

Ali Cherri

How I Am Monument

Apr 12 — Oct 12, 2025 | Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art,
Gateshead, UK

In April 2025, Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art will present the first major institutional exhibition in the UK by artist Ali Cherri.

'How I Am Monument' has been conceived and organised by Baltic in partnership with world-renowned contemporary art space Vienna Secession, where it was presented from 6 December 2024 to 23 February 2025. The exhibition at Baltic, opening 12 April, is a second, expanded chapter of this collaboration, featuring new and recent works.

Cherri's practice is inspired both by archaeological artefacts and the natural world. He explores violence against bodies, objects and nature in regions of conflict, and visualises history and cultural value not as something neutral or universal, but as constructed narratives, deeply influenced by colonialism, nationalism and geopolitics. His work considers the links between archaeology, historical narrative and heritage, reflecting on the processes of excavation, cultural loss and the relocation and preservation of artefacts in museums.

'How I Am Monument' showcases the artist's interests in process and materiality, looking at history and the ancient world through a material lens. The exhibition will present newly commissioned works including *Sphinx* (2024), a hybrid sculpture created from mud and bronze. Evoking Assyrian and Egyptian statues, a winged human/animal creature sits on its haunches, with exaggerated musculature and a serpent curling around its legs. However, unlike the monumental sculptures of ancient civilisations that exude permanence and strength, its body and plinth are made from mud - a humble and fragile material that Cherri frequently employs in his work - and its front limbs are balanced precariously on two bronze prostheses.

In the new work *Toppled Monuments 1-6* (2024), wooden sculptures represent the empty plinths of monuments of deposed leaders or controversial historical figures. Displayed in large vitrines reminiscent of archaeological museums, the works reference statues of figures removed or damaged during the post-Soviet era, the Arab Spring, and the Black Lives Matter movement. The blank spaces left on the plinths invite us to imagine a better future.

Alongside this, will Baltic present recent works such as *Tree of Life* (2023), which is modelled after a Mesopotamian relief of Sargon from the Louvre in Paris, Cherri's first work made in bronze. Appearing in the Bible, the Quran, and the Epic of Gilgamesh, the tree of life functions as hopeful symbol of liveliness and creation. The sculpture will greet visitors as they enter the gallery.

The three-channel video installation, *Of Men and Gods and Mud* (2022), for which the artist was awarded the Silver Lion at the 59th Venice Biennale, was filmed at the Merowe Dam on the Nile River in Northern Sudan. In the early 2000s, the construction of the largest hydropower plant in Africa led to the displacement of more than 50,000 people. The film follows a group of brickmakers and their daily toil as they rebuild, shaping their bricks from mud.

The expanded exhibition at Baltic will also bring together additional works including the artist's acclaimed short film *The Watchman* (2023). Set in Cyprus, *The Watchman* reflects on the tensions around the military division line that separates the Greek and Turkish communities. It centres on the figure of a soldier who mans a watchtower looking out for 'the enemy'. Weary from his long shift, the soldier inhabits a space between wakefulness and sleep where peculiar things start to happen. In a related sculptural work *The Seven Soldiers*, a series of oversized heads are caught in a perpetual state of slumber, their haunting expressions resembling the ghostly figures that appear at the end of Cheri's film.

Ali Cheri commented: "With 'How I Am Monument,' I reflect on the processes through which historical and cultural narratives are constructed and transformed, the fragility of power, and the shifting nature of collective memory. It is an honour to present this expanded chapter at Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead, especially at a time when re-evaluating our shared history is crucial for understanding the complexities of the present."