**Greer**: Hi and welcome back to Vignettes, the EWF storytelling podcast. My name’s Greer, and I’m the Program Coordinator at the Emerging Writers’ Festival.

I’m recording today on the unceded sovereign lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nations. EWF pays our respects to Wurundjeri elders past and present, and to the elders of all lands that this podcast reaches.

Welcome back to the Winter season of Vignettes. On this episode, we’ll be hearing, Elena Gomez and Hannah Debus. The theme of today’s episode is “Work”. Winter’s outlook can emphasise the drudgery and repetitiveness of the everyday, and for many of us, the everyday is defined by work and labour. These are big concepts, obviously, and I’ll pass to our writers to reflect on them.

First up we have Hannah Debus. Hannah is a writer and artist who lives and works on Gadigal land in Sydney, Australia. Here she is:

**Hannah:** After the second lockdown lifted I continued to walk for hours with the baby and the pram. Heading home from the library - a clutter of pages and puppets and half-sung songs - I stopped at a souvenir shop on Marrickville Rd. Not many shops like this left, offering made- in-China boomerangs, single rolls of Kodak ColorPlus and tobacco. Holographic novelty Zippos. Shelves of lighter fluid. Surrounding it all, on every shelf, especially the window display: the Virgin Mary. Busts of all sizes and materials, the Madonna clutching her baby, coronas trapped in glass. Plastic nightlights of Mary, shrouded in prayer, and Jesus, now grown and crucified. Mini LED bulbs inside because who can be bothered with candles. Divinity, battery-operated. I loved them all.

The window was full of watches and rosaries. Bobble-head dolls, ceramic animals. Diamonté dazzle.

The pram hardly fit through the door, a procession of plastic flowers grazing the baby’s hands. Swish swish. He was too small to reach the shelves, thank goodness. I couldn’t take him now.

I chose a frosted glass Mary and Jesus that fit in my palm, seven dollars. And a maraca for the baby. Red with black dots; a two-headed ladybird. The lady wrapped them up for us, in paper and plastic. I gave the bubblewrap to the baby but he was too small to understand. Pop pop. Nothing.

I put the statue on a chest of drawers, next to the couch, and forgot about it. When the baby learned to climb he spotted it, pointed. Saying, ‘Mama, mama.’ Pointed to himself.

Their faces and bodies were soft and hard. Rounded edges, pillowy cheeks. The baby was naked, thighs creasing just like in life. They both looked at me. At us.

I’m trying to describe the look in the mother’s eyes, but I can’t. There was simply nothing there.

\*

To make a vessel, something to help us carry the things we need to bear, we have to make a wound. Uncle shows us. He smells like smoke, tobacco warmth that reminds me of my grandfather. I immediately feel safe with him. He has twenty-six grandchildren, he tells us. The youngest just ten weeks old tomorrow. Every star tattooed up and down his arm is for a grandchild. He needs to catch up, he says. Needs five more. Six now, now that Luciana’s here.

He draws a shape with ochre, a wide oval. Gets a chisel and mallet and strikes it, waits for the thunk that tells us he’s reached the tree. We take turns with the chisel, driving it through the bark. Listening closely for the change. My cut is the last, joining up with the first.

Uncle hits the bark with the mallet, bang bang bang, until it lifts. He pries it off gently. It comes willingly, a single piece. Peels like skin.

The thickness of the bark is satisfying. The wounded face vulnerable and beautiful. The coolamon is wet, smells green. Uncle points out the lines, the lines he mimics in his paintings.

A handful of ochre, wet white clay, rubbed into the cuts, over the exposed face. To protect it from borers, from infection. From the sun. The red bands around the men’s wrists stand out against the white. I don’t yet know what they mean, but I know it’s not for me. Uncle’s stars, a goanna up his arm.

He tells us how these vessels held babies, swaddled in kangaroo fur. How the women would have cut them.

The coolamon holds the sunlight, a pool of gold in the late afternoon. The river sparkles. I’ve never seen trees so big. Giants in the water. Time collapses. Young scars stand still. My only work is listening.

\*

I can only think in fragments.

The smell of rain on warm pavement, on earth I can’t see. The heaviness that precedes it, a mix of cloud cover and the lingering scent of jasmine. The reacquaintance with an observation as old as you are; a sense memory stored young. Of course, you think, the smell of the first spring rain.

I am pure reaction. I react to smells and colours like a child might, like mine is too young for. I try to give these things to him anyway, the things I feel. Is it for him, I wonder, or is it for me - a chance to feel anew.

I notice the trees when I walk without him, just before the rain hits. Ripe with red bottlebrush and dripping with upside down birds. Miners and lorikeets. How lucky I feel, back at home now, to sit in the quiet bathroom and notice the bird sounds.

The frogmouth came back, we think. We hear its sad pulse at night. I hope it stays this time.

**Greer**: Thank you Hannah.

Our last reading for this episode comes from Elena Gomez. Elena is the author of *Admit the Joyous Passion of Revolt, Crushed Silk* and *Body of Work*, and several chapbooks and pamphlets. She currently lives in Melbourne. Here’s Elena:

**Elena**: My name is Elena Gomez, and I’m going to read from a longer work, called “Us and Our Animals”. This is from ‘Part Two: Andromeda’

We are well deep now, you’ll soon see …

Bog rosemary

Risatti: a chasm between craft and fine arts of roles: The role of Functionality.

Weaving crafts a fine art

Alice Notley on feminine epic: ‘I’m afraid I wanted something all of my own’. ‘A woman’s voice with access to the mystery of the dream’

A symphonic poem: Androméde

(Augusta Holmès)

Or Weyes’s galaxy: big. Also wide, also open.

If you eat at

heart

It’s not enough to think

Like nature

I’m convinced

it’s more

a transfiguration it’s like

a sufjan stevens intro

Or a Meredith Monk composition

That’s all woodland

And then the next

Movement you hit the

Open air. I tried out Desert

Mountain but you know what

Those desktop backgrounds are like

[a bucket of herring]

Alma, the liberal landlord and textile artist. Her demanding work: ‘she simultaneously had to be close to it as if she were short-sighted and at the same time view it from a distance as if she were a long-sighted person, in order for the tiny stiches to merge into a huge, living forest, a cascade of trees filled with insects frozen in time’i

Alma misses out on high school textile, the blood that goes with it. Her emotions were ‘transferred to her tapestry’.

*The politics of your tapestry vs. the politics of your relations*

Alma stitches:

‘miller’, ‘gloomy, cramped

mill cottage’, ‘gentry at the manor

house’, ‘the grieving miller’.

‘his unmarried, childless, aged sister’ii

Notley’s night states, or also:

Here’s the other thing I forgot:

*WE ARE LIVING ON A STAR*

She completes it: 1958

now bears scars of

xenophobic fascism

the one they tried to pass as mental illness

The tapestry scars / singed

Hjorth’s Alma sickens me sometimes, I remember when I retreat from a peak. Am I meant to understand *complexity* now?

My beard is ruffled by the autumn air,

Psyche’s linden tree

Yhonnie’s bush plum

Andromeda, chained

Andromeda, Urania’s Mirror

[etching, hand-coloured, the fifth plate]

My rescue, less dramatic, unfounded

Some aspects of my late lunch:

a tuft of grass, a cotton bucket hat,

the minerals of earthen soil, an old

Greek tale, a racial conversation, a

short pile of browning leaves. Coffee grinds

I am the son of the satyr

I am of the woods

control the individual fibre

Hannah said: ‘I am a painter,

not a weaver;

a painter whose tool

is not the brush,

but the loom’

Hannah said: ‘Art is just a summarization

of something one has felt with great intensity’

art is just

[a unit, a dropped dimension]

back to the galaxy, this captured woman, this symphonie subject

the dead monster (Cetus)

elsewhere, local sheep

fermented urine,

marsh andromeda

I’ve got more actions in me

I’ve got a nose for true crime

For tragedy

My father, the satyr, maligned

My song, that is, the goatsong, that is,

My Sacrifice

I’m at the centre of this tragedy

I’m in the mountain air, I’m close

up the sky, the ridges run, the marshland

calls, I’ve got the mother’s wish in my pocket

My goat pack holds it this might make sense

If you sing along

I followed the trail my father the Satyr left,

The stories as such, the captured woman, the monsters

of the sea.

Could you smell it? The salt air, it’s unusual here

The fish debt recalled, I’m thinking about the commons

A common goat, a sibling, my galaxy calling: would you consider a recap

Stephen Merritt’s cat

Dionysus

I’m in the marsh still, there’s a little action we are peering at the large spiral, the sky

It is my goat

song but I am

still on foot

**From *Our Animals***

Hauptman’s *creatures of the loom*

A MOB

In iron and copper pots brewed dyes

Ocean goblins, the Wanderers. Mythical morals

heart desirous

hellebore bouquet

banewort floundered here, our nightshade

The Florence Boos account: Wanderers as historical materialists. ‘A communal history of human emotion.’iii I am a wanderer too, but not in commune with the Greek gods. *Earthly Paradise* circular, epic, but I: matted fur, steppes, marsh, plains, peat bog, mountain chain swung. Hunger. It’s often this talk of the mountains that gets us. I have brothers and sisters but they are silent. And the Stoic view: ‘nature as poetic fire’iv. This poem, my story: it’s a tapestry. A poem woven. You can pull out threads, you could undo it with a word, with a tug. I’m a musical interlude or STORY song. The *I want* of it, a minor character. Have you forgotten where we began? I was in the small house. We watch the blue dye process.

You are clever, too. You can pick out the imagined moment where a burr grinder floats across. We use our hands for everything here. My hooves are plentiful, have felt many surfaces between them. I can catch pollen with my beard. I watched a brushing, a felt layer of fur fallen. It’s a leitmotif, this brush stroke. A swatch, too, or threads in separation.

My mohair halo

Where else the wanderers, towards

flamed spearwort, tight

homespun wool, (Hannah’s ‘human pattern’)

**Greer**: Thanks so much Elena, and thanks again to Hannah Debus for reading this week.

Thank you for listening to our second-last episode of Vignettes, and please join us again next week for our final episode, in which we’ll be hearing readings from Maya Hodge, Zhi and Eric Jiang on the theme of ‘Touch’. Vignettes is produced by me, Greer Clemens, and audio produced by Joe Buchan. Our theme music is by Thu Care. To find out more about the artists featured in today’s episode, and about EWF itself, you can go to emergingwritersfestival.org.au.