His work has been reviewed in major publications, including ARTnews, Art in America, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, and Newsweek, and he is the author of the critically-acclaimed 2008 publication Shoot an Iraqi: Arts, Life and Resistance Under the Gun. The Chicago Tribune called it “one of the sharpest pieces of political art to be seen in a long time,” and named him 2008 Artist of the Year. He is represented by Driscoll Babcock Galleries, New York’s oldest art gallery. Bilal lives and works in New York City, and is an Associate Professor of Art at New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts. Articles about his most recent project, 168:01, can be seen on Hyperallergic and The Guardian. 168:01 consists of an installation at Ontario’s Art Gallery of Windsor and a Kickstarter campaign designed to help replenish the University of Baghdad’s College of Fine Art library collection, which was destroyed by looters during the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

The Michael J. Birkner ’72 and Robin Wagner Art and Photography Acquisition Fund generously provides first-hand access to significant works of art and curatorial opportunities for Gettysburg College students. This gift impacts not just the campus culture, but also benefits the entire Gettysburg and Adams County community. The fund ensures that students, faculty and the larger community will continue to have opportunities to experience diverse, challenging, and relevant art exhibitions. Recent acquisitions supported by the Michael J. Birkner ’72 and Robin Wagner Art and Photography Acquisition Fund include a print entitled Exodus of Confederates from Atlanta, Harper’s Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated) (2005) by prominent contemporary artist and MacArthur Foundation Achievement Award recipient Kara Walker, and a large-scale drawing by internationally renowned, New York-based contemporary artist Michael Scoggins titled Battle of Gettysburg (2014).

The 1,600-square-foot Schmucker Art Gallery is a lively art space that displays nine to ten different exhibitions each year. Included in the gallery calendar are shows by local, national, and international contemporary artists, a faculty exhibition, a student exhibition, the annual senior art-major show, and exhibits of works selected from public and private collections. The Schmucker Art Gallery is located on the main floor of Schmucker Hall (conveniently located at the intersection of N. Washington and Water streets) and is fully accessible. Free parking is available in one of the visitor parking lots on campus, or free two-hour parking can be found on the streets adjacent to Schmucker Hall. The main entrance is through the quadrangle side of the building. All events are free and open to the public. Gallery hours are Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Building is accessible.

Founded in 1832, Gettysburg College is a highly selective four-year residential college of liberal arts and sciences with a strong academic tradition. Alumni include Rhodes Scholars, a Nobel laureate, and other distinguished scholars. The college enrolls 2,600 undergraduate students and is located on a 200-acre campus adjacent to the Gettysburg National Military Park in Pennsylvania.

For more information, please contact Shannon Egan, Director of Schmucker Art Gallery, at segan@gettysburg.edu or (717) 337-6125. For information on how to support a museum-quality art
collection for teaching and student engagement at Gettysburg College, please contact Kathleen Regentin, Major Gifts Officer for Parent & Family Giving, at kregenti@gettysburg.edu or 717-337-6594.


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