A photograph of a person with long dark hair, wearing a black dress, lying on the ground in a volcanic landscape. Their arms are raised high into the air, and their head is tilted back. The background features dark, jagged volcanic rock formations and sparse, leafless trees under a cloudy sky. The overall mood is one of connection with nature and embodied movement.

### ***Leave only your footprints***

A dialogue exploring identity and connection to place that is enabled through embodied movement.


Dialogue between Jennifer Eadie & Adrienne Semmens

Text and artwork by Jennifer Eadie

Photography of Adrienne Semmens by Pete Abordi





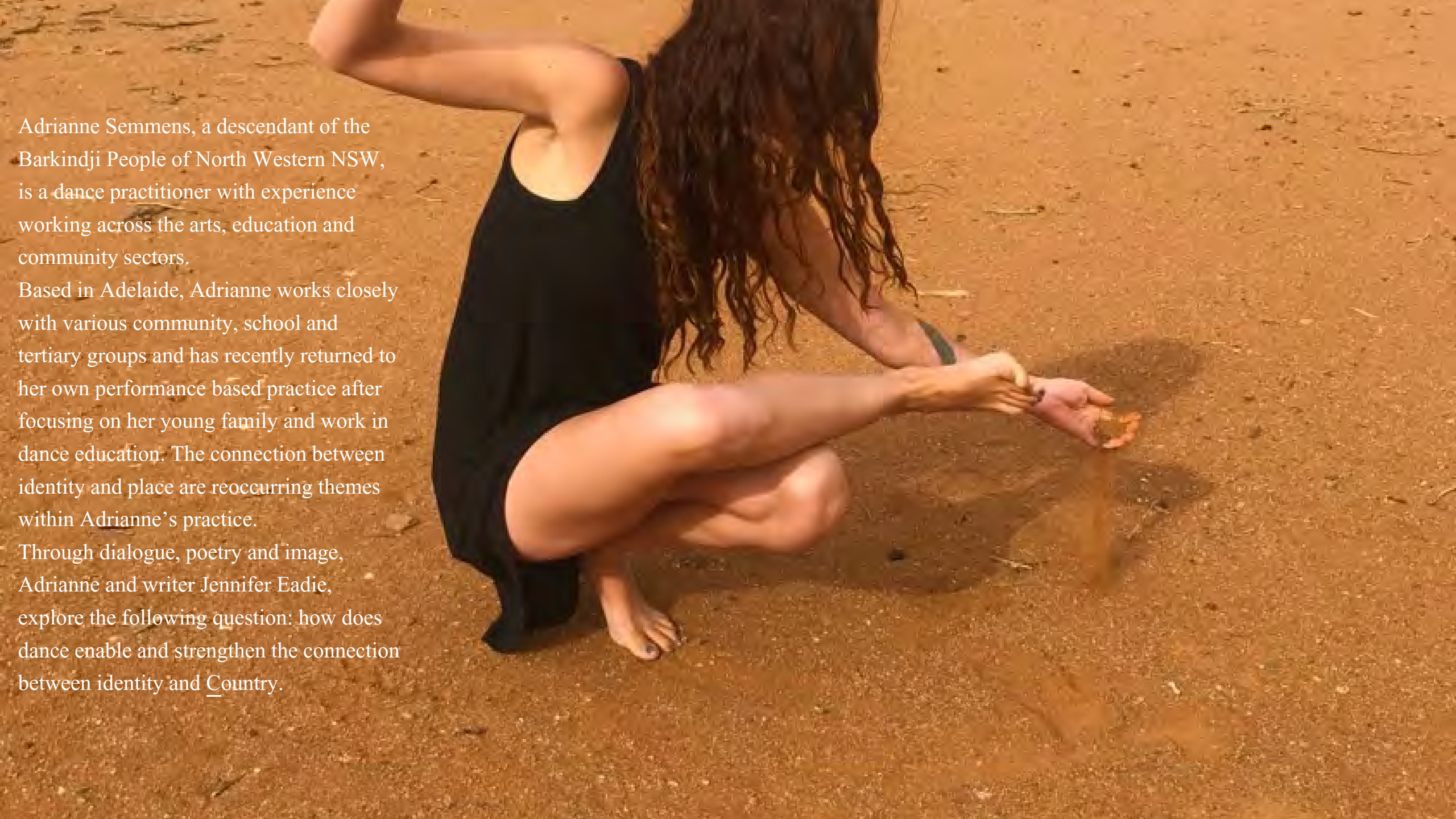


‘MY BONES ARE in the soul of Country, and Country is in my bones. My veins are the creeks that flow to the sea and never quite reach it; walled off by sand, drying up in the sun. They only flow out, break the walls when the sky cries. The sky is all cried out.

In Kaurna Country I found a Peppermint tree  
I plucked a leaf and crushed it,  
Held its scent to my nose  
The scent called me home’

– Excerpt from *Boodjar ngan djoorla. Country, my bones* by Claire G Coleman  
[https://www.griffithreview.com/articles/boodjar-ngan-djoorla/#\\_edn1](https://www.griffithreview.com/articles/boodjar-ngan-djoorla/#_edn1)





Adrianne Semmens, a descendant of the Barkindji People of North Western NSW, is a dance practitioner with experience working across the arts, education and community sectors.

Based in Adelaide, Adrianne works closely with various community, school and tertiary groups and has recently returned to her own performance based practice after focusing on her young family and work in dance education. The connection between identity and place are reoccurring themes within Adrianne's practice.

Through dialogue, poetry and image, Adrianne and writer Jennifer Eadie, explore the following question: how does dance enable and strengthen the connection between identity and Country.

## That which we carry: footprints as a map

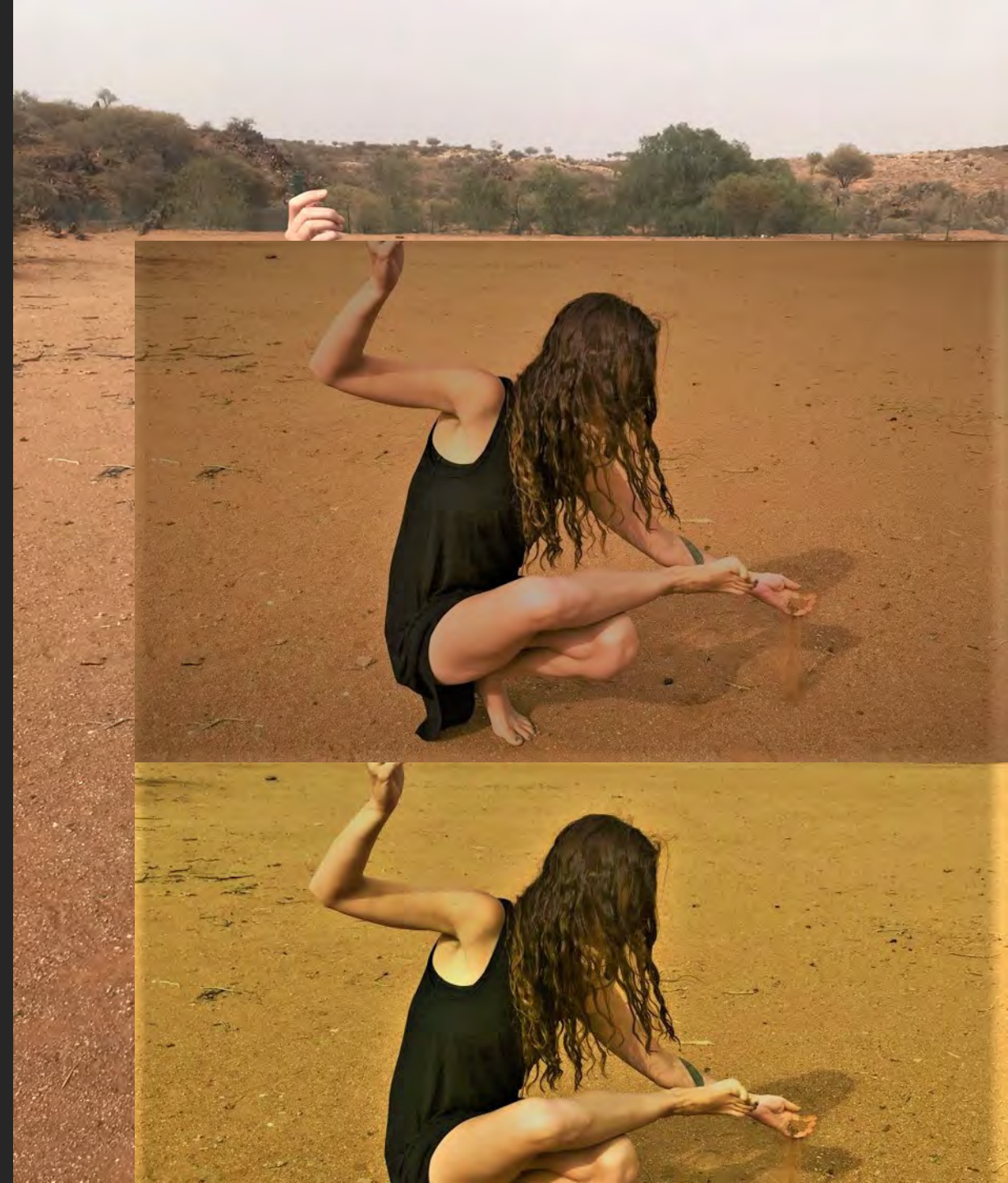
If place is understood as something lived/ how do we speak to it/ without causing a fracture/ that which is ourselves and everything/ always unravelling. There is vulnerability when we say/ I am part of that place/ too many colours/ it is not something that can be held/ it slipped. I will face this body and hold onto it/ a woman told me/ let the pollen and dirt draw up into your nostrils/ it sticks/ making everything here smell soft/ even with rock underfoot.

JE: If we understand our identity as intrinsically bound up with connection to place, what does that mean for our practice?

AS: We carry this into our work. Our practice is responsive to our sense of place and belonging, where we live, where we come from, our place in our societies, how we see ourselves in our environment and community. These are explored and communicated through our practice.

My interest often returns to memories of place - watching my shadow on the iron fence, feeling the dry earth crack underfoot, patterns in the dirt. Drawing these memories and motifs from the dancers and students who I work with.

It's also walking through my local area and acknowledging the place that I call home. The once healthy river that has been reduced to a concrete storm water drain. The old scar trees that witnessed these changes. Recently, I had been visiting an early childhood education site, through dance, through gestures of place we shared and explored the history of the area that we live in.





JE: In this sense, it feels important to consider whether separating or privileging present over past experience of place is helpful or not. There is potential created by allowing both experiences, as an entanglement, to inform our work despite the risk of potential contradictions, gaps or tensions. I think something close to this is happening in your reference to the image of footprints. You have mentioned that this image is a re-occurring theme in your ideas, explanations when teaching and practice:

AS: Leave only your footprints. I think of this saying in relation to my place on Kaurna yarta, recognition of myself as a visitor. Adelaide is my home but I maintain a constant pull to my family's home town in NSW, for deeper knowledge and connections to that country.

Footprints become spatial pathways; accents of weight; response to texture- sand, dirt, water underfoot; and of interconnecting stories.

Whilst creating a site-specific work with a group of international youth dancers at the Royal Adelaide Hospital last year, (for Panpapanpayla Joint Dance Congress), I drew upon our crossing pathways in the hospital: each patient, visitor, staff, all crossing the site, bringing their stories in and through the space-

The energy, stories and connections that each dancer brought with them and shared in the space became our dance; gestures of home, moments of connection, intersecting pathways. We responded to place - the hospital courtyard, but also the sense of place and belonging that each dancer brought with them from their homelands.

JE: Footprints as a map: this idea suggests giving up a certain degree of control. It brings to mind a proposal by made by Trinh T. Minh-Ha, that it is in uncertainty that new meaning can be made; new connections:

‘The gift that circulates with non-closures offers no security.  
Here in the all-meaning circle where there is no in no out, no  
light no shade, she is born anew. This is the **third scenario.**’





AS: Yes, through our movement explorations we are creating new connections, new interpretations, new meanings.

JE: Do you believe dance has the capacity to enable a 'third scenario' described by Minh-Ha - whereby the act of embodied movement is able to dismantle or subvert the social and cultural categories that designate as us as woman/ mother/ Aboriginal/ teacher/ writer/ dancer – even if this dismantling is fleeting or superficial?

AS: Maybe this is what is so important about dance, is that it does not demand a singular identity, if anything the act of dance continually fractures and builds and rebirths.

Dance is able to express meaning that we are not able to in words – why? Embodied thoughts, feelings, stories, histories.

JE: I agree. This is why the structure of dance cannot be understood in singular terms., rather we could say it is about connection – but not necessarily between just the audience & dancer.

AS: Dance, like all live performance art is appreciated in that moment. And is understood through the lens of the viewer. And yes I agree – the opportunity for connections, whether that be the moment shared between the audience and performer; the audience viewing a beautiful connection between dancers, or perhaps the individual interpretations of the audience, connecting to their own life experiences.

I recognise how my own interests return to important connections in my life, recalling memories, significant relationships and affinity to particular places, to embody them through movement exploration.

I utilise this approach in my work with young people, drawing upon positive connections that make them feel strong, to develop shared movement vocabulary.









## That which we carry

holding onto an image/ tight and folded/ when in possession of these things you become protective/ even when aware of the/ How do you know whether you are confusing something here/ too much/ I was once asked/ There is no confusion here/ because it is what shapes my breath in the moments where I fall down/ knees on rigid ground/ hand on knee/ which is covered in salt/ which is becoming what I am holding/ this opening/ so I carry it close.

AS: As we prepared to move out to the sand stage, we were asked to think of our grandfathers. Well, I am always thinking of my grandfather, carrying my connection to him where ever I go and holding that comfort, sense of pride as I dance, especially cultural dance. I dance knowing that he didn't, that my mother hasn't, but here I am, grateful to be able to connect so deeply through dance. In this sense, dance is my affirmation of self.

JE: What is it about identity that makes us want to keep revisiting it in our practice?

AS: It's our celebration of self and how we connect to the world around us, but it's also recognition of a contested space. Through dance we are able to interrogate our identities, social constructs of identity.

JE: You talk about the notions of qualify, quantify as being connected to identity – can you explain this connection

AS: Historical legacies. Blood quantum, notions of Aboriginality, they continue to shape understandings, misunderstandings of Aboriginal identities. This impacted on my sense of self growing up.

Through my dance practice I am looking deeper into myself, I am sharing a bit of myself with those around me.





I am often celebrating the beauty, strength and resilience of the oldest living culture in the world, whilst also interrogating the anxiety and sadness of all that I do not know, of a disrupted inheritance.

JE: Again this relates back to something Trinh T. Minh-Ha proposes:

‘She can only build from the visible as she unbuilds the invisible, and vice versa... The space of creativity is the space whose occupancy invites other occupancies’

If we take this statement and run with the idea that the creative process is constituted by the building and unbuilding of the invisible (which could be understood as one’s internal being or sense of self) and the visible (which could be understood as social-cultural identity or physical markers) how do you think this process manifests in the act of dancing?

AS: It allows us to occupy and present those that are invisible.

It is the power and beauty of dance, like other artforms, to respond, interrogate and question our society, our values, our histories, our own story.

It’s investigating how I perceive myself and how the world sees me. A mother, a teacher, a dancer, fair skinned, connected- disconnected, enough - not enough. The river is in my blood, but my body only knows salt water.

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This connection/ the river is in my blood, but my body only knows salt water.









The background of the image is a dark, textured cave interior. On the right side, there is a circular opening, possibly a tunnel entrance, which reveals a bright, colorful scene. This scene appears to be a painting or a view through a window, showing a landscape with vibrant red flowers, green foliage, and a white structure, possibly a house or a bridge, under a bright sky. The contrast between the dark cave and the bright scene outside is a key visual element.

That connection/ the river is in my blood, but my body only knows salt water

This connection/ the river is in my blood, but my body only knows salt water



An abstract artwork featuring large, textured brown and black ink washes on a light beige background. A vertical yellow strip is visible on the right side. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

Letter to A

I keep coming back to what you said about/

but what if we draw up what is lost/

sweat from chest and armpit., accept

something was lost but when

covered in soft rust rock and salt bush/ which

becomes sky suddenly blue/ too bright.

put hand against iron and hear his story which

is yours because it was given as a gift/

which scatters and fills the air every time the

flowers with which you share fire red, bloom.