Vignettes s02e03 Mineral Transcript

**Ruby-Rose Pivet-Marsh**:

Hi there!

Welcome to Vignettes: The Emerging Writers Festival Podcast. My name is Ruby and I’m the Artistic Director at EWF. I am coming to you from the land of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation.

To be mineral is to be born of fluid and heat and force - to exist as a tiny piece of a much larger puzzle. For this episode, we invited Hana Pera Aoake, Maddison Miller and Iris Lee to respond to the theme of *Mineral.*  We asked these artists to examine the way smallness builds up to largeness. To reflect on the volcanic heat and heavy pressures that come with existing in this world. We can’t wait for you to hear what these three incredible artists have in store for *Mineral*.

First up, we have Hana Pera Aoake.

**Hana Pera Aoake:**

Kia ora koutou, my name is Hana Pera Aoake and I’m an artist and writer living and working on stolen Kaai Tahu whenua, as I just acknowledged in my pepeha. I would like to also extend my acknowledgement and tautoko of all indigenous bodies in both this settler colony of New zealand and in so-called Australia.

I have loose whakapapa ties to this Kaai tahu whenua, but primarily identify as being of the kiingitanga, being both from Ngaati Mahuta and Ngaati Hinerangi. I also have Romani, jewish, Scottish and Irish whakapapa. I currently freelance as a writer, editor and artist and co-edit kei te pai press and Tupuranga journal. I previously worked in the now defunct indigenous collective, Fresh and Fruity. I have recently returned home due to COVID19 after living in Lisbon, Portugal where I was studying philosophy. Much of my mahi is concerned with creating a more expansive understanding of kaupapa maaori research, by writing and reading with and through indigenous and european ideas of the human and non human in order to dissolve cartesian categories that individualize and alienate our bodies. I recently published my first book, A bathful of kawakawa and hot water with Compound Press.

Currently I am in my parents living room on a leather couch I am stuck to, while my feet rest on an old carpet my parents got in north queensland when I was a child. Behind me is a photograph of a dust storm near Alice Springs and in front of me is a television, heater and my great grandmother’s broken spinning wheel. Above me is a skylight and to the left of me is a bay window and some glass doors. The light in here is a dull Otago grey. The birds are noisy.

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*A gold miner's daughter:*

I remember first touching my parents collection of rocks that they had collected after mining in Australia for many years. I put a shiny mineral crystal rock to my face. It was so hard and cold. It felt so distant from my body, but so precious. I remember being very young and asking what these rocks were? What is a mineral?

The word ‘Mineral’ comes from the Medieval Latin *minerale* meaning “something mined”. It was used as an adjective from the early 15th century old french believing it to be “neither animal or vegetable, inorganic.” The noun use of neuter of mineralis "pertaining to mines," from minera "a mine

A mineral is described as being a solid chemical compound. Minerals can be described also as impregnating other substances such as water, *mineral water*, which originally was "water found in nature with some mineral substance dissolved in it".

Minerals are formed through water, lava, and through moving with the tides of the Earth minerals can be found whether the Earth is getting warmer, colder, or changing pressure. Sometimes minerals can be formed off of other organisms. Ocean animals such as oysters and clams produce calcite and other carbonate minerals to form their shells. Even we produce minerals. Your body produces one of the main minerals in your bones and teeth—apatite.

It’s said that gold was first produced in a supernova nucleosynthesis, and from the collision of neutron stars. Gold is also said to have been present in the dust from which the Solar System formed. Gold is what built empire, lining the royal European houses with extraordinary wealth and of course lining their coffers. In the 17th century the Portuguese discovered gold deposits in Brazil. More than 400,000 Portuguese and 500,000 African slaves came to the gold region to mine. Many people abandoned the sugar plantations and towns in the northeast coast to go to the gold region. By 1725, half the population of Brazil was living in southeastern Brazil. When I lived in Lisboa I would think about this while watching the rolling waves of the Tagus river. I thought often about how these waves once carried African slaves from Lisboa to the ‘New World’.

I am a goldminer’s daughter. I spent all my childhood moving, always moving, always living in cities that had once been swimming in gold but were now in ruin and full of kehua. I remember running through a bushtrack with a friend and getting my foot stuck in part of an old mine shaft. When the gold goes and the people go away. Gold drew strict racial geographies everywhere it was found. Rich/Poor. Indigenous/NonIndigenous. White/Chinese. Racial geographies act as borders and inscribe a strict code of nationhood and of place, that always felt so wrong.

When I’m driving around the motu I often see flattened hilltops that used to be paa sites and kumara terraces. When driving through Kaaikoura recently I saw lots of Kumara terraces, but lots of quarrying of the mineral basalt to build roads. Looking at the coastline in Kaaikoura and thinking about the minerals that might be growing on oyster shells I can’t help but think about how strange it is that we extract so many different kinds of minerals, when really we should leave them alone.

**Ruby-Rose Pivet-Marsh**:   
  
Thanks [Hana?]. Next up, Maddison Miller…

**Maddison Miller:**

Warami, my name is Maddi and I am a Darug Woman and Archaeologist.

Right now I am located on the beautiful and unceded lands of the Wurunderji WoiWurrung, where I am so lucky to live, work and to stay safe during this global pandemic.

When I saw the prompt - mineral, I thought of a few things, but mainly I thought of Dja Dja Wurrung country. For so long now Aboriginal country has been exploited for its mineral wealth, and what I wanted to convey is that regardless of what happens to country it will never stop being Aboriginal land.

And so I wanted to dedicate this piece and pay my respects to the ancestors and elders of this land that have given us our culture.

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*Quartz Veins:*

There is a lazy creek, winding its way through this landscape of gold. The water tumbles over quartz rocks on it’s journey past the long abandoned gardens. When it rains the creek is swollen with water as it streams from nearby heaps of mullock and pebble. The landscape is crisscrossed with water races, each dug exhaustingly by pick and shovel. The races bought water to wash away the earth, sluicing away that which had taken millenia to accumulate to get at the precious gold. These days the water races do little more than capture rainwater, diverting it away from the lazy creek.

There is a quietness here that is only interrupted by the chatter of birds. The serenity betrays the reality of the past. The violent and destructive ways this land has been altered are shown through the landforms and ruins.These landscapes were plundered for their wealth. Sacred country turned upside down in pursuit of gold. The clamor of machines and men would have rang out across these lands, a deafening chorus. Before that there were the birds. The birds before and after, squawking high above in the trees. Before and after, and during and always, this place is Aboriginal land.

In 1859 someone wrote: When the glories of a gold field are departed, the sludge will remain as a monument… of wasted energies. This sludge flowed from the mines, swallowing landscapes.Sediment that formed a million years ago was violently brought to the surface and washed away over vast kilometres, choking the rivers and creeks before settling in far off places. The waterways that once nourished food, harboured fish and carried ancestral stories now carried with them devestation.

Miners introduced cyanide and mercury into their processes. Thousands of tonnes of gold was extracted from the earth, seized from quartz veins, creating a concentration of arsenic. County was poisoned and it’s custodians displaced. This poison still lies here, almost forgotten. In many ways that author in 1859 was right. The wealth that built places like Melbourne, Ballarat and Bendigo is nowhere to be seen here. You can glimpse the sludge in the soil profile, sometimes meters deep. An alien lunar landscape of pebbles dredged up from an ancient riverbed, the mounded heaps of mullock left over from processing, the snaking water races with their careful gradient.

Today trees grow from the ruins. The lazy creek once again runs clear, bringing with it nourishment. Descendants of the displaced care for this place and tell its stories. They care for their country, and for its health. A culture that could never be erased.

Eucalyptus smoke trails from the smoking bowl. A cleansing ceremony, one that connects us to our ancestors and to country. There are things that don’t change, what always was and will always be.

**Ruby-Rose Pivet-Marsh:**

Thanks Maddi! And now, here’s Iris Lee…

**Iris Lee:**

Hi listeners, my name is Iris. I’m a white settler that lives in Melbourne, on Boon wurrung and Wurundjeri country. I like salt water, writing and thinking through and doing transformative collective change. I am involved in community radio on 3CR and have been working as a cleaner in a co-op.

The space I’m in is my bedroom, which has one window looking out into the front yard that receives morning sun, and mini rainbows from crystals that hang on the porch. I sit here at my desk by the window in front of a monitor. Behind me is my bed, wardrobes and assorted storage. On the walls I have posters and artwork up, including lots of life drawing sketches.

Today for Vignettes by the Emerging Writers Festival, I’m going to read a piece I wrote on the theme ‘Mineral’.

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I become a solid rock. I am thrown sunshine, rain and snow and remain unflinching. I am exposed but opaque. I support a growing layer of orange lichen. I start to ask: what are the costs of becoming solid?

I am a rock who is filled up. I am no longer hungry for my favourite food. I am on the brink of spilling everything. I start to ask: how close am I to breaking?

Inside me, are a million messy sand grains. Yet all I am on the outside is a tough exterior. I hide the squeaking sand crying out for a hug.

I have to be a rock sometimes. For coin. Or to survive inhaling oppressive sulphur winds. And sometimes I become one because of what I’ve internalised. I lose the potential to connect over soft, slow vulnerable music. And sometimes I become the lichen needing a rock to live on.

Lichens themselves made up of algae or cyanobacteria to capture sunlight and fungi to eat rock and detritus—are not always a mutually beneficial relationship. Sometimes fungi destroy their partner as they take their energy, but keeping them alive enough they can continue to benefit.

Speaking of exploitation and profit while keeping their underlings alive, crisis has drawn capitalists to a rock.

During the pandemic, capitalist markets have flocked to gold like hungry seagulls to chips. Prices have never been so high. It’s funny because gold isn’t a particularly solid mineral. It’s soft and rare. It needs to be mixed with other metals. It used to be the backing for money.

Solidus. A gold coin in the late roman empire. Solid. Now we exchange coin virtually. Numerically. Debt and wealth created at the keyboard at the fantastical marketplace. Now what is solid glows on screen.

A typical mobile phone contains 50 cents worth of gold. A metal prized for its stability to chemical reactions. There are endless pages devoted to sport, but to find out the story of all the exploited labour on stolen lands that goes into a phone often remains a complex hidden crossword.

What if this weighted system that dazzles the rich and white at the expense of the many was no longer solid?

We become many rocky relations, we become solidarity. We are a breakwater against the ocean, a movement against injustice. We become bricks holding up many stories. We start to feel the pushback: what are the wears and tears of solidarity?

We are relations rocked, we are stacked. We push the pinball machine up together to win the game. But the game tilts even steeper. We lose. We go up in smokestacks.

We burn from social, economic and climate breakdown.

From the ashes, calcium carbonate and potassium lays loose on rock. A novel lichen begins to grow.

**Ruby-Rose Pivet-Marsh:**

That was Hana Pera Aoake, Maddison Miller and Iris Lee.

Thank you so much for listening to *Vignettes: The EWF Podcast.* If you enjoyed this episode, please drop us a review, recommend us to your friends and hit ‘subscribe’ wherever you like to listen. And of course – stick with us as we bring you more Autumnal readings over the next few weeks!

This podcast was produced by EWF Program Coordinator Millie Baylis. Our audio producer is Jon Tjhia, and our theme music was created by Thu Care (Thao Ly). You can find out more about the team behind this podcast and the artists featured in this episode on the EWF website.  
  
This podcast was created and edited on the lands of the Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation. We acknowledge that First Nations peoples are the first storytellers of this land, and that their sovereignty has never been ceded. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and to the Elders of the lands this podcast reaches. It always was, always will be, Aboriginal land.