

Tarik Kiswanson

Prelude

3 February – 1 June 2024

Oakville Galleries in Gairloch Gardens

Exhibition curated and exhibition text written by
Séamus Kealy

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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 and statutory holidays
Monday (available by appointment)

Admission is always free.
905.844.4402 | info@oakvillegalleries.com
oakvillegalleries.com | [@oakvillegalleries](https://www.instagram.com/oakvillegalleries)

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Tarik Kiswanson presents an ensemble of works produced over the last couple of years. Forms of rootlessness, regeneration, and renewal are combined in this exhibition through poetic sculptural and architectural gestures, where we see post-war histories eliding with contemporaneous experience. Born in Halmstad, Sweden in 1986 where his family exiled from Palestine, Kiswanson's practice has been described as evincing a poetics of métissage: a means of writing and surviving between multiple conditions and contexts. His broad artistic practice acts as a cosmology of related conceptual families, each exploring variations on themes like refraction, multiplication, disintegration, levitation, and polyphony through their own distinct language.

The idea of transformation is central to the oeuvre of Tarik Kiswanson. That is, we see embodied in his sculptural practice ideas of displacement and metamorphosis, alteration and change, presented statically in form but evoking transformation in its essence. In Kiswanson's earlier work, this was often through the prism of migration. To this day, there remains an echo of this personal uprooted experience—which evinces his constant struggle with his identity, for better or worse. His earlier work would often make reference to his family archives and family histories, picking up the pieces of what was lost in the family's displacement, and remarking on how memory itself fades along with the challenges in encountering a new life and home. The more recent works in this exhibition, however, moves into more universal ideas of transformation, where Kiswanson also

makes reference to post-war reconstruction across Europe, and combines them with ideas of transformation as they appear in nature.

The cocoon sculptures arise out of the artist's fascination with the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly, which he parallels in physical form with notions of diaspora, growth, entropy and becoming. A sliding signifier between egg, seed, life, birth, and death is also evident in these works. They first emerged out of drawings, then eventually were shaped by the artist into sculptures based on his own body measurements. This could be seen as a kind of mirroring of body, emotion and experience for starters. The works have become larger, more monumental and more gregarious in their interplay with architecture—as if a being had planted a cocoon onto the gallery walls. The artist sees the apparent levitation of these works as a central metaphor for rootlessness—as if one floats slightly above and away from the world at large, when one is uprooted from one's homeland and cultural identity. These cocoons thus hang auspiciously from ceilings, appear in corners, and here in one case is wedged together curiously with a chair.

Kiswanson has researched postwar reconstruction since several years, especially in France, United Kingdom, Germany as well as in Austria, with one focus of his research being postwar furniture. Named *mobilier de sinistres* in France, these were made at the very end of World War II in 1945. The chair in the work *The Wait* is one example, Austrian made, of such mass-produced furniture created for the general populace; simple, pragmatic and universal. It is thus such an elegant coincidence

that these chairs are in the director's office of the Salzburger Kunstverein, one of which I sat upon for nine years in my previous role there.

Unknown to me all those years is that these chairs were fashioned *en masse* as part of the general sweep across Europe to reconstruct society after the catastrophe of the war. The artist brings these chairs into his work, pulling this timeline into focus and into play with his concerns and experience of contemporary migration, flight, the endlessness of resettling and the personal and intimate reconstruction one must perpetually undergo.

In addition to the idea of transformation, notions of what comes after an event of note, come into focus in Tarik Kiswanson's exhibition. While cognisant of notions of recovery after trauma, his work moves beyond a depiction of repair per se to assert a sense of metamorphosis and transformation. As a second generation immigrant in his thirties born in Europe, Kiswanson takes on these universal and constant topics from a different time and place. He is concerned with how one moves on from traumatic histories, enabling a transformation to happen while embracing the past and acknowledging inherited trauma of past generations. The scars and wounds remain from one generation to the next, however they are fused with the present creating a ripple in reality, an instability in form as we see throughout this work. This is in form as we see throughout this work. This is a trembling, unfixated and palpitating identity. In earlier works, Kiswanson made sculptures of high polished steel reflecting everything surrounding them. These works absorbed the architecture and other objects or other artwork around them,

and were in constant activation when encountered by people especially. These sculptural works were aesthetically and conceptually malleable, shifting from one constellation of meaning to another, never stable, as different visitors or settings completed them, albeit for a few moments. His formal concerns have shifted more recently, where he sees his work more akin to a threshold that reveals ideas of timelessness and the ephemeral as they interact with changing identity and future society. His awareness and remarking upon traumatic histories—whether more recent or current—underlines this work powerfully, harkening beneath the surface of the cocoons for example. His embodied link to his Palestinian background and all that suggests remains in these works, a combined sense of rootlessness and being and becoming between several countries (Sweden, Jordan, France, Palestine) and five languages. This is however shared across more universal histories and experiences within the exhibition altogether as the works interact with one another.

We also encounter a series of resin floor sculptures, reminiscent of tombstones, these works evince a stoppage of time and a sense of freezing a critical or traumatic moment for observation, analysis and, most of all, intimate exposure.

In the final gallery, the film *The Fall* plays out many of the themes referenced above and is itself also a play on time where a split second sequence of a child falling back on his chair is slowed down to a ten-minute experience. The pre-adolescent boy, found by the artist in the suburbs of Brussels, is both on an inevitable trajectory while also in a poignant moment of liberation. The ideas of levitation and transformation throughout much of the artist's work today had first appeared in this 2019 film.

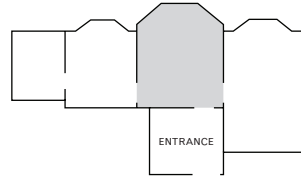
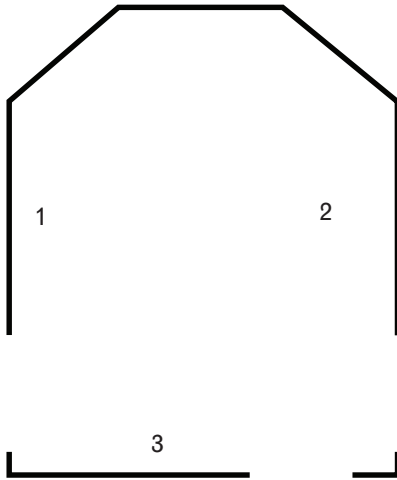
Tarik Kiswanson's personal narrative of displacement, longing, and shifting identity has merged powerfully with a desire to explore and reflect on the collective human condition. His art proposes new possibilities, including hopeful tendencies for rebirth, transformation, and even liberation out of trauma and displacement.

Tarik Kiswanson's exhibition is the first part of a multi-year project in collaboration with Executive Director Séamus Kealy.

Tarik Kiswanson was awarded the Marcel Duchamp Prize in 2023. His work has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions at international institutions, most recently at Bonniers Konsthall (2023), Salzburger Kunstverein (2023, curated by Séamus Kealy), Museo Tamayo(2023), M HKA-Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp (2022), Hallands Konstmuseum (2022) and Carré d'Art-Musée d'art contemporain (2021). He has participated in group exhibitions and biennials at institutions such as Centre Pompidou, Gothenburg International Biennial for Contemporary Art, 16th Lyon Biennial of Contemporary Art, The Ural Biennial, Performa 19 Biennial, Gwangju Biennial, and MUDAM-Museum of Contemporary Art Luxembourg. Tarik Kiswanson received his MFA from École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris and BFA from Central Saint Martins-University of the Arts London. He lives and works in Paris, France and is represented by the galleries carlie I gebauer and Sfeir-Semler Gallery.

Tarik Kiswanson: *Prelude*

Central Gallery

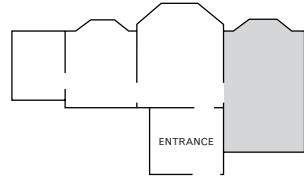
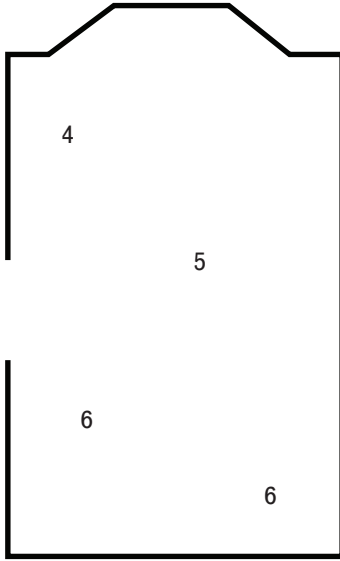


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- 1 *Cradle, 2022*
Resin, fiberglass, paint
175 x 64.8 cm
Courtesy the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery,
Beirut/ Hamburg

 - 2 *Anamnesis, 2023*
Resin cast with inox object
40 x 28 x 9 cm
Courtesy the artist and carlier | gebauer, Berlin/Madrid

 - 3 *The Window, 2022*
Charcoal drawing
46 x 35 cm
Courtesy the artist and carlier | gebauer, Berlin/Madrid

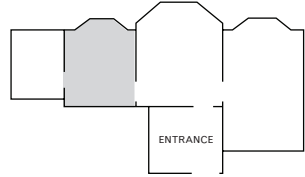
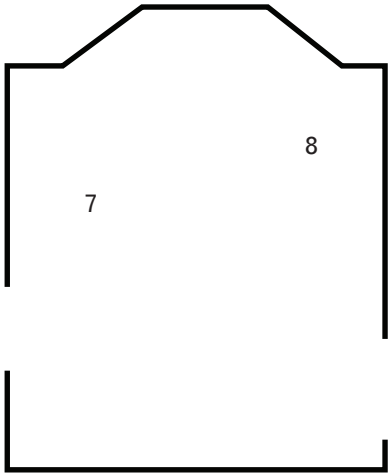
North Gallery



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- 4 *Concealed, 2020*
Resin, silverware
40 x 28 x 9 cm
Courtesy the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Beirut/Hamburg
- 5 *Respite, 2020*
Resin, candle
40 x 28 x 9 cm
Courtesy the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Beirut/Hamburg
- 6 *The Wait, 2023*
Fiberglass, resin, paint, wooden chair by Franz Schuster
203 x 52 x 72 cm
Courtesy the artist, Salzburger Kuntsverein, and
carlier | gebauer, Berlin/Madrid

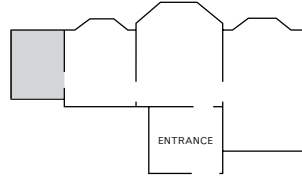
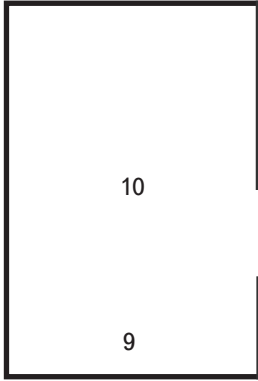
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South Gallery



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- 7 *In my blood, 2020*
Resin, blood, pigment
40 x 28 x 9 cm
Courtesy the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Beirut/Hamburg
- 8 *The Accident, 2023*
Resin, ink pen
40 x 28 x 9 cm
Courtesy the artist, Sfeir-Semler Gallery, and Bonniers
Konsthall

Salah Bachir Gallery



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- 9 *The Fall*, 2020
Film
9 min, 42 sec
Courtesy the artist, carlier | gebauer, and Sfeir-Semler Gallery
- 10 *Shatter*, 2020
Sound piece
26 min, 50 sec
Courtesy the artist, calier | gabauer, Berlin/Madrid

Oakville Galleries is located on Treaty Lands and Territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and the traditional territory of the Huron-Wendat and the Haudenosaunee. The treaty lands are covered by the Upper Canada Treaties, namely the Head of the Lake, Treaty No. 14 (1806) and Treaty No. 22. At the same time, Oakville Galleries in Gairloch Gardens and at Centennial Square is uniquely situated along the shoreline of Lake Ontario and Sixteen Mile Creek. These waterways are unceded territory and the Mississaugas have unextinguished aboriginal title to all water, beds of water, and floodplains contained therein. As an institution, Oakville Galleries recognizes the importance of establishing and maintaining meaningful and respectful relationships with the original inhabitants and keepers of the land, and we are grateful for the opportunity to operate on this territory.

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