

The background is a detailed landscape painting. In the foreground, there are dark, silhouetted pine branches on the left and a large, light-colored rock on the right. A calm lake occupies the middle ground, reflecting the sky. In the background, there are rolling green hills under a blue sky with scattered white clouds. The overall style is that of a classic oil or acrylic painting.

TOUCHSTONE

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The mission of *Touchstone* is to contribute to and praise the creative thinking of the Viterbo Community. *Touchstone* provides a creative outlet for publications of visual art and literature. It is also a learning opportunity for students to create a professionally published journal that expresses the culture and education of Viterbo University.

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The Viterbo University community prepares students for faithful service and ethical leadership.

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Cover Detail: *Overlooking Devil's Lake*, Cami Olson

Back Cover: *Balanced Battery*, Ava Stoeckly



Overlooking Devil's Lake
Cami Olson, Acrylic on Canvas



Beneath The Blue
Cami Olson, Acrylic on Canvas

“Echoes from the Clocktower” by Luke Wiederholt

In the quiet town of Westminster, the old clock tower stood at the square's center like silent sentinel. Its tall, mossy stones had watched over more summers than anyone cared to remember. The townspeople rarely paused to look up at its face, the kind of thing you notice only when it stops working. On one early fall evening, as twilight settled and the lamps lining Main Street flickered, 15-year-old Mara Smith found herself hanging out near the tower longer than usual. She had come to town to get a loaf of bread for her grandmother, but the golden light of dusk pulled her eyes upward. At first glance, the clock seemed frozen; the minute hand had paused just a few ticks from midnight. It looked wrong, out of place, as though time itself had forgotten to wind this clock.

She went around the edge of the square and looked inside the open archway at the tower's base. The wooden door creaked softly due to the breeze. With the hesitation of a child stepping beyond her bedtime, she pushed it open. Inside, the stairwell spiraled upward, covered in dust and quiet. Shadows covered every corner, and the only sound was the faint echo of distant drops of water falling from the ceiling. She climbed, one step at a time, each creak of the wooden stairs marking a hesitant listening into the silence. On a landing halfway up, she noticed something odd. A broken stained-glass window, with beautiful colored glass covering the ground. Mara knelt and touched the shattered glass with trembling fingers.

She felt a strange pull towards the glass, not just curiosity, but something deeper. She rose and pushed open the final hatch leading to the clock room. The door creaked as it turned on weak hinges. Inside, the enormous clock face loomed before her, the hands unmoving, the glass surface so dusty it hid the time from view. A hush settled over the room, thick as velvet. Then came a soft tick. Mara froze for a moment as the sound seemed impossible. She took the pink flashlight she had gotten from her grandmother's house out of her pocket. She flipped the switch, revealing several different murals and stained glass on the walls. One of the murals frightened Mara, as it depicted a man who appeared to be in his 20s or 30s. Seeing this woke her up as if she hadn't already been wide awake before. As she took a closer look at this mural, she noticed something particular about it. The man in the mural looked very familiar; she couldn't put her finger on it, but she knew he looked like someone she'd known. Near the corner of the painting, she noticed there were initials reading "A.S".

As she searched the rest of the room, she started to find that there were several different paintings and writings that felt very familiar. Mara was about to call it a night and come back the next night, but she saw a box in the corner of the room with a lock sealing it shut. As she walked over to the closed box, she felt the same connection she had felt with the broken glass, but this time even stronger. She tried to open the box, but it wouldn't budge due to the rusty, old lock. She frantically searched for a key, but found nothing.

Luckily, she stumbled upon a large brick that had fallen from the walls surrounding her. She picked up the brick and began striking the lock that sealed the box with all of her might. Strike after strike, the lock began to loosen until it finally broke. Mara's heart dropped, not knowing what would be inside. Her heart began to race as she began to open the mysterious box.

She shone the light in the box, revealing several different books, old pictures, and letters covered in dust. She shakingly picked up one of the letters and blew the dust from it, revealing a name. "Albert Smith." Her heart sank, and tears began streaking down her face. Albert Smith was the name of her father, who had disappeared after being lost at sea when she was only 6 years old. She began to read the letters and discovered that they were all addressed to her, dating back to the day of his disappearance. Her mind began to race with a thousand different thoughts. "Why haven't I received any of these?" "Where is he now?" "Is he still alive?" She kept reading the letters, one after another, each one becoming more recent than the other. The last letter that she read was dated only 3 months ago. There was a sudden slam of a door that echoed throughout the clock tower, and her heart sank to the very bottom of my feet. Mara began to quickly shove a couple of letters in her pockets and hid in a closet that was nearby, trying to calm her heavy breathing.

She began to hear footsteps coming up the staircase, getting louder and louder with every second. The door to enter the clock room suddenly swung open, revealing a tall, mysterious figure. Panicking, she came out of the closet and called out, "I'm sorry, I shouldn't be here... I will leave right away." A very masculine voice answered, saying, "Why are you here?" Mara walked out with the letters still hidden in her pockets, trying to apologize to the unknown man. The man walked up to Mara and took his hood off revealing who he was. Mara then looked up at the man's face, and her life immediately changed forever.



Untitled
McKenna Hunter
Stoneware



Untitled
Emily Ludwig
Stoneware

“Buck Nasty is Dead” by Lindsay Koza

Sadness weighted in your eyes tastes
the blood pouring from your nose.

The thoughts leaving your ears, squishy and
pink-fading.

A snapped heart, layered beneath another’s hide.

Black rim, not yours, unable to shade
cracked lips numb to love.

Eyes followed, unallowed, is the sadness
still there?

Ask the band.

Buck Nasty Is Dead.



Coffee Date

Izzy Schaffer, Acrylic Paint on Paper



Personal Still Life

Katherine Giebel, Oil on Paper

“Paola” by Helen Riddle

It was my first time visiting Alessandria, Italy.

Luca had been there before, as half of his relatives live there. He insisted we vacation in Italy for a “trip of a lifetime.”

The sky was particularly blue, and the humidity lingered at a perfect level of moisture where you would not get stuck to your clothing.

He reached for my hand and dragged me along streets full of bricks and yellow lights. The cafe tables surrounding petite lounges and coffee shops were filled with tourists and young couples, just like us. It was crisp in the air, a spring weather that was enhanced by being in another country.

It is truly the best place to propose.

Exhausted from the flight, we stopped at a little classic Italian restaurant that had prices that were bound to be a tourist trap, but we insisted we needed to try authentic, Italian wine.

The waiter graciously poured our glasses, more than we initially expected to drink at two in the afternoon, but we were jet lagged and needed something to rejuvenate our spark for each other.

“Sip honey, don’t chug,” he says to me, looking around to make sure nobody sees my drinking habit.

“I’m not chugging,” I reply, harshly, wiping the deep purple off my lips.

He takes my free hand and holds it tightly. He takes a deep breath

“Do you know how long I have been waiting for this moment, Marie? Just you and I.” He smiles and takes a sip.

Already?

I am smiling, tightly.

I look up to see a beautiful young woman exiting her flat onto her porch.

She puts out her cigarette and stares off the balcony. She is in a beautiful slip that must have cost her a fortune, it is satin and shiny. Her hair is a bit messy, but you can tell she takes care of it- most of the time. She is exhausted. Did she just have sex? Is she cleaning the flat and taking a smoke break? She turns to make eye contact with me, all too brief. She smiles.

I pause to smile back, but by the time I can get the muscles in my face to move, she is already back inside.

“What, dear? What is it?” He grins.

My eyes darted back.

“I have been waiting for this moment too.” I tighten my grip.

Within seconds, the young woman reappears, dangling her car keys at me enticingly, inferring me to get up and go with her-somewhere.

“I- I wanted to ask you something.” The words escaped his mouth.

“Yes dear?” I speak through my teeth, my feet shuffling to escape.

“I love you so much, Marie. I want to spend the rest of my life with you.” He pulls out a ringbox, his hands trembling.

“That’s all too sweet Luca, but I need to let you know th-”

He puts his finger over my lips, shushing me.

“I know we said this would be impossible, I knew this was going to be difficult. I just want you to know that I have everything in order for us when we get back. I have been saving up for that apartment in Elgin and the deposit is already down.”

Before I can respond, a red car speeds around the corner of the restaurant. It’s the woman from the balcony. She is wearing a scarf around her head and has lit another cigarette.

“Saliamo, andiamo da qualche parte migliore.” She signals for me to get in the car.

I scratch the side of my neck and look towards Luca. He is still holding the ringbox, laughing at this supposedly impossible interaction.

I turn my hips before the rest of my body moves, and I quickly move towards the car.

“Goodbye, Luca.”

The exhaust from the car picks up dirt on its way out.



Echoes
Rebecca Sedbrook
Acrylic on Terracotta



Mirror Mirror
Ava Schmitt
Acrylic on Terracotta



*Ni De Aqi or
There*
Ithzel Cossio
Acrylic on Terracotta

“Flight” by Sailor Zarecki

Seven

birds

soar

past

my

open

window.

I

pretend

that

I,

too,

can

fly.



My True Being
Morgan Rattke, Oil on Paper

“Somebody’s Baby” by Genna Gretzlock

Somebody’s baby died today
On the ground of a holy land
The coldness of sterile hospital sheets
That red plastic chair
that goes up on the table after final bells ring

Somebody’s baby died today
While kneeling to pray
Speaking their mind
Mourning those already lost

Somebody’s baby died today
Unnoticed? Unnamed?
A casualty of a broken world,
testament to the desensitized norm
of violence we’ve come to expect.

One, two, three
4,414.
Four, five, six
70,100.
When can we stop counting?

Somebody’s baby will die today
That’s the way the world works
as certain as it turns,

Death is to life as air is to breath
and the day is not yet over

Somebody's baby will die today
cancer, bomb
car wreck, starvation
old age, bullet

Somebody's baby will die today
quiet, peaceful, unafraid.
Somebody else's
terrified, praying hidden away

what makes one deserve peace,
deserve pain?

Somebody's baby was born today
into a world where parents are scared
to send them to that brick building
where they will sit on that little red chair

Somebody's baby was born today
into a world where parents don't know
when hunger stops, when lights turn on,
if shelter will stand by morning
or be rubble at sunrise

who will be left
to see the dust settle at dawn?

Somebody's baby was born today
into a world
that should protect them
yet fails too often

Into a world that douses sparks meant to be fanned
and feeds flames better off drowned;
A world capable of starting a fire all the same.

Somebody's baby was born today
Twin to a hope for a better world
Sibling to dreams of safety and peace

Somebody's baby was born today
That is all the reason we need

to not let today be the day
the world loses a name
and gains a number.



Untitled
Dan Stokes, Stoneware

“Grapejuice” by Annie Wilder

Yesterday it finally came,
a sunny afternoon
She smiled at me

My bluest blue began wearing dresses
She finally felt pretty
Against her brilliant silver
I'll never forget
the smile of a lifetime
the perfectly ripe fruit
round and pink
round and pink like her cheeks
My bluest blue giggled like a little girl with joy

she watched me peel it
a squirt of red on her cheek
My thumb brushed it away
a pink little stain left
long charcoal curly-wavy hair that reached her mid back
sitting on stones
limestone wall
the pomegranate orchard
I held her hands in mine as her hands held the fruit
Pomegranates filled my car
they filled her soul
I asked myself how could I have ever been cruel to that face?

My Mellie cried often
At first
always my fault
never honest
she came to me hurt

My Mellie cries often.
She cries when she's happy
I could paint her tear filled face
I knew it so well

My bluest blue looks at me with her warm pools
Her eyes shifted in the lighting
wherever we went
whenever we were
Today turquoise like Milan seas.
I have still yet
still places to take her
When she says, "Ha, don't say stuff like that,"
I give her a look
Kissed her lips

The titanium above my flesh and the pomegranate above
the titanium
I give her oranges

All kinds

I give her apples

all the best fruits

I give her grapefruits

I give her strawberries

I give her blueberries

Kiwi for the heart

I give her apples to hold in a wicker basket

I give her grapefruits to sit beside and keep her company

I give her strawberries to sit in her lap

I tie the blueberries in a cheese cloth and place them on her
head

I eat the other half of the kiwi

And most of all

For My Melanie

I present her a pomegranate

Peeled to perfection

A perfect glass of white wine

And most of all I protect her smile

Grape juice blues



Caged

Sailor Zarecki, Acrylic on Terracotta



Mini Library

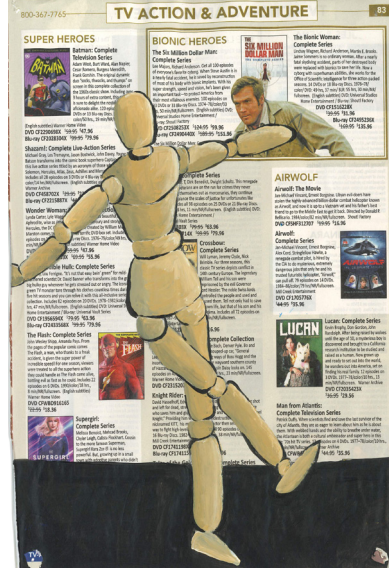
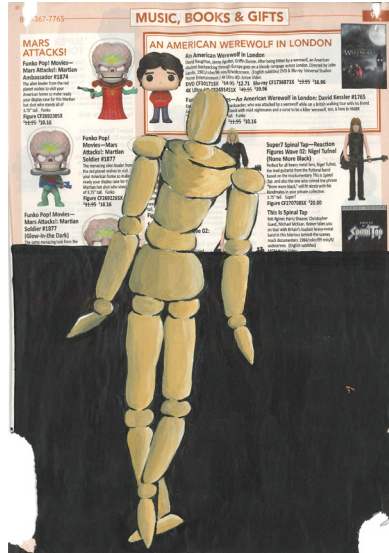
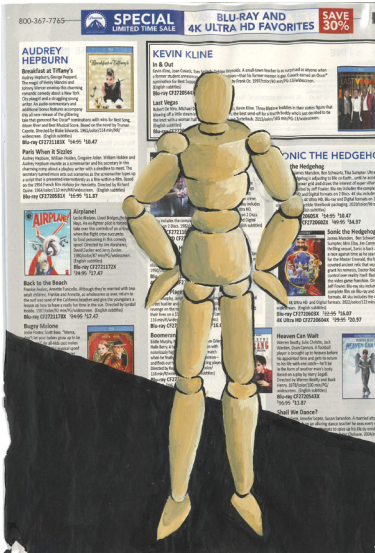
Sailor Zarecki, Acrylic on Terracotta

“The Toad Corpses” by Ava Stoeckly

would be deemed an inferior glitter,
i know that sorrow is one human strength,
or starving clown, show off your charms;
no one has mapped your chasm’s hidden floor.

uncounted swarm of centuries gatherings,
fought without pity from sheer of love slaughter
Was it one last bright smile she thought to claim?
His vows? Man rose like a tower on board.

His flattery makes us eat a toad, the poor lush who
cannot satisfy, unmoved though previous corpses and
their smell on the tits mouthing the rotten
oranges we suck dry; importantly pissing hogwash
through our eyes.



Figurines
Alanna Wagner, Acrylic on Paper

“Paralysis” by Lindsay Koza

I sleep in front of a mirror,
and she watches;

My cool midnight, awakening
from her sunrise
and I can't move.

She sits upright, slowly,
perfectly, and her head swivels
to meet my eyes.

Smiles with chompy teeth,
fists rising to the ceiling, and I
still can't move.

We face each other; I'm always
afraid she'll reach over to
bite my toes off.

I'm choking, tongue unraveling
down my body until it
becomes hers.

Face to Face, connected and
I can't move - our eyes
touch, burning;

Screaming | Laughing
and the alarm is dinging,
I'm pressed against the mirror



Crystal Forest
Kaylee Lawrence, Acrylic on Paper

“Time Clock” by Ashley Tulley

I'd reach my hand out for you
No matter the time of the day
Reeling you in from all the troubles that weigh you down
Whether you are stranded in a desert or drowning in the
ocean
I would search for you
Endlessly

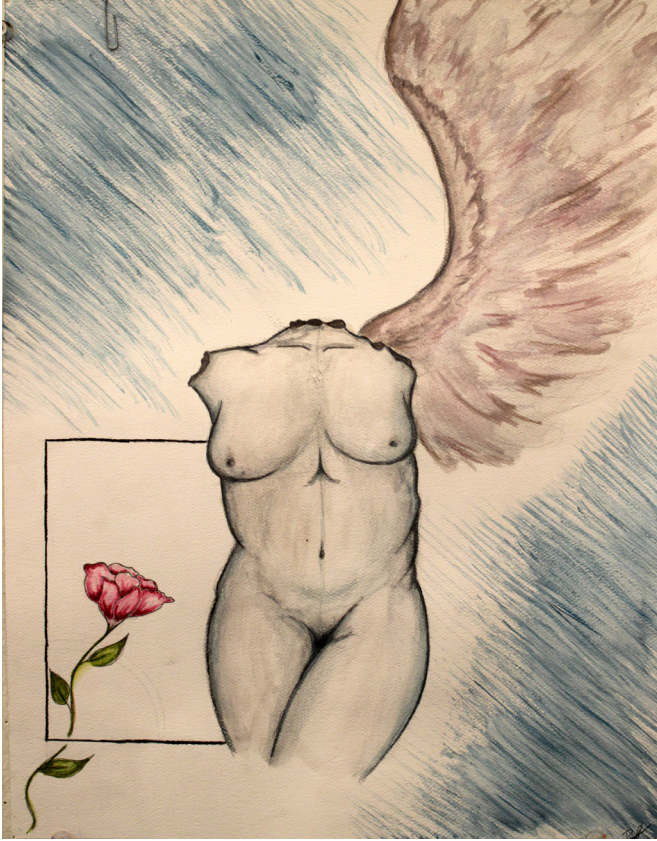
Using every ounce of my energy
Putting you before myself time and time again
As the clock ticks

Our time together growing shorter
I would throw myself into the air
So that I could make it to you in time

To show you I meant every single word I said
Giving you the world like I promised
I would pick you up wherever you lay

Hold you in my arms and take us home
Listening to your voice peacefully
A melody within my heart
Leading us forward

Into the unknown
Fore wherever I am with you
I know I am home.



After the Pain, She Rose
Rebecca Sedbrook, Mixed Media on Paper

“Generational Change” by Jonah Koon

Fulfillment Grandpa

Fulfillment was not their goal

They’ll look at you as if you’re speaking a different language

“I never thought about fulfillment

I ate

I lived

I went to church”

My generation is on the other side of the spectrum

Amazing family life

Recreational adventure

Personal fulfillment at work

Is this the right thing for me?

I dont think I ever had a problem



Calla Lily Bloom
Lauren DeVito, Oil on Glassine

“Symbols in the Stormlight” by Hannah Anderson

There is a small, quiet coastal town called Mayland, surrounded by cliffs and a dense forest. Legend claims that the shoreline’s caves conceal an ancient treasure, the Heart of Tides. Ava, a curious, brave 16-year-old who dreams of exploring beyond Mayland. She feels stuck in a long, slow routine of life and longs for something extraordinary.

It is a cold, early morning, and a violent storm is coming through Mayland. Ava is sitting inside, working on her math homework, which she insists is pointless. Her upstairs bedroom window looks over a large, beautiful cliff towering over the ocean. She looks out the window and sees strange glowing symbols appear on the cliff. She is immediately intrigued and needs to know what it is. She eagerly waits for the storm to pass so she can go explore what these glowing symbols might be.

When the storm finally passes, it is mid-afternoon, and Ava decides it is time to go outside and explore. As she is walking along the beach, something catches her eye. It is flickering in the sunlight, so she decides to go see what it could be. She brushes off the wet covering the object and observes that it is a half-broken compass. She takes a closer look, turning it every which way, expecting the needle to wobble uselessly, but instead, it points steadily toward the cliffs, no matter which way she rotates it.

A chill of excitement runs through her. Between the symbols and this strange compass, something is calling her forward.

She makes her way along the beach toward the cliffs. She comes across a newly exposed cliffside passage. Determined, she begins to climb. She takes the first step, and the rock seems to feel unsteady, but she continues to climb. All of a sudden, she feels the rock crumble underneath her, taking her down with it. She plunges down with the collapsing stone, landing hard as dust and debris surround her. Stunned, she tries to move, but her legs are trapped beneath fallen rocks.

“Hello? Miss, are you okay?” A voice calls out.

At first, she thinks she is imagining it, until she feels hands lifting pieces of rock away from her.

A young man works quickly, freeing her from the rubble.

“Miss, can you hear me? Please answer,” he urges.

Ava blinks, dazed. “Yes... yes, I’m okay,” she manages.

“I saw you fall. Are you hurt?” he asks. He is around twenty-five, with short black hair and a sage green shirt drenched from the storm or sweat.

“My name is Kai. Do you need help?”

Ava pushes herself to her feet, brushing dirt off. “I told you I’m fine,” she mutters, still embarrassed and shaken.

Kai steps back respectfully but still keeps an eye on her. “That passage isn’t stable. You shouldn’t be climbing it alone.”

Ava tightens her grip on the broken compass, its needle still pointing toward the cliffs, toward the glowing symbols she saw before the storm. She meets Kai’s eyes, unsure whether to trust this stranger, yet something about his calmness feels grounding.

“I have to see what’s up there,” she says softly.

Kai studies her for a moment, then nods. “Then you shouldn’t go along. I’ll come with you.”

Ava hesitates only a second before turning back toward the rocky path. For the first time in her life, she feels the spark of a real adventure, one she has no intention of walking away from. And as the compass points unwaveringly ahead, she knows this is only the beginning.



Colorado Mountains
Lauren DeVito, Acrylic on Paper



Cat Collar
Lauren DeVito, Oil On Paper

“The Purse” by Sammi Roesler

I'm my owner's favorite purse. I'm a cross-body tote made of genuine leather with a thick black cloth strap that always detaches from the bag.

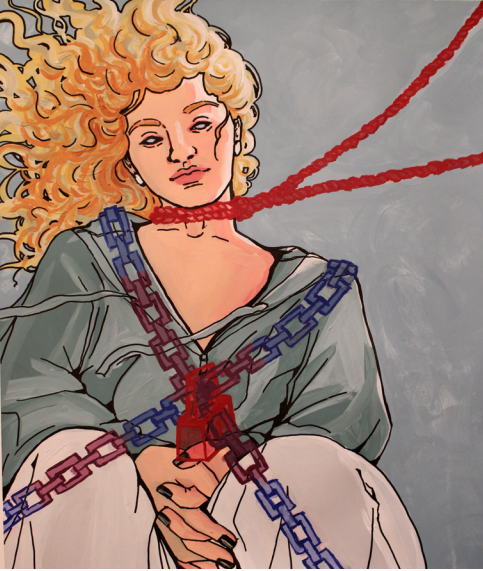
I'm always thrown haphazardly into my owner's backpack or thrown on the floor of her Chevy Traverse.

Her kids always seem to find me, always touching my leather with sticky fingers, looking at what is inside of me.

They search my contents to find yummy treats. My owner loves her gum and her sweets.

When the kids find what they want from inside me. I am once again thrown haphazardly back inside the backpack or thrown to the floor of the Chevy traverse.

I will not be seen or touched again until I am needed to fulfill the wants of the one that is in search of me.



Bound
Katherine Giebel
Acrylic on Paper



*A Knight and His
Lady*
Katherine Giebel
Acrylic on Paper

“Movie, Sunflowers and More” by Annie Wilder

I had a dream that you had passed away one night. And that I was alone sleeping. I'd visit the beach by my lonesome.

All the memories and moments I shared with you were the only times anyone has ever really loved me. The way you always talk and talk about anything, everything; the sky and chess and sunflowers and roses. The way you always tell me that blue is 'objectively' the best colour to possibly ever exist. That I'm every colour that mixes just a tad.

I had a dream you passed away one day. And I was alone in my waking life. Really alone. Podo missed you too. The apartment was horribly quiet. Your mugs collected dust; your puzzles, your art books, your notebooks, collected dust and the sun was never the same and I never heard my two favourite words uttered ever again. I could never speak French the same. I would never look at a doberman or a great dane the same. I would only miss the rain. I would go to Russia for your funeral but you asked to be buried in Riga. I wouldn't shed tears; per your request. I would never dare act the way I once had with people. I visited schools in your name making donations because, Mellie, darling I always knew that this is what you wanted. To be a teacher was what you wanted. Motherhood was what you wanted. It was never to be a detective-- even if you were good at it.

The tears that had collected and welled in my eyes. It was a horrible story. I make coffee like I do every morning and I tell you j'aime, I tell you it seventy times because you said it took seventy pens to relearn how to write again. I become a mess and tell you to make yourself as happy as possible because our childhoods-- stolen, but our adulthood?

I would wake. You sit up and glance at me and then to the watch I had fixed for you.

You don't say a word. You say my favourite words: Ma Lune.



Scene of Peace
Erin Walters, Acrylic on Paper

“Covet” by Lindsay Koza

Do you remember
when bodies were intertwined,
candles more wax than wick,
and the bass-heavy record skipped?

Of course, you must
know the feeling of souls
reaching by rise of sternums
with each laden breath.

Your skin is perfection,
hair coarse and tangled;
eyes glowing, tearful, heavy -
fingers trace your jaw.

One by one, diving
into your mouth,
opening it wider and wider
until chin hits chest.

Crimson, lovely crimson,
your exact shade
sticky like honey;
tastes like it too.



Untitled
Alanna Wagner
Graphite on Paper



Aprender A Quererte
Alanna Wagner
Oil on Canvas



Medicine is the Death of Art
Sydney Jo Bailie, Acrylic on Paper



Restaurant
Jo Britten, Acrylic on Paper



Forest Spirits
Hope Regier, Mixed Media on Paper



Swan Study
Hope Regier, Graphite on Paper



Fish Bowls
Morgan Radtke, Stoneware



Peony Alla Prima 1
Katherine Giebel, Oil on Paper



Horses

Alexa Kalscheur, Mixed Media on Paper

“Balanced Battery” by Ava Stoeckly

Consistent presence, your faithful hands
balanced me out,
I can't speak of unsteady ground,
nor pine for three-sided affection.

The control battery never dies,
And the fire alarm stopped randomly
beeping,
the oven is preheated to 450
for supreme pizza with no sausage
the seat warmers are already warm,
the snugness of our love before
my house became “ours.”
You make my coffee better than I do
cutting the pizza—
makes the cheese-stretch perfectly

I think it hit me when you said our
instead of your
But it stuck when the light stopped

going out.