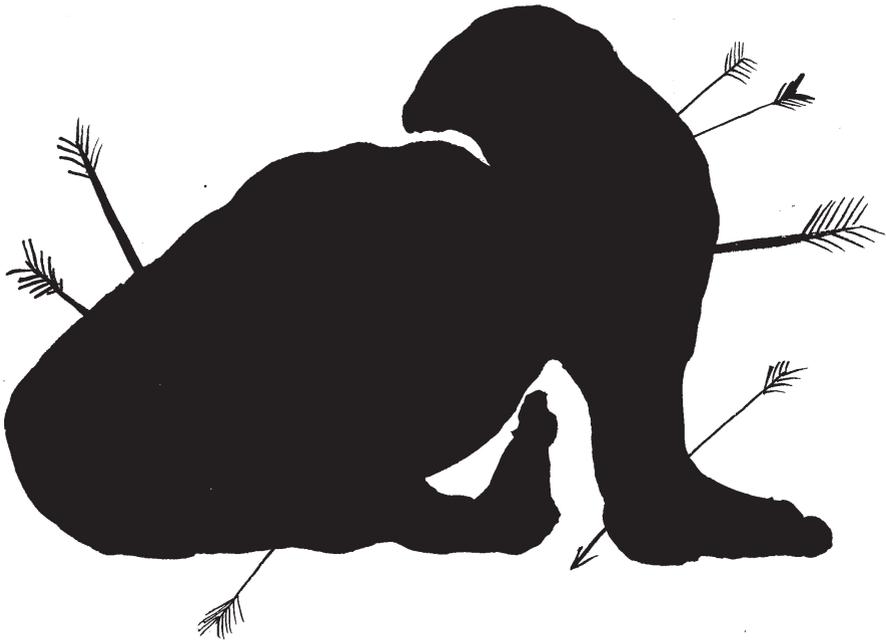
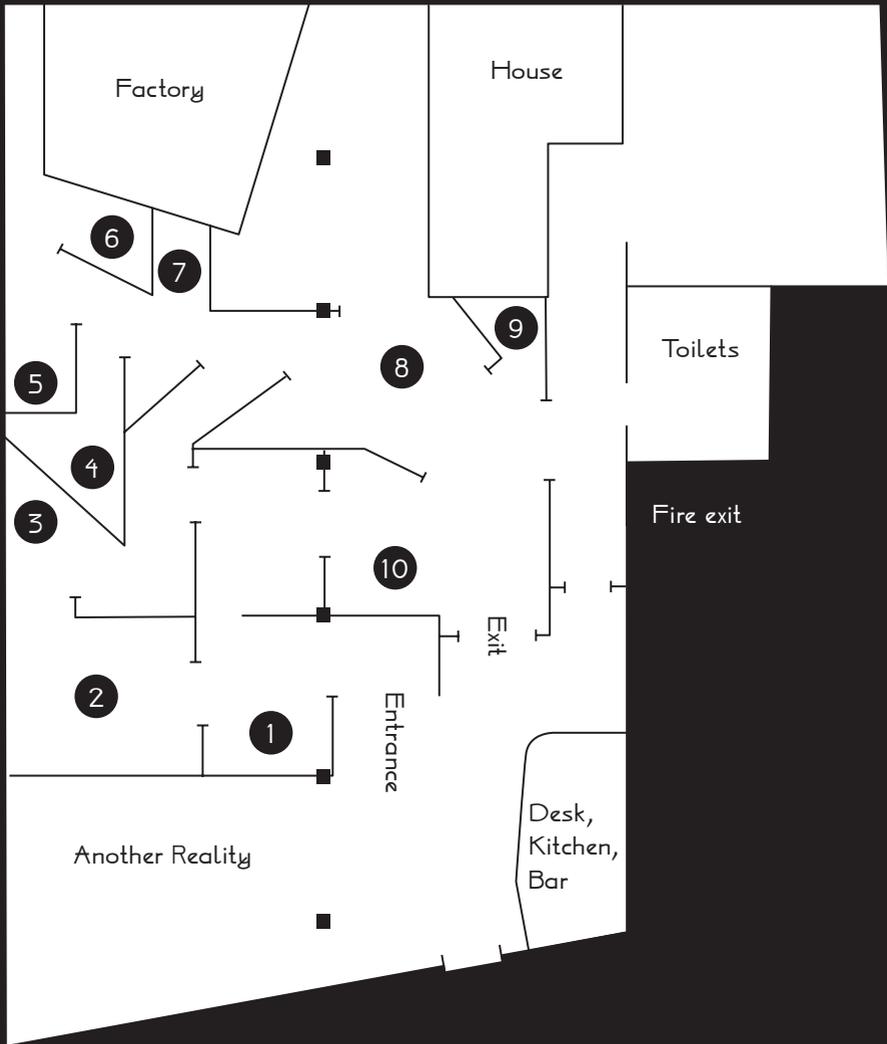


Emû Alrai
The Courtship of Giants
11.3. - 30.4.22
Eastside Projects





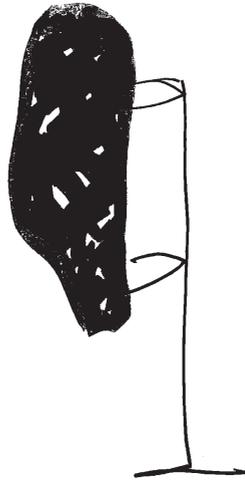
Emii Alrai

The Courtship of Giants (2022)

Timber, cardboard, twine, straw, British gypsum plaster, sand, water, glue, clay, polystyrene, copper leaf, steel, vinegar, fertiliser, salt, time.

- 1 *Poitrine* The French word for a chest. In English, it is used to describe a woman's bosom.
- 2 *Coude* The French word for elbow. The term 'le coude' specifically describes the articulation of where the arm joint bends and creases.
- 3 *Ichor* A word used in Greek mythology that describes the ethereal liquid that flows in place of blood in the veins of the gods. It was supposed to be golden. In the archaic use of the term ichor, it also defines the watery discharge from a wound.
- 4 *Stolon* A stolon is a word used in botany to describe a creeping horizontal plant stem that grows roots along its length to form new plants.
- 5 *Clavicle* The anatomical word for a collarbone, it is the curved bone which acts as a strut to support the shoulder.
- 6 *Tarsus* The group of seven bones which form part of the ankle. It also describes a sheet of tissue which supports the edge of the eyelid. It comes from the Greek word 'tarsos', which means 'flat of the foot'.
- 7 *Fissure* A geological word meaning a long, narrow opening or broken line made by cracking or splitting in rocks or earth. It is also a way to describe a disagreement or state of incompatibility.
- 8 *Spleen* The abdominal organ that produces and removes blood cells which form part of the immune system. It also means to have a bad temper and in archaic vocabulary it means to be melancholic.
- 9 *Blench* A word deriving from Germanic origin, meaning to deceive. It now means to make a sudden movement, a flinch, out of fear or pain. It also describes a face becoming pale from fright.
- 10 *Cuisse* The French word for thigh. It is also the word used to define plate armour which was worn to protect the upper leg in battle.





You stand here, at the mouth of a beast.
Entering, you find yourself in a body, made from
stone. These walls are skin, each layer forming
a ventricle. We can call these ventricles a maze.

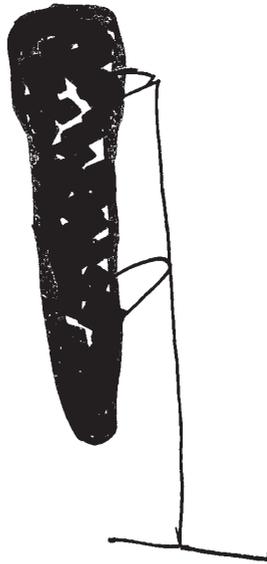
1

A maze is defined by a system of complicated paths that, in the past and present, people have tried to find their way through. A maze is also defined by a set of rules and ideas that one finds difficult to deal with or understand — a confusing mass of information. Mazes could be described as places teeming with dead ends, stoppages and severs. We seek to enter a maze in search of something: a creature, a clue, a token, a reward.



2

Now you are inside the body of this maze, you have entered willingly into a courtship. You follow the turns of its tissue, urgent to win its favour. Stemming from the word 'court', a courtship is defined as a means to gain or achieve. A courtship is also defined as the act of seeking the romantic affections of a person. Although many courtships may blossom, they may not be won without quarrels. A quarrel, a term for disagreement or dispute, is also the technical name for an arrow.

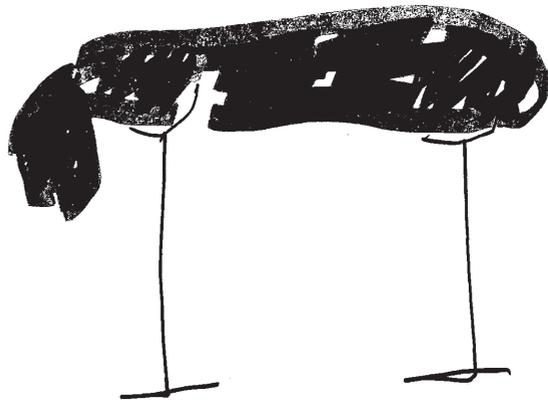


3

Quivering, in quarrel, a quest. Your index
finger guides you through the maze. Leads
you forward, to a point. An arrow through
the bloodstreams, through veins in single file.
You trace the seams and sutures of its skin.
It takes you in the direction of giants.

4

A giant is defined as a real or imaginary person, animal or plant which is of great size or force. In mythology, giants have often represented the human body enlarged to the point of it being monstrous. In lore, giants have been coveted for defeat by humans — the giant at the top of Jack's beanstalk, Goliath, Humbaba — as they have often stood in the way of treasure or paths to other worlds. A giant also defines a star which is ten to 100 times bigger than our sun, and glows brighter.



5

In this maze, giants are resting. They are taut in the thick sleepless slumber of memory, stretched between ropes. Giants dormant, held in place with clouts, ruptured on the stem of a hilt. This hilt is an armature. They have been hunted, arrested, captured and seized.

6

An armature is described as an open framework on which a sculpture is moulded with clay or similar material. It can also mean the protective covering of an animal or plant. The word comes from the archaic definition of armour, which means the metal coverings formerly worn to protect the body in battle.

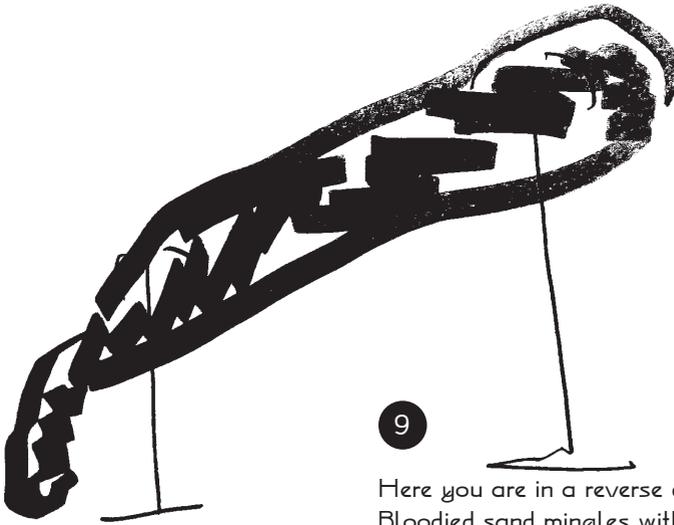


7

Armatures are complex systems of display, employed by museums to showcase objects and artefacts. Born and made of metal, armatures carry a history of violence in their materiality. On them, objects, histories, and giants are stalked, secured and held in their slain position through this fabricated weaponry. These bodies are portrayed, punctured, and pierced.

8

The only sound which echoes here is the whisper of a wound. A wound, clean yet imprecise, is the residue of collision. It is the only trace which remains, the last stitch between the giant's landscape, and its new display as a trophy. We may think of these wounds as romantic, melancholic, reminiscent of Achilles, St. Sebastian or fallen knights coming back from battle, strewn over the body of a horse. Folded over double. Arrows piercing their armoured flesh.

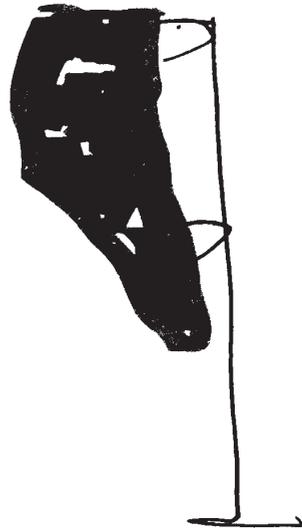


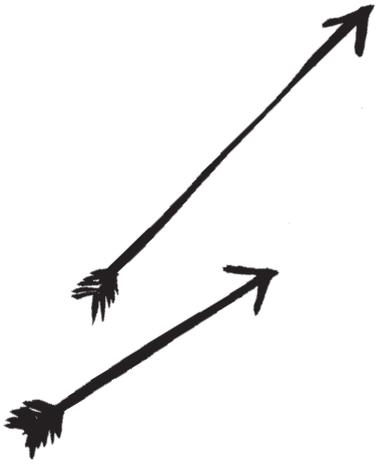
9

Here you are in a reverse defence. Bloodied sand mingles with the gypsum facade. These torn, stone, slatted walls and weaves can be considered graves. Life here belongs in the gaps between relics. The texture of the past is the smell of hands in straw. These bodies are remains, finding themselves abruptly reduced to rubble. Their memory is constantly shifting, weaving a basket out of a shadow.

10

You stand here again, at the mouth of a beast, at its egress. You entered to find yourself in a body, made from stone. These walls are skin, each layer forming a ventricle. We have called these ventricles a maze. At its release, you are unravelled without a scratch, a watcher, a witness to what might be called the courtship of giants.





Deep within Eastside Projects Emii Alrai is creating a world where medieval hunting traps meet museological dioramas.

Emii's largest solo show to date folds together an intricate web of references including the legend of Gilgamesh, the capture and coveting of giant artefacts from Iraq such as the Lamassu by the British Museum, the theatricality of medieval hunting arenas, the etymology and history of courting, ancient gravesite constructions, arrows and how wounds have been romanticised by the Pre-Raphaelites, and their obsession with melancholia.

A large maze-like structure is taking over the main gallery, a lure of corridors and dead ends punctuated by giant wounded sculptures held captive on metal armatures. Traditional willow weaving techniques reimaged in cardboard and plaster walls create an immersive environment ready to entrap and ensnare. Steel arrows pierce walls and sculptures alike, quarrels and quivers anchoring limb like objects in space, conjuring images of fallen knights, hunted animals, the coveted bodies hit by Cupid, and referring to the romanticised violence of the museum — reminding us that the processes of longing, hunting, capture and collecting are underpinned by long bloody histories of conflict and colonisation.

Emii Alrai's practice is informed by inherited nostalgia, geographical identity and post-colonial museum practices of collecting and displaying objects. Focusing on the ancient mythologies from the Middle East alongside personal oral histories of Iraq, the artist weaves together narratives by forging artefacts and visualising residues of cultural collision. Often working at large scale she creates sculptural installations that recall museological displays and dioramas.

Emii Alrai is an artist based in Leeds and Wakefield, and has been an EOP member since 2019. *The Courtship of Giants* has developed from Emii's proposal to our EOP Open Call in 2019. Recent exhibitions include: *Deposition Layer*, Threshold Projects, Leeds (2021), *Stories We Tell Ourselves*, Foreman Gallery, Quebec (2021); *Ecdysis*, Assembly Point, London (2021); *Uerwood Solo Presentations*, Uerwood Arts, London (2021); *The High Dam*, The Tetley, Leeds (2020); *Tutelaries*, VITRINE, London (2019); *House of Teeming Cattle*, Two Queens, Leicester (2019); *An Ancient Quiver*, GLOAM, Sheffield (2018). In 2021, Emii was selected for Triangle Astérides residency programme in Marseille, In-Ruins residency in Calabria and partook in a Creative Fellowship at the University of Leicester. In 2022 she will be exhibiting at the Visual Arts Centre Clarington, Canada and presenting new work at The Hepworth Wakefield as part of the Future Collect programme.



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During exhibitions our (FREE) gallery is open
Wednesday to Saturday, 12–5pm

The exhibition is wheelchair accessible, and alternative formats of written and audio material are available. Please see our full access guide on our website or contact info@eastsideprojects.org for more information.

Artist-Curator	Gavin Wade
Artist-Maker	Ruth Claxton
Offsite Curator	Zoë Sawyer
Artist-Caretaker	Amelia Hawk
Artist-Curator Trainees	Dinosaur Kilby, Taz Morrison, Katherine Smith, Trixibella Suen
Multiverse-Organiser	Al Leeming
Artist-Organiser	Ania Bas
Saturday Assistant	Ashley Wilson
Finance Administrator	Neisa Reid
Graphic Design	Rosen Eveleigh
Technicians	Clubal Green, Suzi Osborn
BCU Fine Art/Art + Design Student Placements	Chad Morrison, Diana Elisabeta Vlad, Ella Martin, Mia Osborne, Rosham Zaki Aftab



Eastside Projects makes art public. We are an artist-run multiverse, commissioning, producing and presenting experimental art practices and demonstrating ways in which art may be useful as part of society.



