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Mineral Garden

Randy Lee Cutler

rcutler@ecuad.ca

ORCID: 0000-0002-0454-0683

Andrew Rewald

andrew.rewald@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0001-8030-1249

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Mineral Garden

by Randy Lee Cutler and Andrew Rewald



About the Artists

Randy Lee Cutler is an artist and writer whose practice weaves together themes of collaboration, materiality, science and fiction. Working with printed matter, collage, video, installation, performance and writing, she has shown work at numerous venues internationally. Exhibitions and performances include the Biennale of Sydney NIRIN 2020 and Belkin Art Gallery (UBC Outdoor Artwork), Vancouver Art Gallery among others. Randy is a Professor at Emily Carr University in the Faculty of Art on the unceded, traditional and ancestral territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), and səlilwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh).

Andrew Rewald's artistic practice is informed through performance, engaging audiences in a duty of care that questions the intersection between food anthropology, migration, environmentalism and colonisation. In each project he undertakes he makes the connection between human interaction and the environment—plants and food politics in particular—more visible. Rewald collaborates with scientists and other professionals, community groups and creatives, to investigate the ever-shifting value and symbolism of what we eat and how it is accessed.

Mineral Garden

Randy Lee Cutler and Andrew Rewald

Mineral Garden (2020) was a collaborative project by Randy Lee Cutler and Andrew Rewald for the Biennale of Sydney NIRIN 2020.¹ The work was presented within the chapel—a circular sandstone building centred within the National Art School, a combination of related themes and ideas from both Cutler and Rewald’s individual Biennale projects brought together as a hybrid installation.² The site of the art school is the former Sydney jail designed in the panopticon prison architectural style, conceptually placing the chapel as the eyes of the site from which all radiates out and to which all moves towards and around. Working with the temporal and spatial displacements between Canada and Australia, the artists shared interests in the natural world and ecological crisis informed a speculative engagement with lifeforms and hybrid systems. Drawing on plants and minerals as material and subject matter, their project offered alchemical propositions for a more sustainable and interconnected world.

Operating as a speculative portal, *Mineral Garden* (2020) took the viewer through a heightened spacetime of hyper-terrestriality by bringing diverse knowledge practices of natural processes into the present and future. Glints and facets of alternative realms were presented through diverse literal and metaphorical lenses of mysticism, museum taxonomy, science fact and science fiction, revealed through the entanglement of collages, posters, mineral and plant specimens, and archival objects, and enabling space for connections to be made and reinterpreted. A reading area supported the project with significant books that inspired the collaboration, with past, present, and future interpretations of human engagement with the natural world that underpin both artists’ motivations to create, reimagine, and educate.



Figure 1. Cutler, Randy Lee, and Rewald, Andrew. *Entry Wall +Table*. 2020. Carriageworks, Australia. Andrew Rewald photo.

Mineral Garden (2020) can be viewed as a nonlinear series of hybrid stories based on seemingly disparate but interrelated formal and informal knowledge practices, to cultivate alternative narratives about botanical organisms in the soil and the geological forms beneath our feet. The installation speculated on the secret and shared life of plants and minerals so as to envision what emerges in-between these biological entities and inorganic solids. The work presented the potential for emergent worlds and lifeforms that further reveal our interconnectedness with the universal elements vital for all life. All these highlighted relationships that are manifest in the ecologies we unearth, create, or destroy but are inextricably part of.

For Cutler's contribution to the project, the presence of minerals in our daily environments were explored for their profound but often unacknowledged effect on our experiences. Using a variety of media such as collages, posters, and audio, her work mapped the physical structures, geographies, and biological effects of minerals, showing how they work as the invisible building blocks of our bodies and our technologies. Each artistic component became a geological dig across a physical-metaphorical spectrum, connecting and rupturing familiar meanings and assumptions. This multi-faceted approach allowed for a non-linear encounter with crystal formations compressing deep time with our collective futures to better contemplate human interactions with these earthly deposits.

For Rewald's contribution, deep time was presented in food-plant-people relationships through our historical and cultural role as environmental landscapers, reimagining agriculture and foraging as ecoreparation practices to mitigate human-induced ecosystem collapse. Rewald's work considered ethnobotanicals, both native and non-native, through European and Australian histories of agriculture and foraging for wild food and medicine plants. In the context of soil sciences on anthropogenic soil, carbon sequestration, and water harvesting, audiences were introduced to urban sustainable practices to foster deeper awareness of the global climate crisis and ways to mitigate its extreme effects. The project was a collaborative encounter with Indigenous and colonial/migrant engagement to demonstrate human connection to the places we live, while highlighting our paradoxical dislocation, yet urgency to reconnect.



Figures 2 and 3. Cutler, Randy Lee, and Rewald, Andrew. *Light Vitrine* and *Medicinal Vitrine*. 2020. Carriageworks, Australia. Andrew Rewald photo.



Figure 4. Cutler, Randy Lee, and Rewald, Andrew. *The Crystal World—Dandelion Inversion*. 2020. Carriageworks, Australia. Andrew Rewald photo.

As a collaborative encounter, *Mineral Garden* (2020) informed and expanded each artists' attention to living systems. Working with temporal and spatial displacements as well as shared interests in the natural world and ecological crises allowed for engagements with lifeforms that took the viewer on a speculative journey through mineral and plant systems. Drawing on plants and minerals as alchemical lore and scientific fact, the artists worked with the metaphoric potential of their subject to propose the interconnectedness of lifeforms for a more balanced, sustainable world.³



Figure 5. Cutler, Randy Lee, and Rewald, Andrew. *Dandelion*. 2019. National Art School, Australia. Andrew Rewald photo.



Figure 6. Cutler, Randy Lee, and Rewald, Andrew. *Future Minerals*. 2019. National Art School, Australia. Andrew Rewald photo.



Figure 7. Cutler, Randy Lee, and Rewald, Andrew. *Dead Forest*. 2019. National Art School, Australia. Andrew Rewald photo.



Figures 8 and 9. Cutler, Randy Lee, and Rewald, Andrew. *Pyrite Worker, Earthwing + Uranium Dust Clouds*. 2019. National Art School, Australia. Andrew Rewald photos.



Figure 10. Cutler, Randy Lee, and Rewald, Andrew. *Stone Vitrine*. 2020. Carriageworks, Australia. Andrew Rewald photo.



Figure 11. Cutler, Randy Lee, and Rewald, Andrew. *Light Vitrine Mushroom*. 2020. Carriageworks, Australia. Andrew Rewald photo.

Notes

¹ Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, *Mineral Garden* (2020) was installed at two different sites, initially at the National Art School and later at Carriageworks. The images included here are from the installation at Carriageworks and include a selection of objects from the artists' collections, the Museum of Art and Applied Science in Sydney, Australia, and Christine Myerscough.

² To experience some sound and video from the installation, see the following: *Mineral Garden* Walkthrough images and video and Randy Lee Cutler's *Rock Album* vol. 1, <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/yAUREE7fD7DsfQ>; "Artist Insider: Randy Lee Cutler and Andrew Rewald at National Art School for NIRIN, 22nd Biennale of Sydney," <https://nas.edu.au/artist-insider-randy-lee-cutler-andrew-rewald/>; Andrew Rewald's "Reading NIRIN: On the Movement of Plants," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DjzQ2yHW-78&t=2s>.

³ Books in the Reading Area included J.G. Ballard's *The Crystal World* (1966); Jane Bennet's *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2009); Hildegard von Bingen's *Physica: The Complete English Translation of Her Classic Work on Health and Healing* (Simon & Schuster, 1996 [1150–58]); Masanobu Fukuoka's *The One-Straw Revolution* (1975); Mark Kurlansky's *Salt: A World History* (2002); Esther Leslie's *Synthetic Worlds: Nature, Art and the Chemical Industry* (2005); Timothy Morton's *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence* (2016); Bruce Pascoe's *Dark Emu: Black Seed* (2014); Elizabeth Alexander Roob's *Alchemy & Mysticism* (2014); Elizabeth Povinelli's *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism* (2016); and The Smithsonian's *Rock and Gem Biography* (2008).

References

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- . 2020. *Mineral Garden*. Sydney, Australia: Carriageworks. Biennale of Sydney NIRIN 2020 Exhibition.