

Henry Lee

B. 1981, Singapore



Eihwaz

2021

Charcoal, Pencil and Acrylic on Canvas
H 101.4 x 76.2 cm



European Yew (*Taxus baccata*)

An exceptionally long-lived, slow-growing evergreen, most of the yew (eihwaz ᚱ in the Germanic runic alphabet) is highly poisonous, with its branches having the unique ability to take root upon meeting the ground. Commonly associated with death, the afterlife, rebirth, immortality and transcendence in many ancient myths, particularly for the ancient Celts, the yew tree can often be found in churchyards. The strength and flexibility of its wood also made it ideal for the famed English longbow, leading to its near depletion during medieval times. Long valued in folk medicine for treating various ailments, a compound in yew needles and bark was discovered to have anti-cancer properties in the 1960s. Unsustainable harvesting led to certain yew varieties becoming critically endangered, prompting debate about the future of ancient forests in both the east and the west. A large, ancient yew grows over a multi-faceted clock with missing clock hands – a gateway to the afterlife, where time holds no sway. Flanking stone pillars, with carved images of the longbow and medicine vial, point to the synthesis of life and death, as exemplified by the yew.