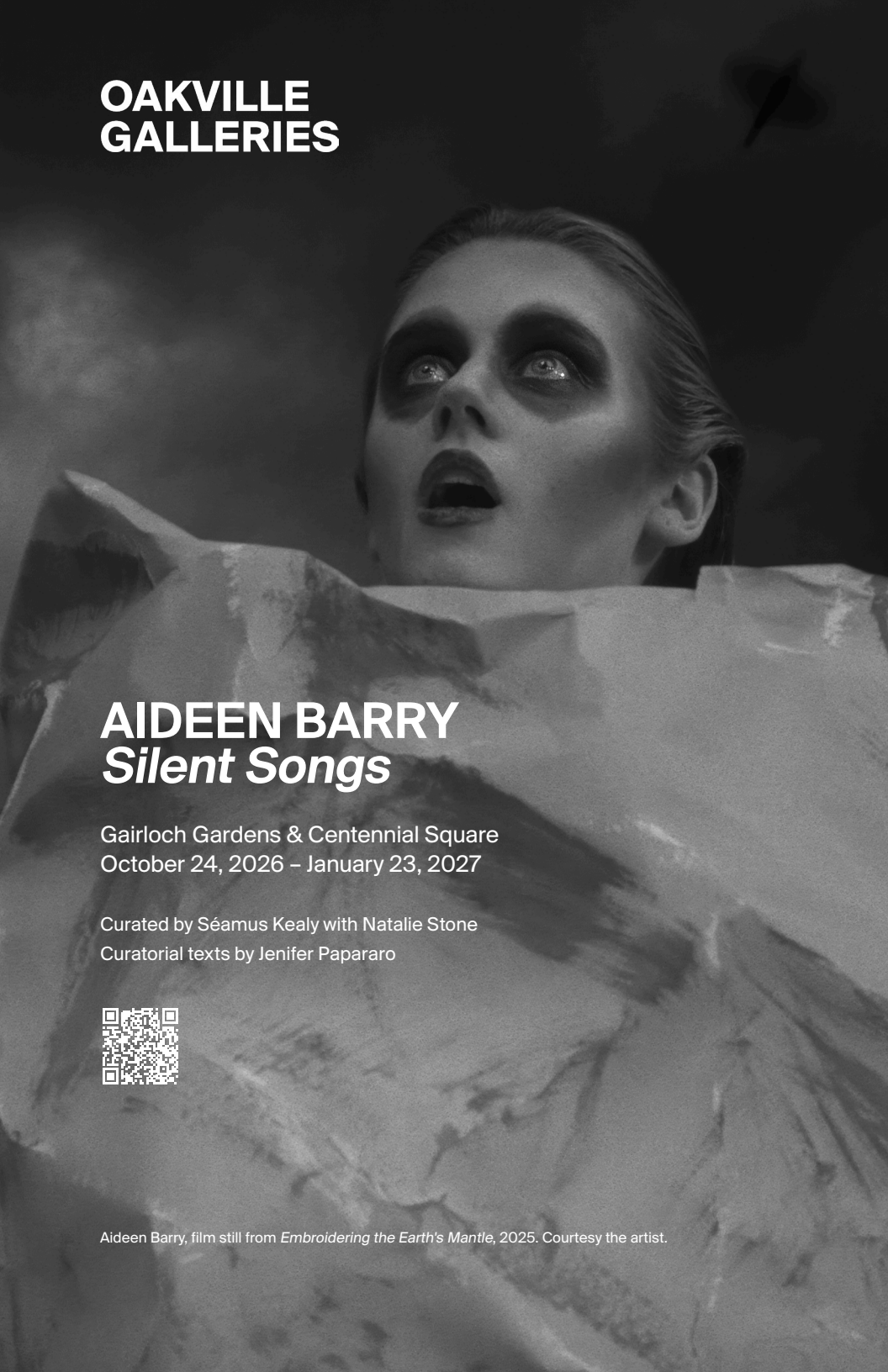
OAKVILLE
GALLERIES



AIDEEN BARRY
Silent Songs

Gairloch Gardens & Centennial Square
October 24, 2026 – January 23, 2027

Curated by Séamus Kealy with Natalie Stone
Curatorial texts by Jenifer Papararo

Aideen Barry, film still from *Embroidering the Earth's Mantle*, 2025. Courtesy the artist.

Land Acknowledgment

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Oakville Galleries would like to thank the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation for the open conversation around truth and reconciliation.

OAKVILLE GALLERIES

Gairloch Gardens | 1306 Lakeshore Road East, Oakville ON L6J 1L6
Centennial Square | 120 Navy Street, Oakville ON L6J 2Z4

Gallery Hours
Tuesday – Saturday: 10:00 AM – 5:00 PM
Closed Sundays, Mondays and statutory holidays

Admission is free
905.844.4402 | info@oakvillegalleries.com
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Silent Songs

By Aideen Barry

We are products of the immense torque that propels this universe. We are not individuals but a great accumulation of all that lived before.

— Tanya Tagaq, *Split Tooth* (2018)[1]

Known as *katajjaq* in Nunavik, Inuit throat singing is a vocal game traditionally performed by women with two singers closely facing each other, holding one another, and producing deep rhythmic sounds through voice and breath. More than a musical form and performance, throat singing is a means of social connection, cultural expression, and the transmission of knowledge, passed from one generation to the next through observation, imitation, and participation. Inuit singer and songwriter Riit ᐃᓚᖅ describes the cultural practice as a friendly competition with a leader and follower.[2] The leader produces vocalizations which the follower responds to and mimics, but the follower can also change the sound shifting position into the leader. The game is to outlast the other without running out of breath, skipping rhythm, or laughing.

The spirit of *katajjaq* is captured by Aideen Barry in her recent film ᖃᑲᐅᓕᕆᔨᒋᑦᑐᖅᑕᖅ / *Seachmalltacht / Oblivion* (2021), which features Riit ᐃᓚᖅ reading a slow poetic invocation in conversation with Irish harpist Aisling Lyons. The work pairs Riit ᐃᓚᖅ and Lyons in concert with each other through spoken word, singing, and plucking in musical dialogue – like two throat singers in a balance of call and response relaying stories of presence, disappearance and resurfacing. The texture of their rhythms, sounds, words, and gestures hover above a disarticulated electronic background of drums, keys, composed, arranged, and orchestrated by Barry, Stephen Shannon and her collaborators from the “Lamentations” of the Bunting Archives at Queens University, Belfast. Both *katajjaq* and the Irish harp carry histories of suppression, but their stories more poignantly reveal how cultural practices persist and transform. In Inuit communities, throat singing was restricted through colonial rule and Christian indoctrination; treated as pagan ritual it was silenced, creating

disruption of the tradition across generations. In Ireland, the harp became increasingly associated with Irish cultural and political resistance under English rule.

Oblivion was commissioned as part of an artist response to the digitization of the Edward Bunting Archive, drawing on a collection that traces its origins to the 1792 Belfast Harp Festival, where nineteen-year-old Bunting was commissioned to transcribe the music of the remaining harpers. The festival brought together ten Irish harpers and one Welsh harper, including Rose Mooney, the only woman among the Irish participants. Bunting sat among the harpers, recording their music at a moment when the Gaelic harp tradition was already in decline; his transcriptions would become an important record of a tradition that might otherwise have been lost. By the late eighteenth century, the once flourishing tradition had been reduced to a small number of itinerant harpers, most of them male. Over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, the gender of the tradition shifted: the harp became increasingly associated with women, particularly through its teaching in schools, and eventually becoming predominantly played by females.

This movement between suppression, revival, and transformation is central to *Oblivion*. Barry brings together Riit ᐃᓚᖅ and Lyons not as representatives of static traditions, but as contemporary women carrying cultural forms that have themselves changed over time. Their voices, breath, fingers, and instruments embody powerful cultural mediums that perform as forms of resistance by defying empirical drives of assimilation and control to create new forms of cultural expression. Contemporary Inuit performers continue to adapt throat singing, bringing it into dialogue with popular music, and other contemporary art forms, just as the Irish harp has evolved into a thriving, cross discipline, and multifaceted tradition.

Barry brings these cultural forms together not only to recognize their persistence, but to also sound a warning. The revival of *katajjaq* and the continued vitality of the Irish harp do not erase the violence that sought to suppress them. The effects of colonial rule remain present in the ruptures of cultural transmissions, in the loss of knowledge, and in the vulnerability of traditions whose survival was once deliberately threatened. *Oblivion* imagines what might happen if that history is allowed to repeat itself. In Riit ᐃᓚᖅ’s invocation, the figure of the last artist becomes a haunting image of a culture pushed to the point of disapperance:

"Our eye was supposed to make us all seeing
But we rammed it deep within this land
And made it barren
Now this toxic drain will make everything forgotten."[3]

The film's title takes on a double meaning. *Oblivion* is both the threat of cultural disappearance and the condition produced when histories of violence are forgotten. The work asks us to consider what it means to celebrate the survival of cultural forms while acknowledging that the forces that once sought to silence them continue to shape the present.

This concern with what is lost, remembered, and carried forward extends into the video animation *The Song of the Bleeding Tree* (2023), where Barry shifts her attention from the voice to the landscape. The tree becomes both witness and participant in histories of violence, its wounded body holding traces of ecological destruction and cultural displacement. Drawing on Irish folklore, including the tradition of placing human and animal afterbirths at the roots of hawthorn trees, Barry imagines the tree as a living body that bleeds and weeps, its suffering bound to that of the earth and its inhabitants. The work also draws on accounts preserved in Irish folklore archives, including testimonies from famine survivors who feared they were the last generation of Irish people, connecting historical trauma with the looming possibility of environmental collapse. As in *Oblivion*, the natural world is not a passive backdrop but a repository of memory. The violence enacted upon land is inseparable from the histories of the people who have lived on it, and the wounds of one are carried by the other.

For the exhibition *Silent Songs*, Barry syncopates the two films so that their relationship unfolds through presence and absence. As *Oblivion* plays, *The Song of the Bleeding Tree* remains silent, its images fading in and out with its roots and placentas continuously visible. Only after *Oblivion* has played in full does *The Song of the Bleeding Tree* find its voice. The effect is subtle but haunting. The tree is always there, even when it cannot speak. Its persistent presence becomes a reminder of what remains after violence: the visible traces of destruction, the wounds carried by land, and the histories that cannot simply be silenced or erased. The installation makes this silence visible, carrying with it the weight of what has come before and the marks left behind.

These remaining marks become a kind of record: traces to be read, archived, and interpreted. This notion of the earth as a repository of memory becomes central to *Embroidering the Earth's Mantle* (2025), where Barry creates a world where women are interned to document, record, and storytell. Women produce the material needed to record histories, their labour is used to express it, and with this burden they become embedded in the earth. Inspired by the life and work of the surrealist artist Remedios Varo, Barry imagines this world through film, animation, drawing, embroidery, sound, and image. What begins as an image of confinement and displacement becomes an act of collective creation: a world being woven into existence by those who have inherited its fractures.

Barry enters Varo's imaginative universe and reactivates it into her own, weaving their imaginations together in a contemporary conversation of female solidarity and the power of femininity. Barry uses the historic manor at Gairloch Gardens to unfold this mystical dreamscape, and like Varo, places feminine figures at the centre of fantastical worlds, elevating women from observers or subjects to agents who shape the worlds they inhabit. Like Varo's worlds, women are the fabric of life, part of the earth, civic infrastructure, pillars supporting the walls that surround us, and are connected to each other.

But Barry's women carry the histories into the present, telling of displacement, conflict, ecological destruction, and the struggle to preserve what violence threatens to erase. In rendering these histories, she has made manifest elements from her films, giving materiality to the labour performed by her female protagonists. One of the galleries is filled with embroidered drawings, which depict scenes from *Embroidering the Earth's Mantle*, but are also important elements within the film. Two of the central characters produce the thread for the embroideries as well as use the thread to render future scenes. They are Cassandras predicting the future that no one believes will come until it is history.

Maybe Barry is also both blessed and doomed to be Cassandra, but inversely, prophetic of a resilient future that rises from the darkness of history's silencing. Two glorious crowns designed by Margaret O' Connor a traditional Irish Milliner designed and worn by Riit ᐃᓪᓕᖅ and Lyons in *Oblivion* are also exhibited as sculptural objects, presented before you enter the video installation, offering an auspicious glimpse into the film's mystical realm. Three wooden hands with long

decorative nails painted by Kate O'Brien, a professional manicurist, are elegantly posed, emblematic of Barry's eccentric yet meticulously built worlds. The three hands in manner form a predictive cosmology for the exhibition. Three wishes, three subatomic particles: protons, neutrons, and electrons, and three representations of time: past, present, and future.

As an exhibition *Silent Songs* weaves together three distinct bodies of work that explore how cultural memory persists in the face of erasure. Across her hypnotic and fantastical worlds, Barry draws on folklore, oral histories, mythology, ecology, and archival research to recover voices and forms of knowledge that have been suppressed or marginalized. Across these three bodies of work, Barry moves between different forms of testimony. In *Oblivion*, memory is carried through the voice and music. In *Embroidering the Earth's Mantle*, it is carried through the hand and the act of making. In *The Song of the Bleeding Tree*, it is carried by the land itself. Together, they suggest that memory does not disappear, it remains dormant, travels through generations, takes on new forms, and returns in unexpected ways.

By Jenifer Papararo

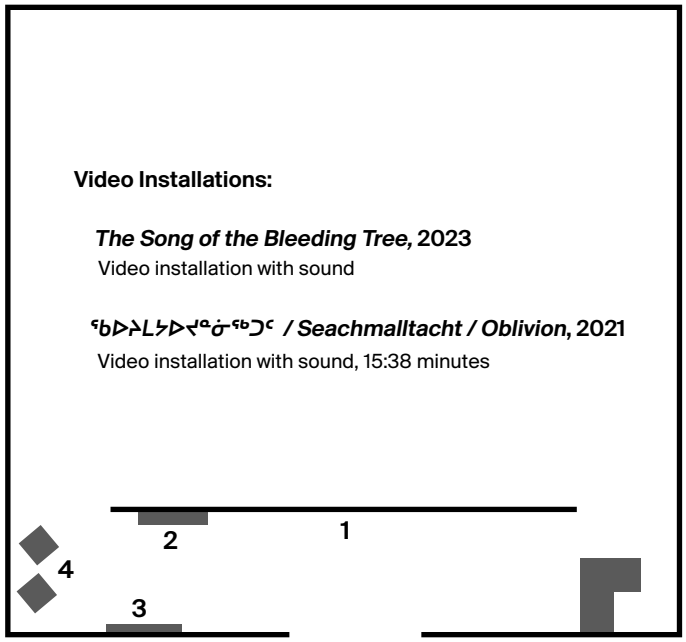
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[1] Tanya Tagaq, *Split Tooth* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2018).

[2] ITMAVideos, "*Aideen Barry's Oblivion / Seachmalltacht / ᖁbᐅᓗLᖃᐅᔪᓐᓂᖅᑐᑦ (LIVE),*" YouTube video, December 21, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptLaYnKZFcE.

[3] Aideen Barry, *ᖁbᐅᓗLᖃᐅᔪᓐᓂᖅᑐᑦ / Seachmalltacht / Oblivion*, 2-channel video, 2021.

Aideen Barry: *Silent Songs*
At Centennial Square



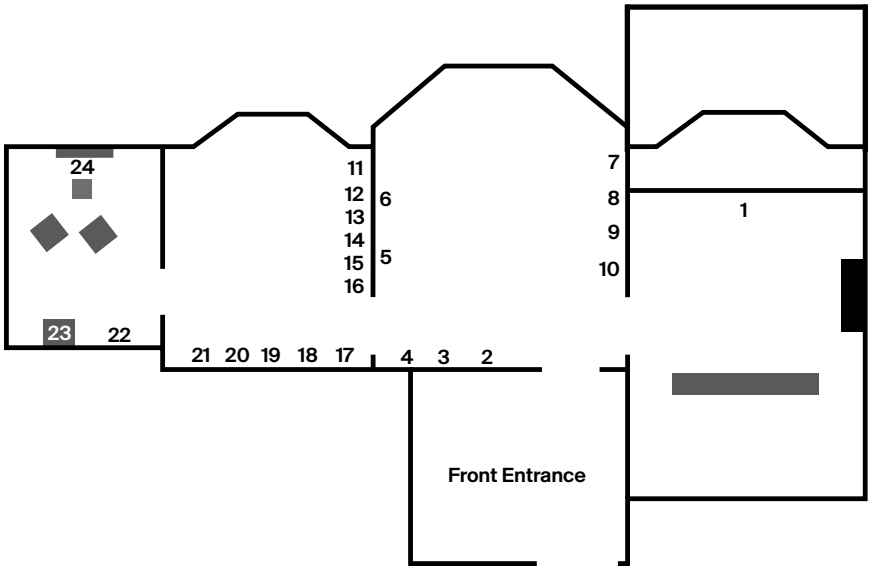
1. *Balor's Eye,* 2020
Wall vinyl in Inuktitut, Gaelic, English and French
120" x 432" in.

2. Acrylic Nail Art for *OBLIVION,* 2020
Acrylic nail art by Kate O'Brien, nail artist at Tropical Popical
Various Dimension

3. *The Song of the Bleeding Tree,* 2024
Print on photo paper
72" x 30 1/2" in.

4. *Eel Skin Crowns for OBLIVION,* 2020
Eel-skin crowns by Margaret O'Connor, accessories designer
15" x 6" x 16" in.

Aideen Barry: *Silent Songs*
In Gairloch Gardens



1. ***Embroidering the Earth's Mantle,*** **2025**
Video with sound, 14:10 minutes

2. ***The Moon Feeder,*** **2025**
Embroidery thread and cotton fabric on wool
18 3/8" x 20 5/16" in.

3. ***The Tower,*** **2025**
Embroidery thread and cotton fabric on wool
27 7/8" x 22 3/8" in.

4. ***The Labyrith,*** **2025**
Embroidery thread and cotton fabric on wool
24 5/8" x 28 1/4" in.

5. ***Will You Sail the Orinoco or Become a Singing Mountain,*** **2025**
Embroidery thread, felt, cotton fabric, pencil and acrylic paint on wool
43 7/8" x 21" in.

6. ***The Watchmaker*****, 2025**
Embroidery thread and cotton fabric on wool
24 1/4" x 24 1/4" in.

7. ***Moon in a Cage,*** **2025**
Embroidery thread and cotton fabric on wool
27 1/2" x 22 3/8" in.

8. ***Creator of Birds,*** **2025**
Embroidery thread and cotton fabric on wool
27 1/8" x 22" in.

9. ***The Singing Mountain,*** **2025**
Embroidery thread, felt, pencil and acrylic paint
26 3/4" x 23 1/2" in.

10. ***Sailing the Orinoco,*** **2025**
Embroidery thread and cotton fabric on wool
22 3/4" x 18 7/8" in.

11. ***Climbing from the Tower, After Varo,*** **2026**
Hologrammed print on Hahnemühle Fine Art Photo Rag Paper, edition 2 of 25
17 3/16" x 9 11/16" in.

12. ***The Labryinth, After Varo,*** **2026**
Hologrammed print on Hahnemühle Fine Art Photo Rag Paper, edition 2 of 25
17 3/16" x 9 11/16" in.

13. ***The Embroider's Flee Through a City Walled Up, After Varo,*** **2026**
Hologrammed print on Hahnemühle Fine Art Photo Rag Paper, edition 2 of 25
17 3/16" x 9 11/16" in.

14. ***The Sister Looks Up Towards The Singing Mountains, After Varo*****, 2026**
Hologrammed print on Hahnemühle Fine Art Photo Rag Paper, edition 2 of 25
17 3/16" x 9 11/16" in.

15. ***The Silent Song, After Varo,*** **2026**
Hologrammed print on Hahnemühle Fine Art Photo Rag Paper, edition 2 of 25
17 3/16" x 9 11/16" in.

16. ***The Watchmaker, After Varo,*** **2026**
Hologrammed print on Hahnemühle Fine Art Photo Rag Paper, edition 2 of 25
17 3/16" x 9 11/16" in.

17. ***Moon Feeder, After Varo*****, 2026**
Hologrammed print on Hahnemühle Fine Art Photo Rag Paper, edition 2 of 25
17 3/16" x 9 11/16" in.

18. ***Moon in a Cage, After Varo*****, 2026**
Hologrammed print on Hahnemühle Fine Art Photo Rag Paper, edition 2 of 25
17 3/16" x 9 11/16" in.

19. ***Creator of Birds, After Varo*****, 2025**
Hologrammed print on Hahnemühle Fine Art Photo Rag Paper, edition 22 of 30
17 3/16" x 24" in.

20. ***The Musician, After Varo*****, 2026**
Hologrammed print on Hahnemühle Fine Art Photo Rag Paper, edition 2 of 25
17 3/16" x 9 11/16" in.

21. ***Sailing the Orinoco, After Varo,*** **2026**
Hologrammed print on Hahnemühle Fine Art Photo Rag Paper, edition 2 of 25
17 3/16" x 9 11/16" in.

22. ***Balor's Eye,*** **2021**
Print on photo paper
42" x 42" in.

23. ***Wood Hat Block*****, 2020**
Wood and metal hat block by Margaret O'Connor, accessories designer
16" x 6" x 22" in.

24. ***Behind the Scenes: The Making of OBLIVION,*** **2023**
Directed and produced by Aideen Barry
16:32 minutes

About the Artist

Aideen Barry is a conceptual artist based in Ireland with an international multifaceted practice spanning filmmaking, performance, experimental lens-based media, drawing, and sculpture. Her work employs visual trickery to create a heightened suspension of reality, with a central theme of exploring sinister systems. Her recent projects are intersectional and collaborative, working with artists such as Peter Gabriel, William Kentridge, and The Centre of the Less Good Idea in Johannesburg, as well as Inuit throat singer Riit, composers Irene Buckley, choreographers Junk Ensemble, fashion designer Richard Malone, Tropical Topical & Margaret O'Connor, composers Tshegofatso Moeng and Philip Miller. Barry engages with a diverse range of collaborators, including artists, pop singers, archives, archivists, historians, scientists and activists, transcending pop culture and visual culture to create massive interventionist artworks. Notably, she collaborated with nearly a thousand Lithuanian citizens to create the feature film Klostės, which is now part of the National Collection at IMMA and contributed to Kaunas receiving UNESCO World Heritage Status. Her works serve as a Brechtian hammer, while also democratising access to visual culture for various audiences and stakeholders, inviting them to co-author the creative process.

Significant projects include: projects and exhibitions at; The Bangkok Art Biennial curated by Dr. Apinan Poshyananda, FORMAT international festival of photography, UK, film screenings at the BFI and the IFI, solo at IMMA, solos at Salzburg Kunstverein, Oakville Galleries, Canada The Welt Museum, Vienna, Matucana 100; Chile,The Irish Museum of Modern Art PS; Ireland, CAC Malaga; Spain, The Headlands Center for the Arts; US, Centre for the Less Good Idea; South Africa, Art OMI; US, The Whitaker Museum;UK, NASA Kennedy Space Center; US, Skaftfell; Iceland, Banff Centre; Canada, Centre Cultural Irlandais; France. Selected Solo and international projects at: Galleri Image, Aarhus, Denmark, Zona Maco, Ch ACO; Chile, The Katzen Center at the American Museum; US, Wexner Center: US Elephant Gallery; UK, Moderna Musett; Sweden, Musée des Beaux Arts,Lyon; France, Louise T. Blouin Gallery; UK, Galeria Isabel Hurley; Spain, Artscene Shanghai;China and Project 304 Gallery; Thailand, BAC Geneva; Switzerland, Liste Art Fair; Switzerland, Catharine Clark Gallery; US, NYU DC; US, Crawford Municipal Gallery,Project Art Centre, Temple Bar Gallery, Limerick City Gallery, The RHA, Visual,Mothers Tankstation, The Butler Gallery; Ireland, an An Post EUROPA stamp commission.

Parallel Programs

Common Ground: Aideen Barry Artist Talk
Wednesday, October 14, 2026, 1–2pm

Sheridan College

Common Ground is a new programming partnership co-presented by Oakville Galleries and Sheridan College. For its first edition, we present an artist talk by Aideen Barry exploring her expansive, collaborative, and multidisciplinary practice in relation to *Silent Songs*.

Stop Motion Animation with Aideen Barry
Sunday, October 18, 2026, 10am–1pm

Ages: 8–16

Gairloch Gardens

Inspired by Aideen Barry's exhibition and creative practice, this hands-on workshop introduces children to the art of stop-motion animation. Participants will create their own short animations by drawing sequences of images and bringing them to life through photography and digital animation techniques.

Bodies of Memory with Erica Stocking and Delphi
Saturday, November 21, 2026, 2–4pm

Gairloch Gardens

Erica Stocking and Delphi, her life-sized doll and longtime creative collaborator, will lead a hands-on workshop exploring storytelling, memory, and personal meaning through doll-making, inspired by the themes of Aideen Barry's *Silent Songs*.

Aideen Barry

Silent Songs

October 24, 2026 – January 23, 2027

The exhibition is curated by Séamus Kealy with Natalie Stone.

Curatorial texts by Jenifer Papararo.

Installation preparators: Vanessa Rieger, Lead, with Spencer Barclay, Jordan May, Hannah McInally and Maximilian Suillerot.

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About Oakville Galleries

Oakville Galleries is a contemporary art museum housed across two locations — one in a mid-century Modernist civic building in downtown Oakville, and the other in a historic lakeside mansion and public garden. Oakville Galleries is one of Canada's leading art institutions, presenting an international roster of contemporary artists in varying stages of their careers. Oakville Galleries' mission is driven by a belief in the singular power of art and artists to deepen our understanding of ourselves and our communities and move us toward a better world.

We are thankful to Culture Ireland for their generous support of *Silent Songs*.

Oakville Galleries gratefully acknowledges the ongoing support of the Corporation of the Town of Oakville; the Canada Council for the Arts; the Ontario Arts Council, an agency of the Government of Ontario along with the generous support of our individual, corporate and foundation partners. We acknowledge the generous support of our membership. Thank you!

The film *Oblivion* is supported by the Arts Council | an Chomhairle Ealaíon, Irish Traditional Music Archive, Music Network, Cultural Ireland, and Canada Council for the Arts.















