

Large Print Guide

Emii Alrai

Capture

26 July to 2 November 2025

[Please return to Large Print Guide holder
after use]

[Enter Studio 2 and move to large text panel on right]

Emii Alrai

Capture

26 July to 2 November 2025

Emii Alrai is a British-born Iraqi artist and former museum registrar who lives and works between Edinburgh and London. Working primarily in sculpture and installation, Alrai's practice explores Middle Eastern mythologies, archaeology and European museum structures.

Alrai uses a range of materials to create ruins and artefacts reminiscent of ancient civilisations and museum dioramas. The weather-worn texture of eroded pillars and archways that she creates resemble stonework and structures uncovered at archaeological sites such as Pompeii in Italy and Jerash in Jordan. These large-scale ruins are fabrications, built in her studio and onsite, assembled in the gallery and furnished with earthenware vessels and votive offerings – false artefacts made by the artist.

Through this work, Alrai engages critically with a Western tradition of museum display that prioritises the object and its value, over its historical context. She invites us to think about collections, the violent extraction of artefacts and their entanglement with colonial empires.

Emii Alrai (b.1993, Blackpool) is the first artist presenting work in a new series of solo exhibitions in Towner's ground floor gallery. This exciting programme of free exhibitions highlights exceptional contemporary artists working locally, nationally and internationally.

Supported by the Towner Emerging Artist Fund.

[Moving left toward video projection]

Emii Alrai

Capture, 2021

Single channel video with stereo sound 13 minutes 19
seconds

During an artist's residency in 2021, Alrai was granted special access to museum collections in Marseille, France.

Working in isolation due to the covid-19 pandemic, Alrai photographed the archaeological depot where thousands of freshly excavated objects are processed, the site of their extraction, and the glass cases where they are held on display by custom metal armatures.

Commissioned by Triangle - Astérides with the support of Fluxus Art Projects, in partnership with Musées de la Ville de Marseille, Musée d'Histoire de Marseille and the Dépôt archéologique de la Ville de Marseille. 35mm images and text by Emii Alrai. Subtitled by Stagertext.

[Transcript available on request]

[Return to entrance and work clockwise through the gallery]

Emii Alrai's installations are often created using elements of past works that have been dismantled and reconfigured for display. In this exhibition, broken forms pierced by terracotta nails punctuate the walls, like fragments from an archaeological collection.

Alrai plays with the allure of archaeology, underlining the human desire to discover, unearth and claim items of apparent historic importance or value. Disrupting this custom, Alrai's fake artefacts, sculpted and drawn in rich inks, shapeshift into imagined narratives.

Emii Alrai

Orthostat, Henge, 2025

Polystyrene British gypsum, cardboard, sand, steel

Central sculpture:

Emii Alrai

Tooth Part, Fountain, 2021-2025

Polystyrene, British gypsum, cardboard, sand

Wall on the left:

Emii Alrai

Treatise of Silences, 2017-2025

Polystyrene, British gypsum, jesmonite, bamboo, sand,
clay, bitumen, copper, patinates, volcanic sand, hops,
wax, ink, steel

Wall on the right:

Emii Alrai

Litanies:

Tota, 2017

Crossknee Fragment, 2022-2024

Bull Head Oracle, 2017

Polystyrene, sand, steel, clay, copper, ink

[Continue moving to the right toward large window]

Works on paper, left to right:

Emii Alrai

Shepherd's Augur, 2025

Organ, Jaffa, 2025

The Compatriots, 2025

Ink on cotton paper

Large sculpture:

Emii Alrai

Marrow, 2022-2025

Polystyrene, British gypsum, bamboo, copper, patinates,

bitumen, paint, volcanic sand

[Turn toward corner installation]

Emii Alrai

Tutelaries, 2016-2025

Polystyrene, British gypsum, steel, clay, copper,
patinates, ink

In the installation Tutelaries, Alrai creates a possible site of ritual, bringing together clay vessels to form a fragile stage set of undisturbed archaeological discoveries.

Tutelary meaning protector or guardian is also associated with figurines found at ancient burial sites.

Inspired by Iraqi date syrup production, large storage jars, collapsed pots and hand-formed clay objects are gathered here, evoking the presence of past civilisations.