

PRESS KIT

THE WATCHMAN

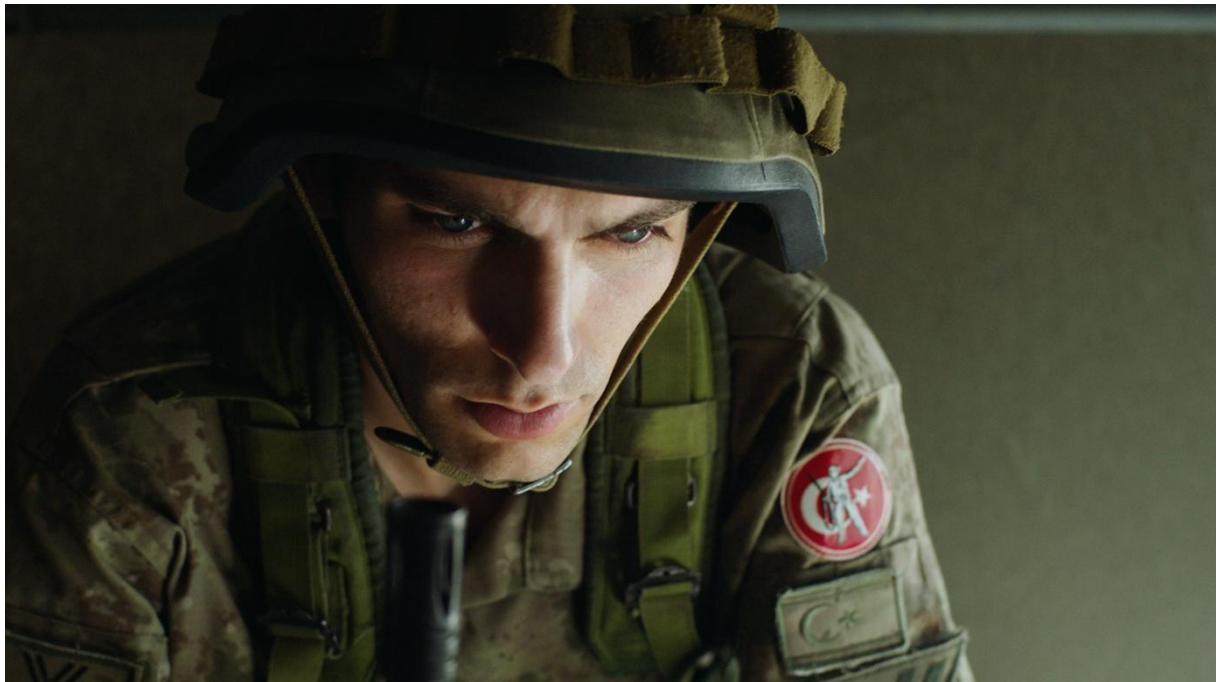


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Synopsis

In the remote village of Lourujina, situated within the self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Sergeant Bulut, a young Turkish Cypriot soldier, finds himself stationed to guard the dividing line. As he dutifully stands watch over the quiet landscape amidst the routine and solitude, peculiar events unfold that challenge the very essence of his mission.

"The Watchman" looks at a life suspended in the limbo of waiting. While Sergeant Bulut grapples with the enigmatic occurrences around him, the film unfolds a narrative of duty entangled in illusion—a tale of disappointment by the anticipation of an elusive enemy that might never come.



Director's statement

The Watchman: Unveiling Geographies of Violence in Cyprus

by Ali Cherri

In the turbulent history of Cyprus, the village of Louroujina stands as a poignant testament to the island's division. Nestled in the northern part, it now resides under the self-declared Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Before the 1974 division, Louroujina was a harmonious mix of Greek and Turkish Cypriots. However, the conflict resulted in the displacement of the Greek Cypriot population, leaving the village predominantly Turkish Cypriot.

Louroujina transformed into an isolated enclave within Greek Cypriot-controlled territory, accessible only through a narrow corridor to Northern Cyprus. The main road to Lympia, blocked since 1974, lies 300 meters from the roadblock in Louroujina, but the current journey stretches over 77 kilometers, symbolizing the physical and emotional distances imposed by the geopolitical rift.

"The Watchman" unfolds against this backdrop. Set in Louroujina, the narrative follows a Turkish Cypriot young soldier stationed on the division line for his military service. Tasked with monitoring the border from a watchtower, the soldier's routine duty takes a surreal turn as he begins witnessing strange occurrences on the Southern hills – mysterious lights moving with unpredictable intent.

As the soldier's nightly visions persist, scenarios of a potential enemy attack occupy his thoughts. Uncertain and hesitant to inform superiors, the soldier summons courage to investigate up-close. His inquiry leads him face to face with an army of "ghosts" – soldiers who died on the front, returning as revenants haunting the hills. This supernatural twist anchors the film in a socio-economic and political reality of Cyprus, blending fiction with a stark examination of historical scars.

Cherri's cinematic exploration extends from his "Telluric Trilogy," which delves into how violent crises are inscribed in specific environments. The trilogy, comprised of standalone films – *The Disquiet* (2013), *The Digger* (2015), and *The Dam* (2022) – serves as an entry point to history through the materiality it produces. *The Watchman* seamlessly continues this trajectory, maintaining its focus on Cyprus while introducing fictional narratives imbued with the supernatural.

Central to Cherri's work is the recurring figure of the guard, portrayed as a complex and multifaceted presence. In *The Watchman*, the guard takes the form of a young soldier stationed at a closed border. The hills that once represented "the enemy" become a canvas for fantasies and imagination, symbolizing the soldier's internal conflict and the broader socio-political complexities of borderland experiences.

The film deepens its exploration by framing waiting not just as a temporal experience but as a spatial one. The soldier finds himself ensnared in the false crests of duty, unfolding a poignant tale of wasted life waiting for an enemy that may never arrive, compelling him to invent one.

"Why Cyprus?" Cherri answers, revealing the island's historical resonance with Lebanon. Cyprus has long been the "echo-chamber" of Lebanon, with conflicts in Lebanon reverberating on the island. The influx of Lebanese refugees during the Lebanese civil war significantly impacted Cyprus' social and cultural fabric. Nicosia, the "last divided capital in the world," mirrors the history of divided Beirut. The echoes of the Beirut Port explosion on August Fourth reached Cyprus, emphasizing the interconnectedness of these regions. The complex border situation in Cyprus, recognized as a border by the self-declared Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and as occupied land by the Greek Cypriot, serves as an entry point for Cherri to delve into Lebanon's complex border questions.

The Watchman encapsulates the intricate interplay between history, geopolitics, and individual experiences. Ali Cherri's storytelling transcends borders, both physical and thematic, creating a narrative tapestry that resonates universally while uniquely capturing the soul of Cyprus and, by extension, the echoes of Lebanon's tumultuous history.

Biofilmographie Ali Cherri

Born in Beirut, Ali Cherri is a visual artist and filmmaker based in Paris. Combining film, video, sculpture and installation, his work questions the construction of historical narratives. Ali was the Artist in Residence at the National Gallery in London (2021/2022) and is the Silver Lion winner at the 59th Venice Biennale Arte (2022) for his installation *Of Men and Gods and Mud*. Ali Cherri is the recipient of Harvard University's Robert E. Fulton Fellowship, the Rockefeller Foundation Residency Award. His short films *The Disquiet* and *The Digger* have been shown and awarded at numerous festivals. *The Dam*, shot in Sudan during the revolution, his first feature film, was presented at Cannes - Directors' Fortnight 2022. This year, Ali Cherri's first solo exhibition in the United States *Humble and quiet and soothing as mud*, has been presented by the Swiss Institute. He is now opening the exhibition *Dreamless Night* at GAMeC (Bergamo) which will travel at Frac Bretagne (Rennes) and works on his next exhibition at the Fondation Giacometti (Paris).



filmography

THE WATCHMAN	2023
26min, Première mondiale – Festival International du Film de Rotterdam	
THE DAM	2022
80min, Festival de Cannes – Quinzaine des Réalisateurs 2022	
SOMNICULUS	2017
14min, Liban/France	
Jeu de Paume – solo exhibition/CAPC Museum of Contemporary Art of Bordeaux	
LE CREUSEUR / THE DIGGER	2015
24min, Lebanon/United Arab Emirates/France	
CPH:DOX (2015) – NEW VISION Prize / Rotterdam International Film Festival (2016) / Imagine Science Festival (2016) / Ann Arbor Festival (2016) / Cinéma du Réel (2016) / New Directors/New Films (2016)	
L'INTRANQUILLE / THE DISQUIET	2013
20min, Lebanon/France	
Dubai International Film Festival (2013) – Best Director Prize / Toronto International Film Festival (2013) / Videobrasil, Southern Panorama (2013) – Honorable Mention	
PIPE DEREAMS	2012
6min, France	
Toronto International Film Festival (2012) / FID Marseille (2012) / MoMA New York (2012) / Berlinale – Forum Expanded (2013) / Doha Tribeca Film Festival (2012) / San Francisco International Film Festival (2013) / Oberhausen International Short Film Festival (2013)	
DREAMS IN THREE CHAPTERS	2011
7min, France	
YOU	2008
Video, 7min, Lebanon	
SLIPPAGE	2007
Video, 12min, Lebanon	
UNTITLED	2006
Video, 3min, Lebanon	
UN CERCLE AUTOUR DU SOLEIL	2005
Video, 15 min, Lebanon, Netherlands	

• Original title	Nöbetçi
• English title	The Watchman
• Director and scriptwriter	Ali Cherri
• Cast	Halil Ersev Gökçek
• Director of photography	Bassem Fayad
• Sound	Stavros Terlikkas, Simon Apostolou
• Art Director	Marios Neocleous
• Costume desing	Joanna Syrimi
• Make-up	Yiorgos Vavanos
• Editing	Denis Bedlow
• VFX creation	Fadi Baki
• Composer	Cynthia Zaven
• Casting and artisitic adviser	Rahme Veziroglu
• Line producer	Marios Piperides
• Creative Producers	Leonardo Bigazzi, Alessandro Rabottini
• Coproducer	Janja Kralj
• Production	Fondazione In Between Art Film
• Coproduction	The Vega Foundation - KinoElektron
• Press and sales	KinoElektron
• Technical details	
• Duration	26'
• Language	Turkish
• Screen	HD 1920x1080 16/9 1.77
• Sound	5.1
• Countries	Italy, France
• Premiere	IFFR 2024 (Short Film Competition)

Stills
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