

# LOWELL RYAN PROJECTS

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### Emil Alzamora's Broken Figures Struggle to Find Their Way

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The eight figurative sculptures comprising Emil Alzamora's show, "Waymaker," evoke somber aspects of the human condition. Lacerated, contorted, and dismembered, these generic persons appear as victims of circumstances whose origins and nature remain tantalizingly mysterious. Contributing to a sense of instability and disjunction, Alzamora's



combinations of motley materials such as wood, plaster, wax, and metal heighten his sculptures' emotional import: Rough, conflicting textures could be interpreted as metaphors for the mental states of his protagonists in their nameless struggle to overcome situations beyond their control.

Entering the show, one encounters *Into the North Forest* (2020), positioned so near the door as to be almost obtrusive. Yet the figure's mien, frozen as a carelessly cast death mask, seems more rueful than confrontational, as though its placement near the threshold were a silent plea for

*Emil Alzamora, Into the North Forest (side view 1), 2020, Wood, cement, steel, plaster, and epoxy, 73h x 20w x 23.5d inches*

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help or a futile attempt to escape. Its body has been transformed into chunks of rough-hewn timber, with only a left hand, right arm, and two grotesquely veined sienna feet as its last remaining vestiges of mortal existence.

Just beyond is *Sky Island* (2020), a prostrate corpus whose blackened surface recalls the mummies of Pompeii as well as horrific news photos depicting charred remains of people burned alive in recent California wildfires. Yet this was no natural disaster: bound ankles bespeak violence of a more sinister, intentional sort. Furthermore, the body's head and arms are severed; its chest bears an expansive wound stained with blood; and its legs, one of which appears to have been partially disjoined and then reattached, are propped up at an angle, leaving most of its bodily weight to fall awkwardly on its upper back. Could the person have been sundered, eviscerated and burned as a ritual sacrifice?



*Emil Alzamora, Sky Island, 2020, Cement, steel, wood, and epoxy, 33h x 25w x 73d inches*

In *Waymaker* (2021), a contraption of rusty steel bar crosscuts an elongated figure composed of a substance resembling cracked, discolored cement. Bringing to mind Shelley's "Ozymandias," the crumbling statue suggests industrial decay alongside the decline not of a king, but of every-

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day humanity. The press release describes this sculpture as “half man, half mechanical parts,” and although it seems more like a mannequin than a machine, it does give off a steampunk feel. Exaggeratedly hunching its back and wrenching its head upward, the jointed form conveys the impression of an ungainly marionette straining against the strings of its fate.

Opting for an air of timelessness, Alzamora eschews the usual practice of directly tying his sculptures in with current sociopolitical issues; but it’s easy to read contemporary narratives of disease, unrest, and abuse of power into his protagonists’ maimed bodies.

*Emil Alzamora, Waymaker (front view), 2021, Steel, plaster, graphite, and wax, 82h x 22w x 24d inches*

The pandemic’s hastening of society’s shift to remote interaction could be projected upon the overall installation of figures that seem alone and disconnected despite their close proximity to one another. Evoking the dreariness of the quarantines and their aftermath, *A Weight of Calm Descended* (2020) portrays a person being engulfed by a shapeless lump of sandy clay. Its arm is half-severed, and its gray body, coarsely textured à la Giacometti, appears to be disintegrating. Will it ever be able to recoup its former self?

–Annabel Osberg

*Emil Alzamora, “Waymaker,” May 8-June 19, 2021 at Lowell Ryan Projects, 4619 West Washington Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90016, [lowellryanprojects.com](http://lowellryanprojects.com)*

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*Emil Alzamora, A Weight of Calm Descended, 2020*  
*Aluminum, plaster, cement and wax, 58.5h x 8w x 8.25d inches*