

PRESS RELEASE: 21 October 2021

iniva and The Hepworth Wakefield announce the second artist to be commissioned for Future Collect – a programme of contemporary art commissions – transforming the national conversation around contemporary art collecting.



Passing of the Lilies, Jerwood Arts, 2021. Photograph by Anna Arca

iniva and The Hepworth Wakefield have selected artist Emii Alrai for the second Future Collect commission. Alrai's work explores relationships and tensions within Western museum practice, and previous projects have investigated processes of displaying and valuing artefacts from the Middle East. Her practice has emerged from making objects mimicking these artefacts, transforming humble materials to question museological traditions and systems of display.

The selection panel, composed of curatorial teams from **iniva** and The Hepworth Wakefield, chose the artist because of her sensitivity in navigating complex diasporic narratives combined with her evocative exploration of materials.

The partnership between **iniva** and The Hepworth Wakefield to commission a major new work by an artist of African, Caribbean, Middle Eastern or Asian heritage living and working in the UK follows the commission of Jade Montserrat with Manchester Art Gallery. Alrai's work will be accessioned into the The Hepworth Wakefield's collection, which holds international modern and contemporary art as well as a substantial body of work by Barbara Hepworth, who was born in Wakefield. Alrai, who is based in Leeds and currently has her studio in Wakefield, spoke about the importance of accessing The Hepworth Wakefield's collection: "The opportunity to engage with The Hepworth Wakefield's collection would be extremely beneficial to this work, particularly looking at the way in which Barbara Hepworth used materiality to explore the relationship of the geographic world through her forms. By spending time with The Hepworth's collection and archive up close, I would hope to research and develop new methods of casting, and forming material to explore the complexities of the natural world."

Alrai's Future Collect commission will be exhibited at The Hepworth Wakefield in Spring 2022. Its display and acquisition will bring it into dialogue with existing works in the collection, and there will be an accompanying public programme which will include study days, conversations, and work with local communities.

Rohini Malik Okon, Future Collect Curatorial Project Manager said: 'I'm delighted that we have selected Emii for this commission, and look forward to seeing how her ideas evolve. I'm particularly excited by her proposed use of glass as a core material, as well as her focus on oral histories and processes of renewal and reframing both in relation to museums and the natural landscape.'

Eleanor Clayton, Curator at The Hepworth Wakefield said: 'As an artist based in Wakefield, I have known of, and admired, Emii's work for some time, not least due to the moving and complex public realm community project she initiated in Wakefield as a Yorkshire Sculpture International Engagement Artist in 2019. It is wonderful to have the opportunity to work closely with Emii, build on these conversations and see her sculptural practice develop. Her work will be a fantastic addition to the collection.'

Emii Alrai said of her appointment: 'I'm delighted to have been selected for Future Collect, and to be working with iniva and The Hepworth Wakefield. I'm excited for the opportunity to develop my practice, expanding my current interest in museums and their collections. Through conversations with both iniva and The Hepworth Wakefield, I want to interrogate how we collect things.'

From 14 October to 10 December 2021 in Iniva's Stuart Hall Library, a small display of sculptures and drawings organised by Curatorial Trainee Amber Li introduces the material processes involved in Alrai's work. Here, in a place for learning and research, Alrai's own research-based works will remain active and in dialogue with surrounding texts and the library's users.

Amber Li is the Future Collect Curatorial Trainee at The Hepworth Wakefield and will support the development of the commission as well as the curation of the exhibition to show the work in Spring 2022.

- ENDS-

NOTES TO EDITORS

ABOUT EMII ALRAI

Emii Alrai is an artist based in Leeds. 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, Alrai weaves together narratives by forging artefacts and visualising residues of cultural collision. Drawing references from objects in museum collections, ancient writing from the Middle East and cultural memories, her work questions the value and origins of artefacts, as well as navigating the experience of diaspora.

She studied her BA in Fine Art and an MA in Art Gallery and Museum Studies at The University of Leeds. In 2020, she undertook a residency in Calabria with In-ruins, Italy, and was selected for the Triangle Asterides Residency, Marseille. In 2019, she participated in the Arab British Centre Making Marks Project in Kuwait and the 2018 Tetley Artist Associate Programme. Up-coming and Recent group and solo exhibitions include: Eastside Projects, Birmingham, UK (2022), Visual Arts Centre, Clarington, Canada (2021), Threshold, Leeds, UK (2021), Jerwood Arts, London, UK (2021), The Tetley, Leeds, UK (2020); VITRINE, London (2019), Fallow, Rectory Projects (2019), Two Queens, Leicester, UK (2019); GLOAM, Sheffield, UK (2018); (2018); Caustic Casual, Salford, UK (2017); Hutt Collective, Nottingham, UK (2017).

ABOUT INIVA

iniva (Institute of International Visual Arts) is an evolving, radical visual arts organisation dedicated to developing an artistic programme that reflects on the social and political impact of globalisation.

With the Stuart Hall Library acting as a critical and creative hub for our work, we collaborate with artists, curators, researchers and cultural producers to challenge conventional notions of diversity and difference. We engage a wide audience, particularly young people, in discourse and debate on issues surrounding the politics of race, class and gender.

Through our programme we work predominantly with British-born and British-based visual artists of African and Asian descent supporting them at different stages in their careers. We offer residencies, commission new work and promote existing practices enabling artistic ambition and development. By cultivating innovative thinking, we are committed to disseminating research across a wide cultural spectrum and geographical network. Our ambition is to build a greater

body of knowledge around each of the artists with whom we work to ensure the legacy of their practices for future generations of researchers and audiences.

[Iniva.org](http://iniva.org)

ABOUT THE HEPWORTH WAKEFIELD

Designed by the acclaimed David Chipperfield Architects, The Hepworth Wakefield is set within Wakefield's historic waterfront, overlooking the River Calder. The gallery opened in May 2011 and was awarded Art Fund Museum of the Year 2017. Named after Barbara Hepworth, one of the most important artists of the 20th century who was born and brought up in Wakefield, the gallery presents major exhibitions of the best international modern and contemporary art. It is also home to Wakefield's art collection – an impressive compendium of modern British and contemporary art – and has dedicated galleries exploring Hepworth's art and working process. The Hepworth Wakefield Garden, designed by internationally renowned landscaped architect Tom Stuart-Smith, opened alongside the gallery in 2019 and is free for all to enjoy.

hepworthwakefield.org

ABOUT OUR FUNDERS

Art Fund is the national fundraising charity for art. It provides millions of pounds every year to help museums to acquire and share works of art across the UK, further the professional development of their curators, and inspire more people to visit and enjoy their public programmes. Art Fund is independently funded, supported by members who buy the National Art Pass, who enjoy free entry to over 240 museums, galleries and historic places, 50% off major exhibitions, and receive Art Quarterly magazine. Art Fund also supports museums through its annual prize, Art Fund Museum of the Year. artfund.org

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