

EMII ALRAI

A Lake as Great as Its Bones

18 July – 7 September 2024

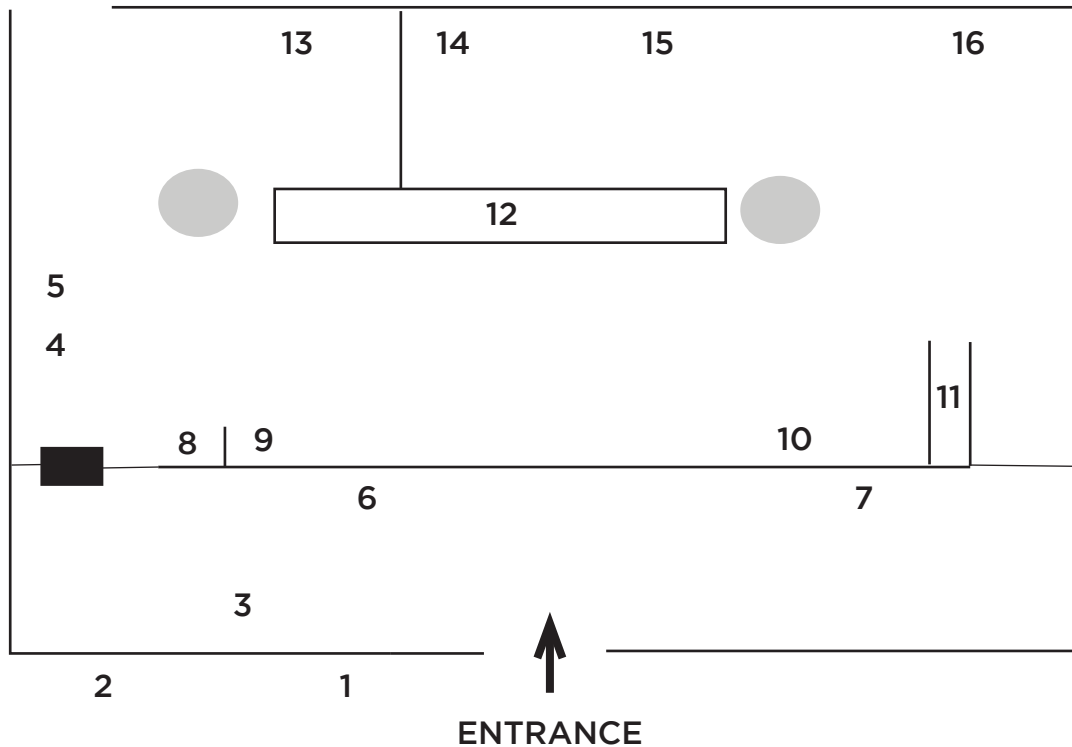
Maximillian William is pleased to present a solo exhibition of new works by Emii Alrai. *A Lake as Great as Its Bones* takes its name from Lake Nemi, a volcanic crater south of Rome that the artist encountered during her residency at the Villa Medici in 2023. Drawing from the lake's great history of shipbuilding, scuttling, excavation and destruction, the installation blends ceramics, metalwork, and sculpture to build a world that gathers fictions, fragments, and traces of an inconclusive past.

For her first exhibition with the gallery, Alrai continues her investigation of material histories that reference archaeological sites and museum displays. She works with gold, pewter, silver, copper, and clay: materials with an embedded hierarchy that were used on the palace-like boats built on Lake Nemi in the 1st century AD. In a new series of drawings, Alrai uses bitumen to depict topographies reminiscent of the ancient landscapes around Lake Nemi. Bitumen is naturally found in the mud at the bottom of lakes, and in these drawings, the artist conjures gestures of unearthing what has been buried. In the same vein, sculptures are assembled across the gallery as artefacts from antiquity. Indefinite polystyrene forms are treated with gypsum and bitumen paint to summon scarred terrains or the clay bed of lakes, while ceramic vessels appear dredged up. *A Lake as Great as Its Bones* evokes material poetics that signal no definitive history, but a romanticised memory of the past.

In mapping the gallery space, Alrai appropriates museological structures—vitrines and partition walls—to mirror how museums control both bodies in space and the subsequent consumption of the narratives on display. The works probe a subtle critique of Western museology in their subversion of value through scale and material palette. Terracotta pots remain unfired, scaled up to almost half of human size, and towering arches are built from polystyrene, a cost-effective substance the artist describes as 'deathless.' Gold scythes are rendered in miniature, and wall panels, inspired by stucco reliefs seen throughout Rome, are mounted on ply stained to look like teak or walnut. Throughout the installation, Alrai questions where value is placed and why, and tenuous relationships between truth and fiction are embraced. 'We are so desperate to weave through these crumbled things, a sense of identity, nostalgia, yearning, and imagination,' Alrai notes. As we traverse through a realm of her making, she positions herself as an unreliable narrator, forging remnants from an imagined landscape and troubling our reverence for unknowable histories.

Emii Alrai (b. Blackpool, UK, 1993) is an artist and trained museum registrar whose work spans material investigation in relation to memory, critique of the western museological structure and the complexity of ruins. Working primarily in sculpture and installation, her work operates as large-scale realms built in relation to bodies of research which concern archaeology and the natural environments objects are excavated from. Past solo exhibitions include *Lithics* at Quench Gallery, Margate (2024); *A Core of Scar*, The Hepworth Wakefield & iniva (2022); and *Reverse Defence* at Workplace Foundation in Newcastle (2022). Alrai is currently included in the group exhibition, *An Axis of Abstraction: Art in Cornwall and Yorkshire - Then and Now* at Leeds Art Gallery. Previous group exhibitions include *Drawing Attention: Emerging Artists in Dialogue*, a British Museum touring exhibition (2023-2024); *life-bestowing cadaverous sooooooooooooooooo* at CCA Glasgow (2024); *A Permanent Departure for Nostalgia, A rehearsal on legacy* with Zaha Hadid at the Contemporary Arts Centre, Cincinnati (2023); and *Exploratory Drawings* at Maximillian William, London (2022). Alrai's work is held in public collections including the British Museum, London; Leeds Art Gallery, Leeds; the Arts Council Collection, London; the Government Art Collection, and The Hepworth Wakefield.

Emii Alrai
A Lake as Great as Its Bones



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| <p>1 <i>Meridian</i>, 2024
 Bitumen on paper
 60.5 x 80.5 cm</p> <p>2 <i>Pipe I</i>, 2024
 Buff clay, copper, patinate, and steel armature
 34 x 23 cm</p> <p>3 <i>Tidewater</i>, 2024
 Bitumen on paper
 60.5 x 80.5 cm</p> <p>4 <i>Centrifuge</i>, 2023
 Bitumen on paper
 60.5 x 80.5 cm</p> <p>5 <i>Lachrymose</i>, 2023
 Bitumen on paper
 60.5 x 80.5 cm</p> <p>6 <i>Galley Turn</i>, 2024
 Plywood, hay, straw, metal wire, gypsum, hops, and pewter nails
 52 x 244 x 8 cm</p> <p>7 <i>Pipe II</i>, 2024
 Buff clay, copper, patinate, and steel armature
 33 x 23.5 cm</p> <p>8 <i>Tilth Vessel</i>, 2024
 Buff clay, terracotta, copper, and patinate
 35 x 58 cm approx</p> <p>9 <i>Syrup Vessel</i>, 2024
 Buff clay, terracotta, copper, and patinate
 89 x 38 cm approx</p> <p>10 <i>The Pentacles</i>, 2024
 Plywood, hay, straw, metal wire, gypsum, hops, and pewter nails
 70 x 194.6 x 8 cm</p> | <p>11 <i>Dirk</i>, 2024
 Buff clay, copper, patinate, and steel armature
 23.5 x 50 cm</p> <p>12 <i>Whorl, Clouts, Scythe, Florin Spike, Brace Fragment, Anchor Topstay, Annulus, Brails</i>, 2024
 Clay and iron, Copper, 22 carat gold and garnet, Silver, Copper, Jute
 Dimensions variable</p> <p>13 <i>Spear</i>, 2024
 Buff clay, copper, patinate, and steel armature
 29 x 10.5 cm</p> <p>14 <i>Brazen Vessel</i>, 2024
 Buff clay, terracotta, copper, and patinate
 80 x 33 cm approx</p> <p>15 <i>Crescent</i>, 2024
 Buff clay, copper, patinate, and steel armature
 11 x 10 cm approx</p> <p>16 <i>Mast Head, Half Flag</i>, 2024
 Plywood, hay, straw, metal wire, gypsum, hops, and pewter nails
 197.2 x 122.3 x 9 cm Each</p> |
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