

# OAKVILLE GALLERIES

## ALI CHERRI *To Fall, Patiently*

13 June – 03 October 2026  
Gairloch Gardens & Centennial Square

Curated by Séamus Kealy

An Audio Tour by Ali Cherri is available in English and French

To learn more visit [oakvillegalleries.com](http://oakvillegalleries.com) or scan below:



Ali Cherri, still from *The Watchman*, 2023. Courtesy the artist, Fondazione In Between Art Film, and Galerie Imane Farès, Paris.

# 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  
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Admission is always free.  
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Oakville Galleries gratefully acknowledges the ongoing support of the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the Ontario Arts Council, an agency of the Government of Ontario and the Corporation of the Town of Oakville, along with our many individual, corporate and foundation partners.

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## ***Of Mud and Dreams: Ali Cherri***

### **Text by Séamus Kealy**

*“If the gods made us in their own image, then the gods, too, must have been made of mud.”*

– Excerpt from *The Book of Mud*, Ali Cherri, 2019

**Ali Cherri** (b. 1976, Beirut) is a Paris-based artist with three decades of artistic practice spanning across film, performance, sculpture, painting, drawing, and installation. Highly influenced by the Lebanese postwar art scene, Ali Cherri’s complex body of work interrogates how histories and currencies of political violence resonate through generations as well as cultural landscapes and objects. Ali Cherri was notably awarded the Silver Lion at the 2022 Venice Biennale. He has exhibited in leading museums around the world. This is Ali Cherri’s inaugural solo exhibition in Canada.

*To Fall, Patiently* is an exhibition in several galleries and into the gardens that brings together several streams of Ali Cherri’s work over the last number of years. The title has contained within it a number of sentiments, some of which are referenced in this text below. This title is, for one, poetic. It immediately conjures an idea of vulnerability and of being deferential. It also seems to express surrender and acceptance, with grace, in the face of adversity, of the world’s difficulties. Likewise a sense of human meekness, accepting or embracing how it falls before fate or providence is also associable with this title. *To Fall, Patiently* has a somewhat unusual ring to it, and could imply amorous relationships; gently, softly fading, or falling in love, somehow at the same time—waxing and waning. The word “patiently” might imply that the “falling” is under the subject’s will here rather than being patient with something “other.” In this metaphorical sense for this title, the falling could be caused by an outside cause, whether negative or not (ie. force, age, attrition). An association with the writings of Samuel Beckett may not be far off, particularly his common uses of “falling, failing” throughout his oeuvre, and, a sense of vulnerability and resilience combined as a gestalt arises in the sculptural work of Ali Cherri especially.

## **Gairloch Gardens**

At the Gairloch Gallery, Ali Cherri presents a series of sculptures, assembled elegantly between different materials, each a hybrid involving artifacts found by the artist in auctions or marketplaces, originating from different eras. Adjacent to the sculptures is a series of watercolour paintings of prickly-pear cacti, contrasting the plants’ sharp thorns with their radiant blooms, a shifting metaphor for trauma, violence and endurance under duress in conflict zones, both historical and current. The film *Of Men and Gods and Mud* explores the relationship between people, labour, and the environment in North Sudan. Installed outdoors in the sculpture garden is the bronze sculpture *The Tree of Life*, and the neon sculpture *Les (Sur)Vivants*.

A key binding element in this exhibition is mud, the primeval matter of our creation stories, both resilient and fragile, the gritty matter of dreams. In 2019, with Lina Mounzer, Ali Cherri wrote and published *The Book of Mud (Dongola Limited Editions)*. This book is in part manifesto, in part reverie; a story of earth and water, which one can see strains of throughout this exhibition. *The Book of Mud* is an exploration of the past and the ways in which it inscribes itself physically: eroding, shaping, reforming, becoming itself through upheaval and destruction. Cherri is a storyteller in conversation with writers in both English and Arabic, unveiling “a story of perpetually shifting geographies, of elemental forces and terrain that cracks and rumbles and breaks over eons into new topographical formations.” They ask, “if mud had its own memory, what might it deem worth remembering?”

We see mud as an essential creative form in the sculptures as well as in the film *Of Men and Gods and Mud*, where references to origin myths that assert humankind originally emerging from mud. In this film, nearby the Merowe Dam in Northern Sudan, local brickmakers mix earth with the water of the Nile River. The men fire the wet clay over mudded kilns. The film alternates between closeups of the men and landscapes, while a voiceover recalls that in many creation myths, man was made of primeval muck, from Adam with his clay rib to Gilgamesh’s dust-borne companion Enkidu. “Out of mud we were made, out of mud we dreamed we were made. Then we forgot or sought to forget.” Also with the idea of mud we think of the primordial, how to make sense of the world, the deep contrast between those working in the labour of mud in the film and the complete opposites in the lavish expressions of wealth at the other end of the wealth spectrum. One defines the other and each are reflective of the other. Ideas of labour, exploitation, even the commodity being made

from the basest of elements, here in the case of bricks, where these socio-political realities are contrasted with mythologies and centuries of dreaming in this hypnotic film. Meanwhile the harsh and indifferent construction of Africa's largest hydropower plant nearby has displaced more than 50,000 people. The dam transforms ecosystems and floods cultural and archaeological sites. The grand scale and sophistication of the dam contrasts starkly with the brickmakers' spare conditions, underscoring the destructive potential of development and depicting the double-sided nature of humanity: creative and self-destructive, indeed not unlike the creation myths after all if not entirely conscious of them.

Indeed the sculptures in this exhibition appear also very much of this origin nature, harkening back to antiquity and grafted together with newer mud and glue; vulnerable, unstable, and yet also melded into a safety net of sculptural process. The artist acquires them from auctions or markets, and is deeply interested in how their value is determined. They are often of dubious origin, he says, and therefore seen to be of little value. Moreover, they exist outside the museum system—a system that places great value on other antiquities. This spell of inequality is curious to the artist. And then the thrill of the auction and the desire of acquisition happening in real time is also admittedly, he admits. This new-found desire is thus bound into these objects on the one hand, and the artist's desire to also bring these objects out of a sort of lost history back into the museal sphere as art objects is also palpable. After purchasing the objects they often remain in his studio for years until he figures out how to move forward with them. Once decided he takes the fragments, like broken bodies, and assembles them into new forms with newer albeit similar materials. The wounds of time and neglect are present in these objects, and the damages are not repaired, he insists. He doesn't change the objects to enhance their quality, in fact there is nothing to hide, he says. This is akin to a psychoanalytic approach to the object to "take it as it is," not adjusted, but to in fact enshrine the flaws, the history, the scars, the wounds, the imperfections, in this elegant, hybrid process of sculpture-making. They appear as they are before us, and the suturing by the artist serves to complete them as sculptures, where in the end they may be more about our own broken bodies and what this brokenness may teach us about ourselves, and how wounds can create solidarities. The sculptures are also like a playful impostor brought into the museum, into the system of value and care and they are therefore saved from oblivion by the museum as the vast majority of their cousin objects will never be. The historical value is not of immediate importance to the artist, is it more how they have been kept in the background and out of the spotlight of

canonization. "The concept of desire becomes a political question—we put desire around objects, that's our consumerist society. Historic objects are part of this desire. I question all structures of power and the writing of history, because the latter becomes problematic," he says. Ali Cherri is conscious of the narratives of art history and hagiography and how while some objects and artwork are revered, others are left in the dust. These sculptures likewise reveal systems of power and determination, also therefore expose histories of colonization and indeed systems of power operating within capitalism. Signifiers, the artist says, are broken.

Cherri started to acquire the artifacts that form the basis of his sculpture a little over a decade ago at French auction house Drouot. A quick view of the Drouot website reveals the availability of objects from antiquity—among others—starting at the cost of 100 euros. They are, however, incredibly diverse—from sarcophagi to masks, mummies, and more—and span centuries. Despite their low value, we might immediately associate figures that had a place in ancient temples, had a reference to deities, and unearthed sacred objects of worship and societal binding. In these works, we experience the unmistakable presence of human life long passed—its tragedies, its fragilities, its pondering, its wonderment, its unknowingness—long snuffed out, and yet here we encounter a trace, like a gently-shaped fossil, remaining.

Ali Cherri's works are, in their hybridity, delicacy and bathos, also simultaneously akin to the layering upon layering of history that we believe to uncover through anthropology and archaeology. We become conscious of anthropology's colonial specters and problematic residues—along with accounts of related trauma. Not unlike the radical writing of Michel Foucault, these works expose and problematize our relationship to these histories and ideas, as well as depict the fetishization of ideas of origin, which become reformed in contemporary formations of society, hierarchy, sexuality and identity.

Ali Cherri's own history is discernible in these works. Having grown up in 1990s Lebanon, he recalls memories of the fate of the National Museum of Beirut during periods of war. With the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975, the capital was divided into East and West Beirut, and the museum stood on the demarcation line. 'So, the museum itself became a witness to the violence,' explains Cherri, who was about 15 when he had his first museum experience. To protect the artifacts, museum officials stored some in the walled-up basement, while other larger objects were covered up to protect them from bombardments. 'I was looking at cement blocks that had an

image taped on them indicating what was inside,' recalls Cherri. 'There was an act of faith that you had to have that what you're not seeing is actually there, so there was a suspension of belief. The experience was a starting point for me of looking at how artifacts literally disappear and retreat from violence.' These early ideas of the museum and its vulnerability—and its production of history despite that—spurred a continued interest in which 'broken objects' endured and how they go on to produce meaning. Museums, says Cherri, are 'sites of ideology, power, and producers of stories that we have to question.'

But the sculptures also emerge from all these associations in a radiant fashion. Grafting, like in botany, brings together two different species so that a stronger species emerges, one that can endure difficult circumstances. And here we may look at the adjacent watercolour paintings of prickly pear cacti by Ali Cherri. These cacti are used in communities in the Mediterranean as those in the West might use hedges, where they are deployed to separate areas of property and ownership. In Cyprus and in Lebanon, the prickly pear species is threatened by disease aggravated by the changing climate. Therefore we see these botanical borders literally dissolving before our eyes.

A deep concern in the artist's work is how to produce artwork and how to write historical narratives after violence has inflicted itself upon people and landscapes. This theme emerges repetitively in Ali Cherri's work, but never in one certain direction.

Two sculptures by Ali Cherri are installed in the sculpture garden of Gairloch Gardens. Installed in the porch facing the gardens, the neon sculpture *Les (Sur)vivants* poetically references the perils of surviving catastrophe. Ali Cherri knows this sentiment personally, and speaks to the complex nature of surviving while others have perished in tragic or unjust circumstances, most notably in the war-torn region he and his family were raised in. 'We all come with our baggage, we meet the other who has lived through the same experiences, and then we create a community of survivors,' says Cherri. On the other hand, the bronze sculpture *The Tree of Life*, which re-interprets ancient Assyrian, reliefs of a sacred tree, will be installed for one year in Gairloch Gardens. The work also references creation myths and stands as a symbol of hope for our future. These two sculptures contrast and complement each other, while enacting a parcours from the gallery into the sculpture garden.

## Centennial Gallery

At the Centennial Gallery, Ali Cherri presents the hypnotic film *The Watchman*, which features a soldier on watch before the no-man's land in Cyprus between the Greek Cypriot south and the Turkish Cypriot north.

*The Watchman* is akin to a dream. It sets out from the political history of this troubled territory and invokes personal stories of its inhabitants. The work also proposes a wider reflection on the politics of the recognition of borders and their consequences regarding notions of sovereignty, identity, and ultimately war, genocide and war crimes and, one hopes, peace. The main character, a soldier, guards the division line of the unrecognized Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, spending unimaginable night shifts on a watchtower looking out for "the enemy," who may or may not arrive. Sometimes, a robin crashes against the watchtower's window, and he reverently collects their bodies. When he is off duty, the soldier wanders half-asleep in the landscape waiting for the next shift to begin again. On the watchtower, reveries eventually take form.

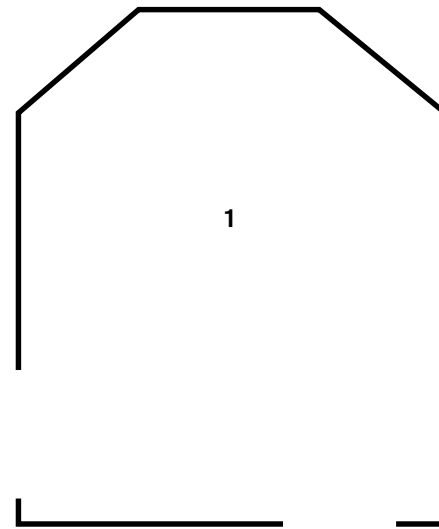
A notion of exhaustion runs through this exhibition and is culminating here in this film. On the one hand we have the exhausted gaze of the *Watchman*, whose duty transforms into dreams that are in part provoked by histories and possibilities of violence. The eyeless apparitions that appear to him from the dark are themselves the product of exhaustion; the exhaustion of histories of violence and the ever possibility of continued violence in and outside of borders. The soldier of the *Watchman* has to empty his mind in order to do his job to militarize his brain and in doing so inevitable repressed expressions erupt.

We sense a deep empathy for the figure of the soldier, caught in the machinery of absurd conflict, the expressions of dominant power and the resulting geopolitical theatres that enact vast forms of violence upon nations and generations. And yet, in his exhaustion, he is one of many bodies that the artist here imagines being capable of resisting violence and military repression through doubt and dreams. From his suffering hallucinations arise spectres that undermine the systems of perception holding everything together, disassembling the "truth" of the world into a series of fragments that we may suture back together ourselves.

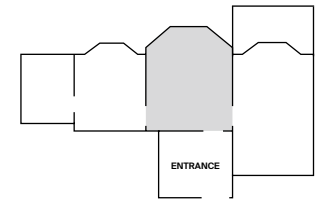
The prickly pears cacti in the paintings at Gairloch Gardens also appear in the film *The Watchman* (at the Centennial Gallery). A series of cascading metaphors arises therefore between these paintings and the film through their representation, where the disease that affects the prickly pear cactus is a metaphor for dissolving borders which then is associated with dissolving forms of nationalism which then is associable with the necessity of commonness and multitude as an alternative to dominant narratives, to imperialism and injustice. Like the artist's hybrid sculptures we come together in our imperfections and embrace one another. In this world and in this time when geopolitical and socio-economic realities are even more determined by misguided nationalisms and imperialistic expressions of hegemonic power, this work is quietly urgent in its appeal to humanity.

Poetic, bathetic, tense with a knowingness of the darker elements of humanity, and imbued with a constant sense of Walter Benjamin's Angel of History, Ali Cherri's work sweeps across different eras of humanity while being very much connected to the world as it exists today. The rich tapestry of Ali Cherri's work oscillates between history and memory, realities of violence and remainders of trauma, worlds of political spectacle and the stuff of fantasy, ancient monuments and modernism, myth and sensuality, death and survival, fragments and hybridity, fragility and resilience, materiality and mortality, museal knowledge and its ruins, and of mud and dreams. His work offers a sense of hope in the face of grave adversity, and cries out that humankind can and must save itself from its own peril.

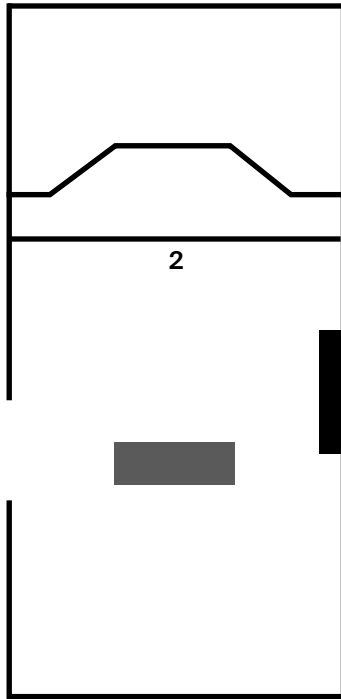
**Ali Cherri: *To Fall, Patiently***  
In Gairloch Gardens



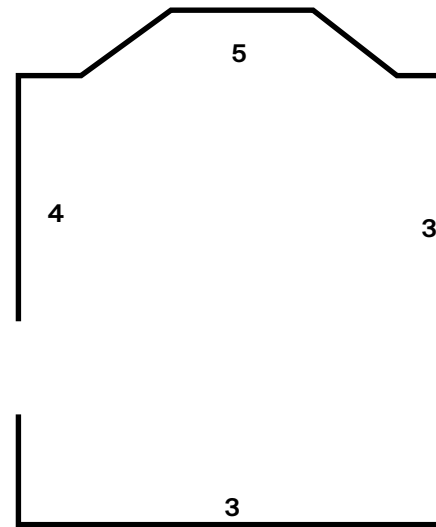
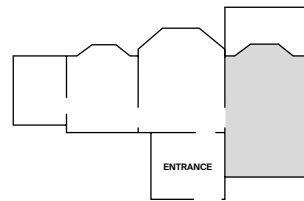
**Central Gallery**



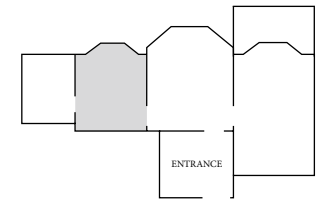
1. ***Seated Figure, 2022***  
Heaume mask Mapico (Tanzania), clay, sand, xps, wood, pigments  
Courtesy of the artist and Imane Farès Gallery



**North Gallery**

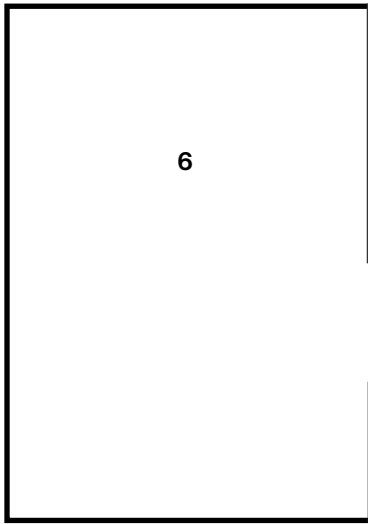


**South Gallery**

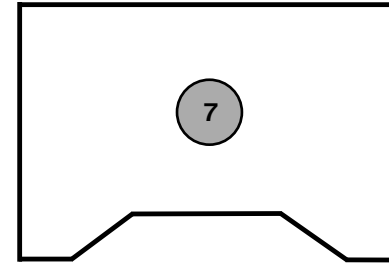
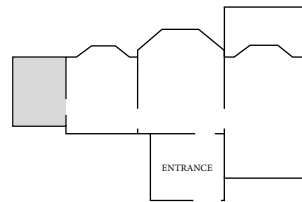


2. ***Of Men and Gods and Mud, 2022***  
 Video Installation  
 Courtesy of the artist and Imane Farès Gallery

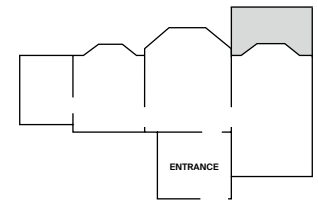
3. ***We Grow Thorns so Flowers would Bloom (8/13 works from the series), 2023***  
 Watercolour and graphite on paper, framed.  
 Courtesy of the artist and Imane Farès Gallery
4. ***La Grande Dame, 2023***  
 Male head with ball headdress (Egypt, Late Period, ca. 664-32 B.C.),  
 clay, sand pigments, xps, steel  
 Courtesy of the artist and Imane Farès Gallery
5. ***Grafting (Errance), 2023***  
 Headless and stone bust of Saint John the Baptist (France, late  
 eleventh century), alabaster head (France, eighteenth century),  
 votive feet in terracotta, brass  
 Courtesy of the artist and Imane Farès Gallery



**Salah Bachir Galley**



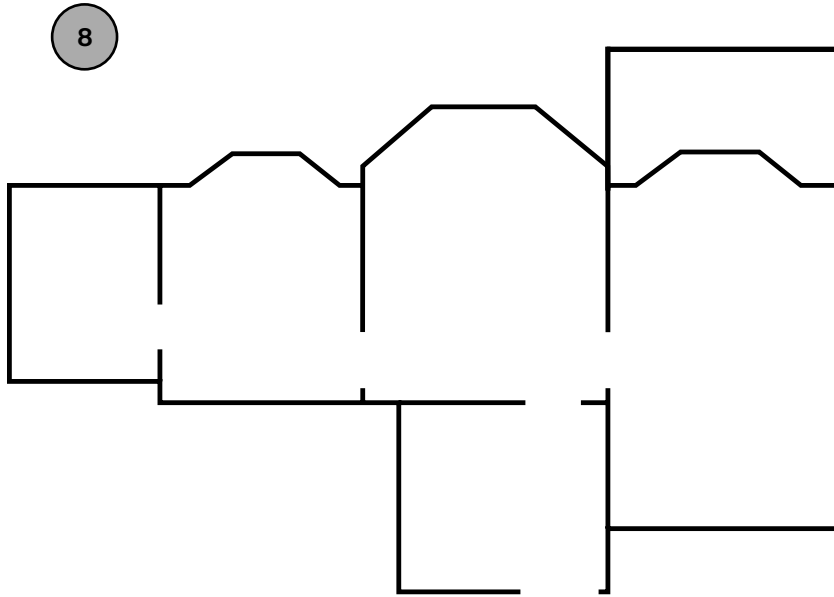
**Covered Porch**



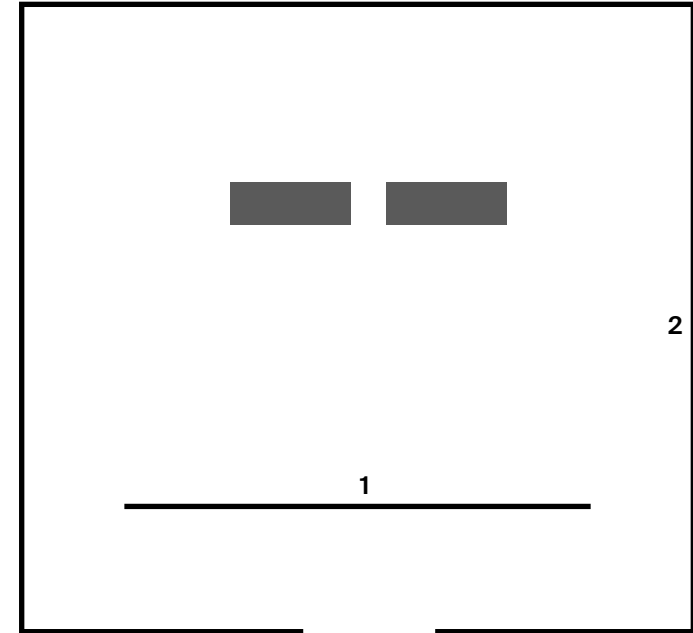
6. ***Vermilingua Bust, 2023***  
 Mumuye Mask, 20th/21st century (possibly made for trade) (Nigeria),  
 clay, sand, pigments  
 Courtesy of Slobodan Randjelovic

7. ***Les (Sur)Vivants, 2025***  
 Glass neon tube, white steel structure transformers,  
 dimmer switches.  
 © Estate of Ali Cherri, courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech

**Ali Cherri: *To Fall, Patiently*  
At Centennial Square**



8. ***The Tree of Life, 2024*** (outdoors in Gairloch Gardens)  
Bronze, steel  
Courtesy of the artist and Imane Farès Gallery



1. ***The Watchman, 2023***  
HD video, colour, sound  
Courtesy of the artist and Imane Farès Gallery  
Commissioned and produced by Fondazione In Between Art Film for the exhibition Dreamless Night held at GAMeC, Bergamo, and Frac Bretagne, Rennes. Co-produced by The Vega Foundation and KinoElektron. The film received additional support from Galerie Imane Farès, Robert Matta – Fondation RAM, Arab Fund for Arts and Culture, and Frac Bretagne. Courtesy of the artist; Fondazione In Between Art Film; and Galerie Imane Farès.
2. ***We Grow Thorns so Flowers would Bloom (1/13 works from the series), 2023***  
Watercolor and graphite on paper, framed  
Courtesy of the artist and Imane Farès Gallery

## About the Artist

Ali Cherri (b. 1976, Beirut, Lebanon) is a contemporary artist and filmmaker whose practice spans film, sculpture, drawing, and installation, examining how political violence imprints itself on bodies, landscapes, and cultural artifacts across the Middle East, North Africa, and beyond. Ali Cherri has exhibited at institutions, biennales, film festivals, and contemporary art galleries across Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and the Americas.

Ali Cherri was born in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1976 and grew up during the Lebanese Civil War. This experience shaped his sustained engagement with conflict, memory, and the built environment. Cherri's early career focused on film and multimedia and was shaped by the post-war Beirut art scene of the 1990s and 2000s. He began exhibiting internationally in group shows such as *In Focus* (Tate Modern, 2007), *Future Imperfect* (Tate Modern, 2013), exhibitions at Centre Pompidou, Paris (2011 and 2017), and *But a Storm Is Blowing from Paradise* at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2016). His film tetralogy—*The Disquiet* (2013), *The Digger* (2015), *The Dam* (2022), and *The Watchman* (2023)—offers an extended meditation on political landscapes from Lebanon to Cyprus and Sudan, and has received awards at Dubai International Film Festival, CPH:DOX Copenhagen, VideoBrasil, Côté Court Festival, and Cannes (Directors' Fortnight).

From 2020 onward, Cherri expanded his practice into monumental sculpture using earth and mud—what he describes as 'the primeval matter of our creation stories.' His installation *Of Men and Gods and Mud* (2022), shown in Cecilia Alemani's *The Milk of Dreams* at the 59th Venice Biennale, earned the Silver Lion, with the jury praising 'an interdisciplinary and multilayered presentation that takes a meditation on earth, fire, and water from a constructive perspective to a mythical dimension'. Solo exhibitions followed at the National Gallery, London (*If you prick us do we not bleed?*, 2022), Swiss Institute, New York (*Humble and quiet and soothing as mud*, 2023), GAMeC, Bergamo (*Dreamless Night*, 2023), and the Vienna Secession (*How I Am Monument*, 2024), forming the basis for an expanded survey at Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art in 2025.

In 2024, Cherri held the exhibition *Envisagement* at Fondation Giacometti, Paris, exploring representations of the human face through sculpture and archaeological artefacts. In 2024–25, his

major institutional project *How I Am Monument* was presented at Secession, Vienna, and subsequently at Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead. In 2025 he presented *Les Veilleurs* at Musée d'art contemporain de Marseille. In 2026, his first solo exhibition at Almine Rech in New York, *Last Watch Before Dawn*, debuted the new film *The Sentinel* (2026) alongside sculptures and works on paper. Ocula Magazine named it among the top ten exhibitions worldwide in February 2026. Forthcoming solo exhibitions at Palais de Tokyo, Paris, and Pray, Lips of Clay at WIELS, Brussels, further consolidate his presence within European institutions. Cherri is also scheduled to participate in the Kyiv Biennial and the group exhibition *Near East, Far West* at the Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw, in 2026.

Ali Cherri received the Silver Lion for a Promising Young Participant at the 59th Venice Biennale in 2022 for his installation *Of Men and Gods and Mud*, and his work is held in the collections of MoMA and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Centre Pompidou in Paris, and the British Museum in London, among others.

## Select solo exhibitions

2026	Palais de Tokyo, Paris, WIELS, Brussels; Almine Rech, New York; Oakville Galleries, Oakville, Canada
2025	<i>How I Am Monument</i> , Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead
2025	<i>Les Veilleurs</i> , Musée d'art contemporain de Marseille
2024	<i>Envisagement</i> , Fondation Giacometti, Paris
2024	<i>How I Am Monument</i> , Secession, Vienna
2023	<i>Dreamless Night</i> , GAMeC, Bergamo
2023	<i>Humble and quiet and soothing as mud</i> , Swiss Institute, New York
2022	<i>If you prick us do we not bleed?</i> , The National Gallery, London

### Select group exhibitions

2026	Kyiv Biennial; Near East, Far West, Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw
2025	<i>Corps et Âmes</i> , Bourse de Commerce – Pinault Collection, Paris
2023	15th Sharjah Biennial; 5th Kochi-Muziris Biennale
2022	<i>The Milk of Dreams</i> , 59th Venice Biennale
2020	<i>Minds Rising, Spirits Tuning</i> , 13th Gwangju Biennale
2018	<i>Statues Also Die</i> , Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo and Museo Egizio, Turin
2016	<i>But a Storm Is Blowing from Paradise</i> , Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
2007	Lebanese Pavilion, Venice Biennale

### Awards and honours

2025	Press Award, Best Film, Côté Court Festival, for <i>The Watchman</i>
2022	Silver Lion for a Promising Young Participant, 59th Venice Biennale
2022	National Gallery Artist in Residence, London
2015	New Vision Award, CPH:DOX Copenhagen, for <i>The Digger</i>

### Ali Cherri's work is held in the following public collections:

Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York  
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York  
Musée national d'art moderne / Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris  
British Museum, London  
Collection Pinault, Paris and Venice  
Museo Egizio, Turin  
National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA), Seoul  
MACBA, Barcelona  
Bonniefanten Museum, Maastricht  
Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha

**About Oakville Galleries**

Oakville Galleries is a contemporary art museum in two locations presenting international and Canadian artists. Housed in a unique lakeside mansion in the magnificent Gairloch Gardens and a white cube gallery downtown, Oakville Galleries is one of Canada's leading contemporary art institutions. Supported by The Town of Oakville, Canada Council, Ontario Arts Council, sponsors, patrons and members.

