

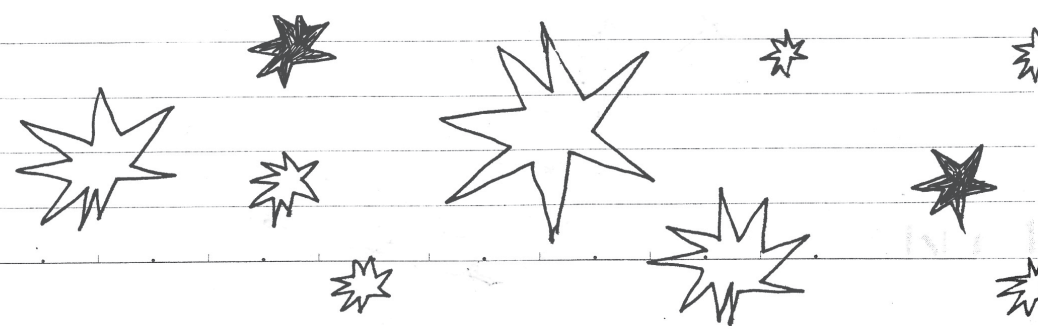
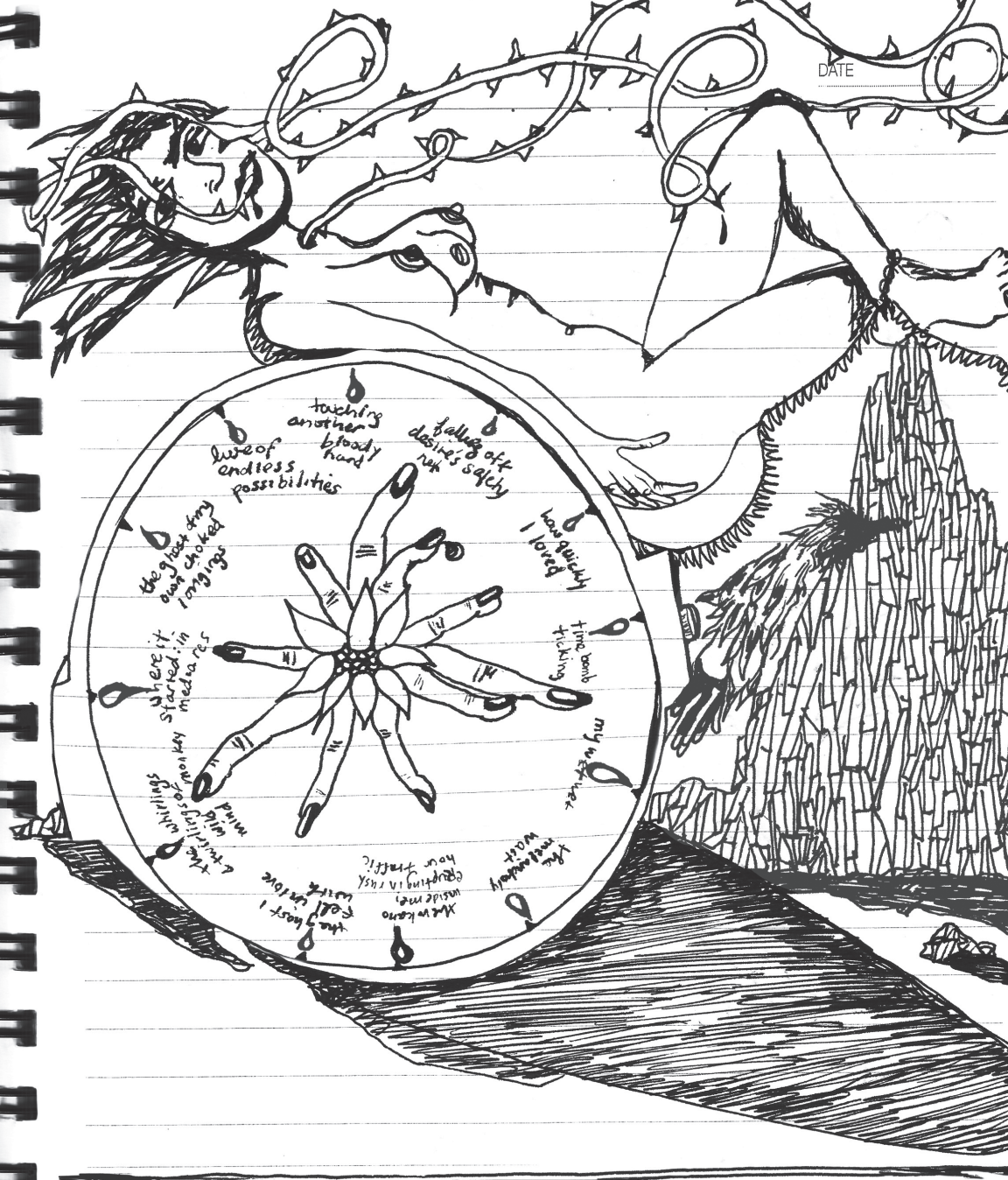
SWEETBITTER



*On Pleasure
& Pain*









I have the strongest sense of myself when I am alone at home. I sleep when I want to. I eat when I want to. I have packs of sheet masks that I keep chilled in the fridge. I light a candle. I do a yoga DVD video. I spray my face with a rose face mist. I do the dishes. I drink too much coffee. I take a cold shower and wash myself with a body-positivity Dove bar. I wear only the clothes that please me, indoor comfort clothes that are ultra-tacky. Like my grandma pajamas, printed with photo-realistic roses, bought in a Chinatown mall. Or this fleece leopard robe. I like things around me to be a little bit in disarray. I like to have a lot of books and magazines open, so that I can skip between them when I get bored. I like to have music playing, or the TV on playing. And it's okay if there are clothes on the floor that I haven't hung up yet, or a few dishes out with half eaten food.

It was Memorial Day weekend, which meant I was off work for three days. So I stayed like this at home for three days. I was also on my period. I thought, after my period is over, I'll go and confront Bonnie. But really, I was waiting for Bonnie to contact me.

I like to have food around when I'm on my period. Things like: lavender tea, freshly brewed in a big ceramic pot, sometimes with a splash of vanilla extract. Flaming Hot Cheetos puffs with all the flaming hot-flavor powder licked off, the husks discarded. Frozen blueberries and a banana blended together with both almond and coconut milk. Quartered hard boiled eggs drizzled with sesame oil and ponzu and sprinkled with furikake. Black bean soup with roughly cut slices of avocado and squeezed lime juice, and Cool Ranch Doritos on the side. When the lavender tea is no longer hot, I stick the pot in the fridge and drink it chilled later.

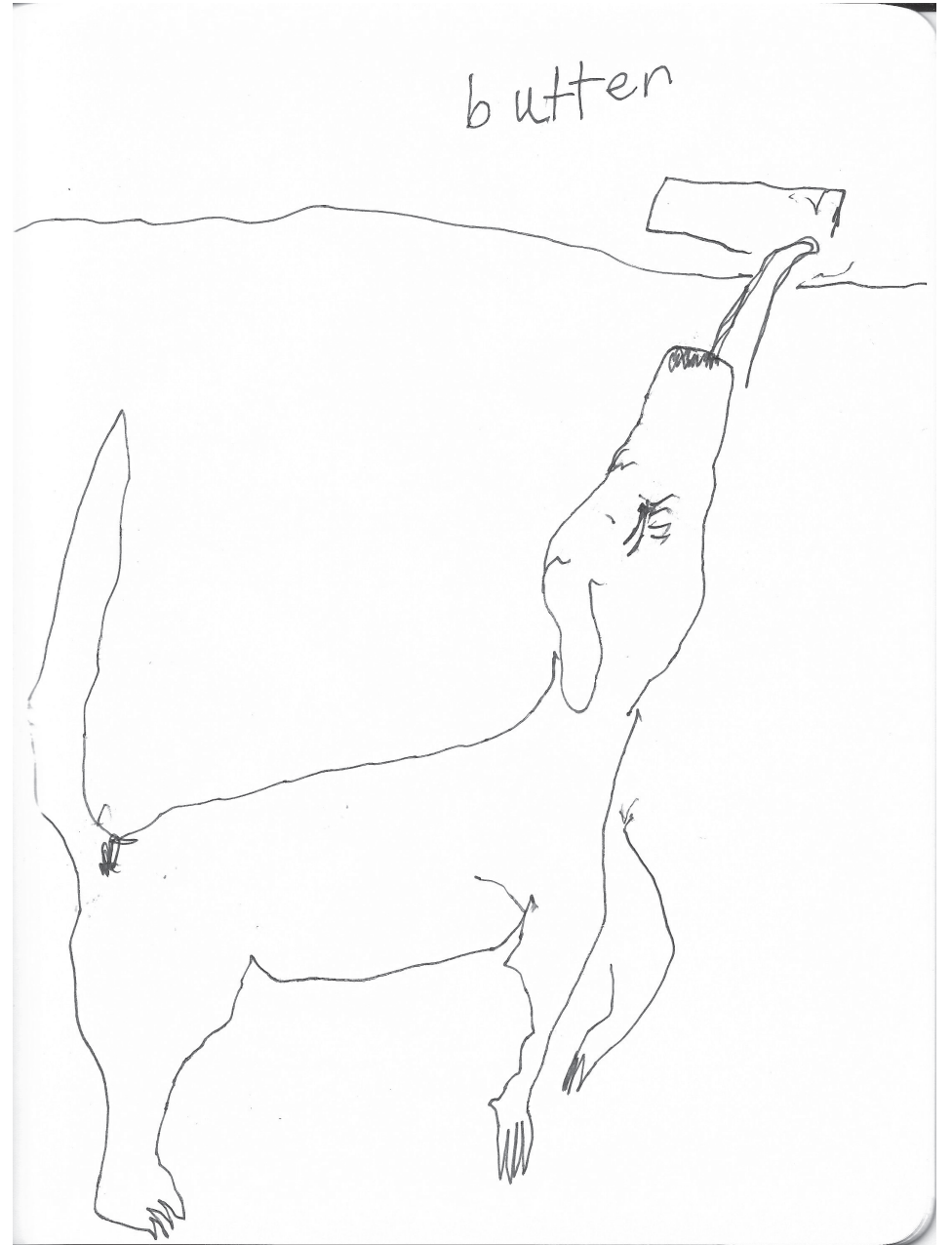
Not all of this at once, but any of this whenever.

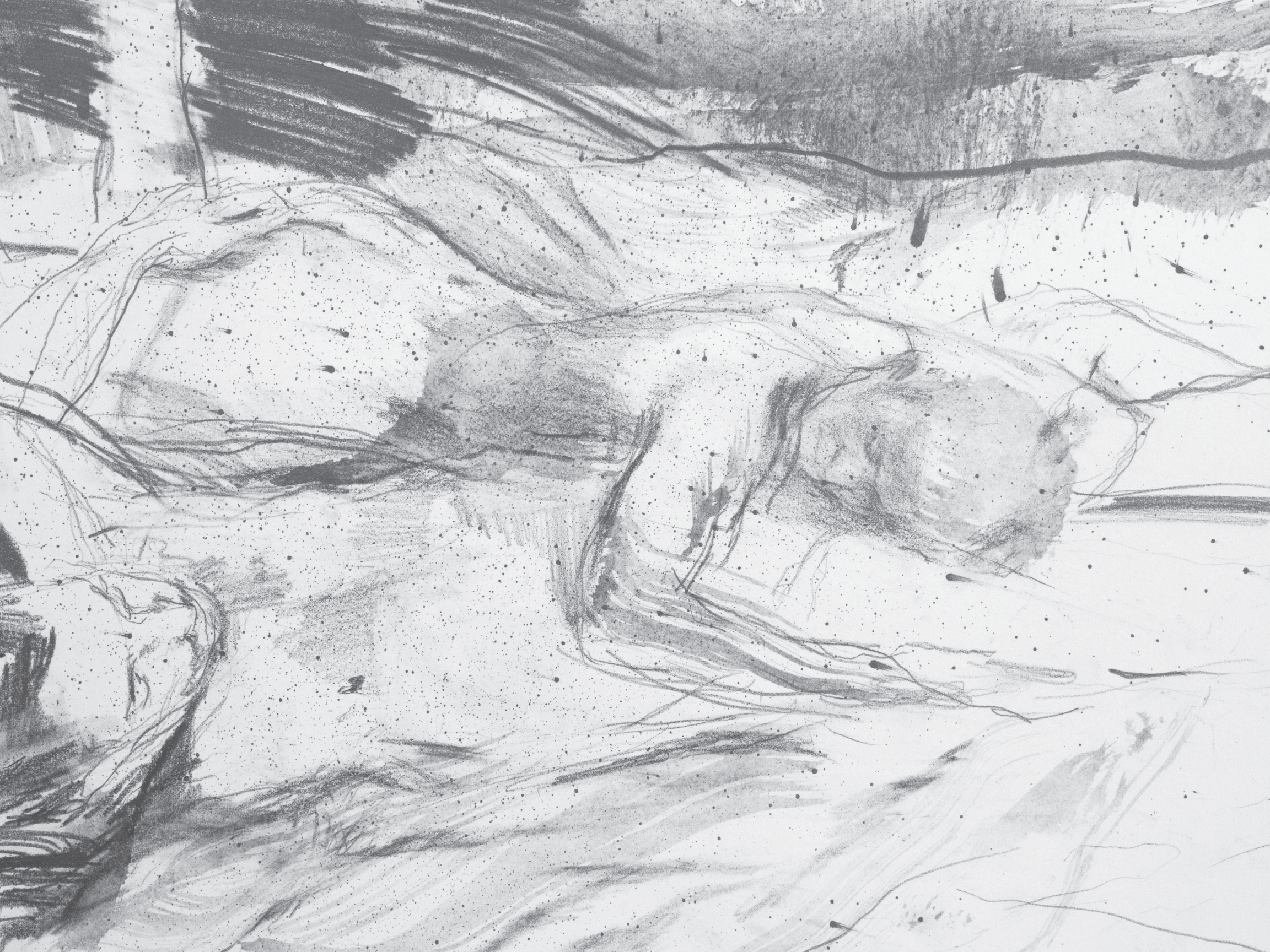
Bonnie didn't contact me during that weekend. Nor the following week. And I didn't contact her. It wasn't until a month later that we began passing texts back and forth like a half-hearted soccer game. Finally, we chose a time and date. And so, one Wednesday in February after work, I took the train up and met her on the Upper West Side. "It's a nice day for a

walk, don't you think?" she asked. It was a cold winter day, but I obliged anyway. We walked down Broadway in our parkas, making small talk about the latest exhibits we'd seen. I kept waiting for her to bring it up. And, because it seemed like she was skirting the issue, I finally forced it.

"You fucked my boyfriend," I said. We were in the Barnes and Noble. A bookseller glanced up from her shelving in the Psychology section.

Bonnie sighed, whether resigned or condescending, I couldn't tell, from looking at her face in profile. She walked to the Biographies section, and I followed. Finally, she looked at me. "I'm sorry, Bee. I..." She was trying to find the words, words that either eluded her or that she didn't want to say, that she wanted to keep to herself.







When Sarah asked me to write about pleasure and pain in the body, I picked up the hammered dulcimer my best friend Luísa recently gifted me. I placed the instrument in my lap and played. Here is a translation of what I played:

The evening primrose bells in winter promise a new coming in live arising.

A train forever paused in a new station.

The perfume of thought perfumes all thought through the fire shard.

A year flies through the fragile hand.

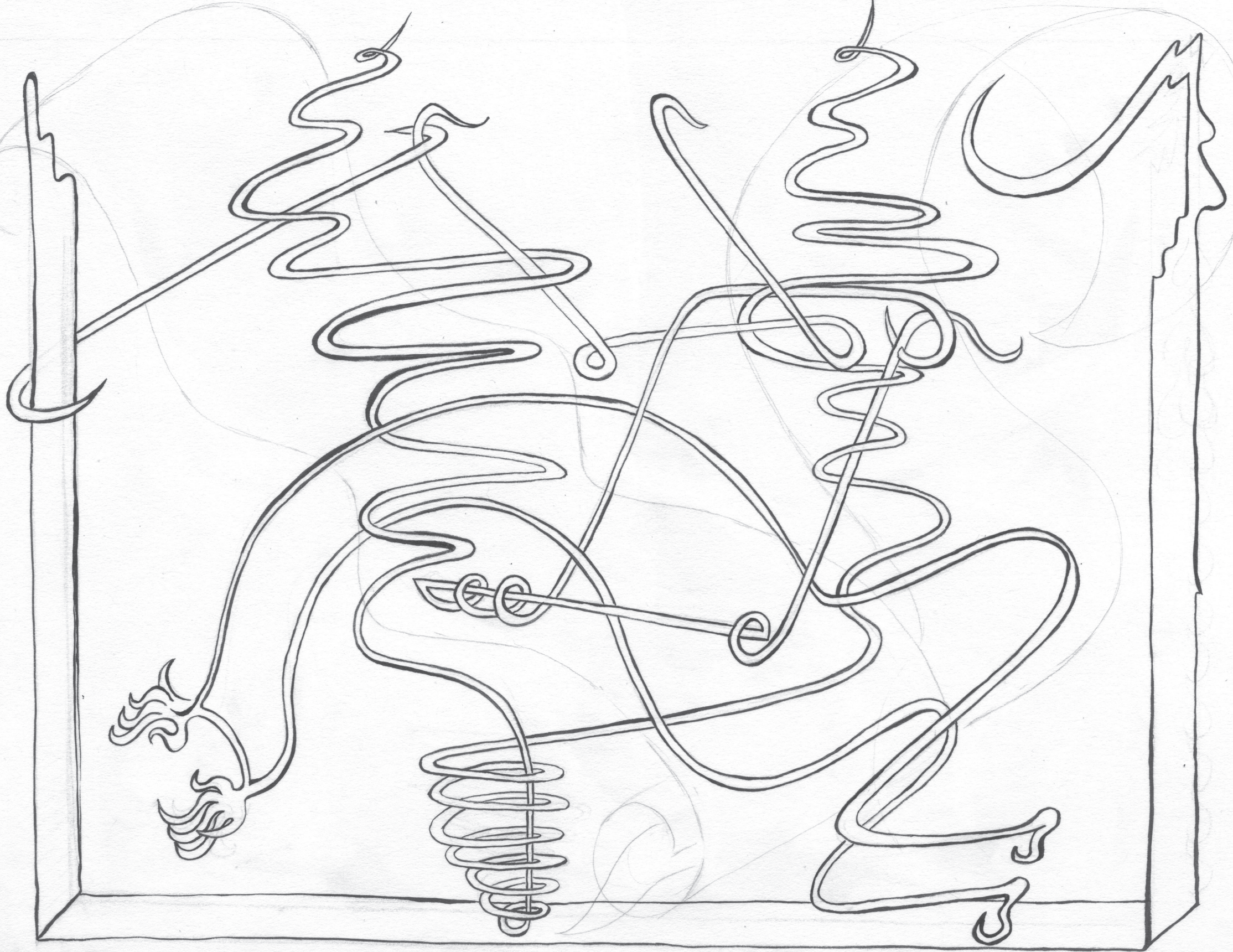
To graph healing on a vinescape.

The evening primrose bells on the sill teach empty and the slip that comes before.

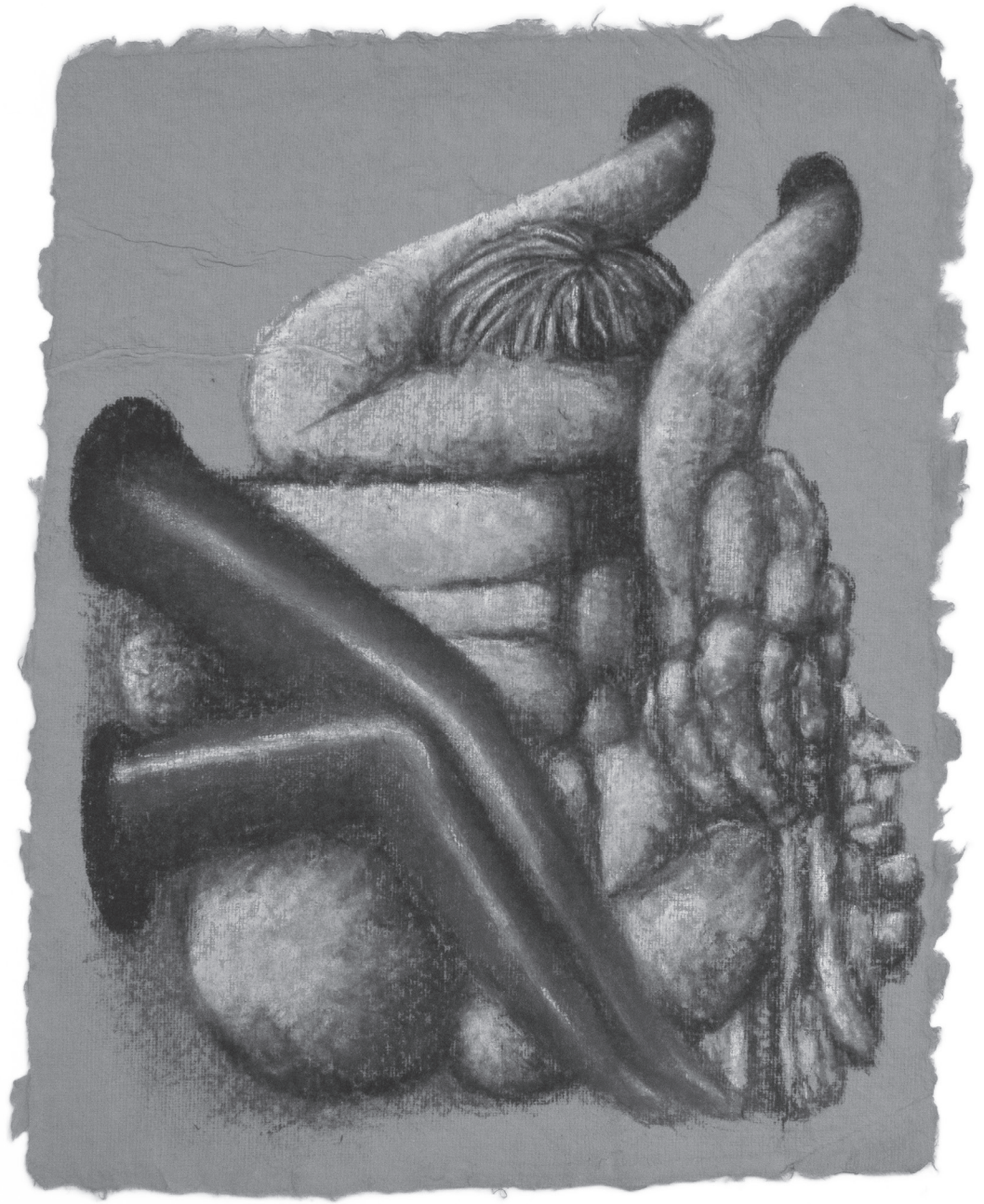
A shoulder wrapped around years like a shawl.

Move more out of tune; seek what gallops on the other side of *in tune*.

A story arises once again: three monkeys were sw—







So there were new pains to be had. A pain so cold it's hot. A pain long and slithering, liquid in its capacity to cover every surface and enter every crack—her whole mouth hurt. In fact her entire face: sometimes it rippled across her jaw, stopping only at her neck. She imagined rivers of nerves filtering through her teeth like skeletal hands. They carried the hurt, manifested it. The dark memory of childhood, hers and someone else's. Onyxlike, though without beauty; opacity itself, and yet so clean now in the light of adulthood—it seemed just yesterday she'd learned of kindness. (Sometimes she took the thing out for a polish, spinning her sorry into a high shine.)

By day nowadays she lived and laughed and loved, the usual nicenesses. (To dismiss them is to count herself—newly—among the lucky ones.) But when the mind goes to sleep, the body remembers: by night she turned between her white linens, and ground. She never even remembered her dreams, if you could call them that, and still there it was in the morning, not to be argued with, just reckoned: the pain that self-generated, neon green and radiating.—All that was normal, but this was new. A bone-breaking pain.

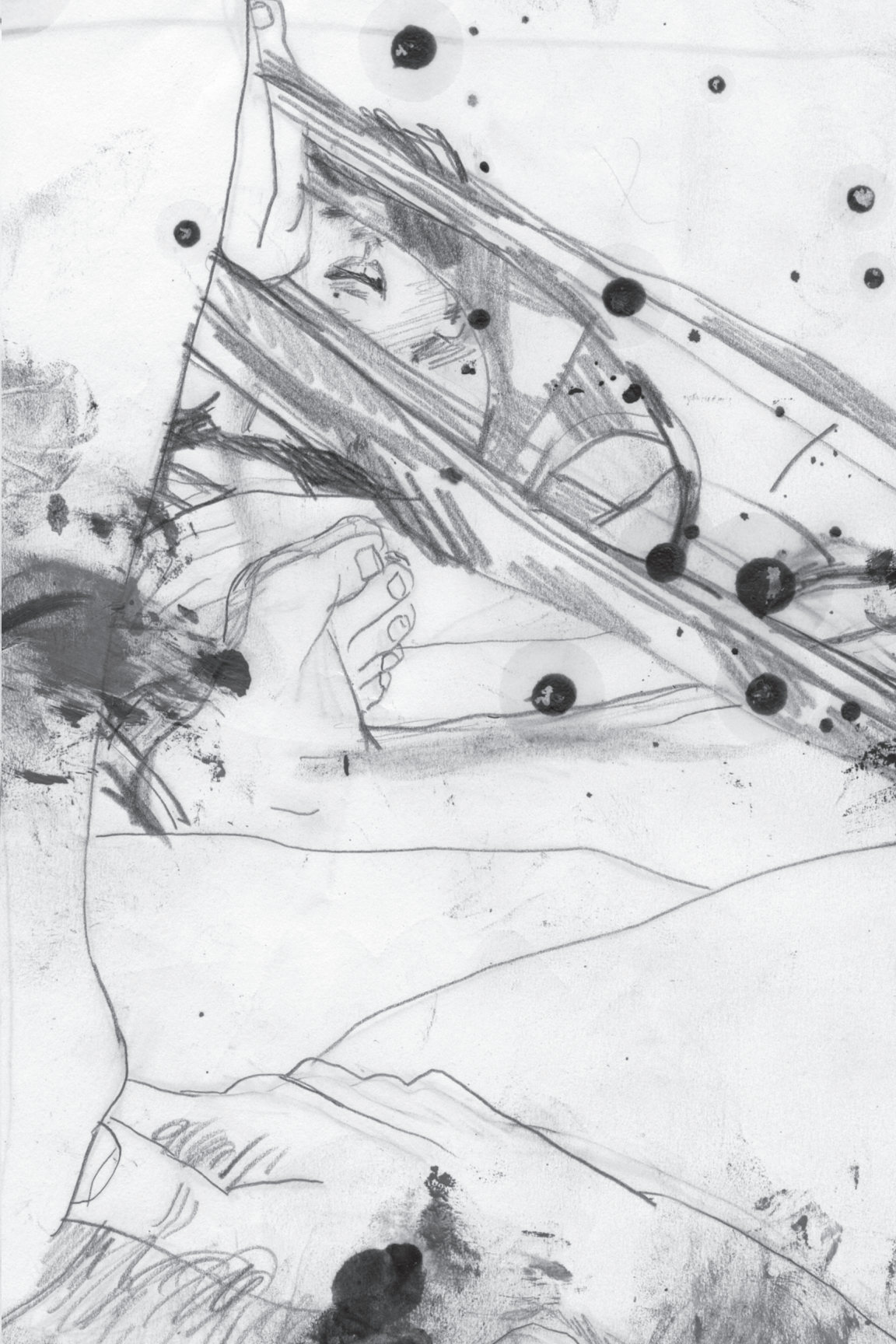
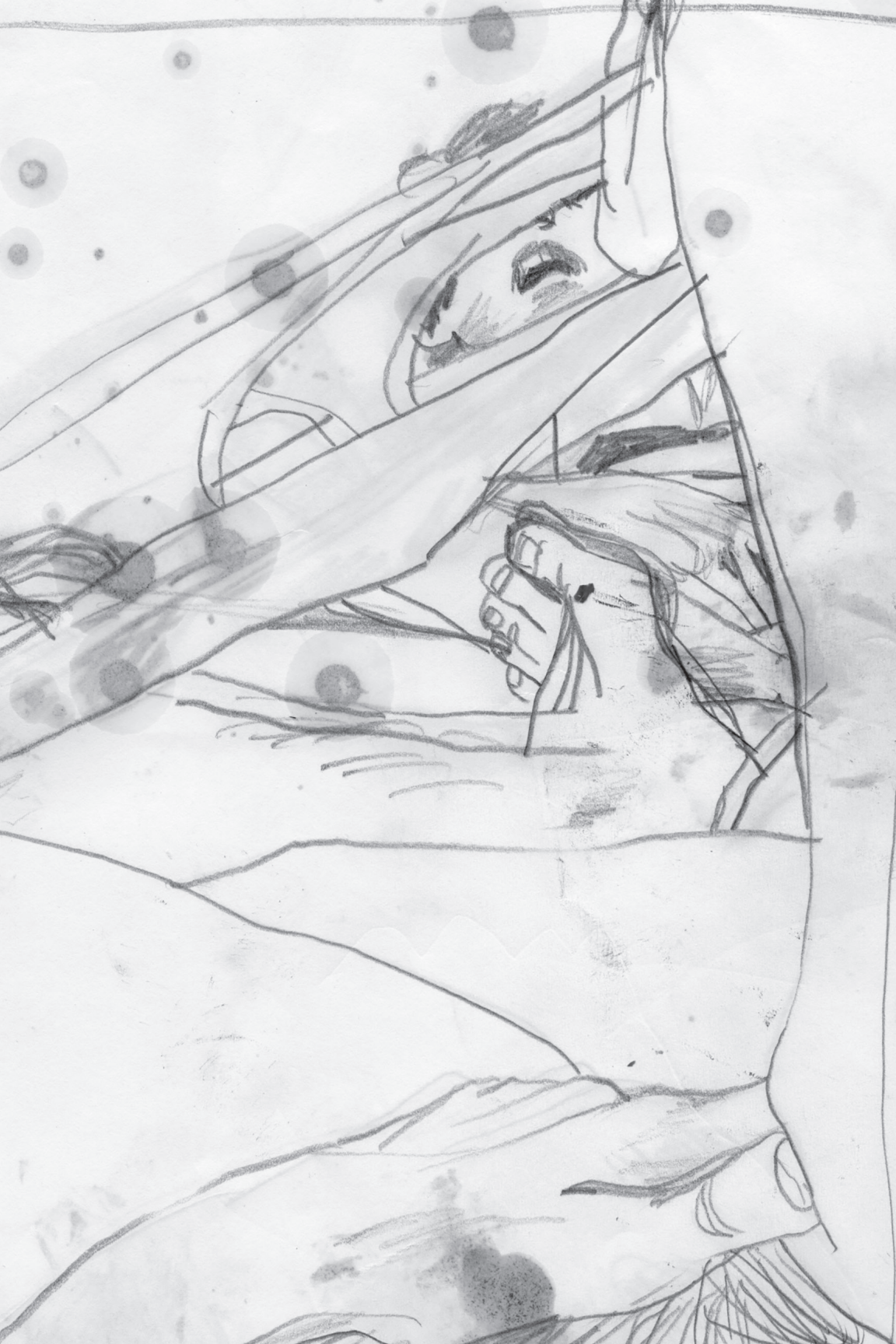
Except what's strange, she thought on day two, popping an expired Vicodin by way of breakfast, is that she's at once the bone that does the breaking and the bone that's broken. A pathetic sort of self-reflexivity, too airtight to offer any interest. (She washed her coffee mug, applying a scratch-sponge to the pale porcelain.) Maybe it was actually the other way around: when the body lies down to bed, the mind wakes. Cuts of consciousness too sharp for daylight.

See this? The dentist—in a week's time, the doctor's first available—held up the newest x-rays, in evidence because the scanner was broken. Her bruxism had only gotten worse. (As if she couldn't tell. Depths of pain from the bone out.) The image of her pain was written there, translated into its effects: at several spots, even, enamel worn down to the dentin. I mean, look at this—the good doctor ditched the film in all its gauzy glory in favor of a hand mirror. In the mirror whose naked materiality was certainly more shocking, as intended, the doctor waved a hooked scraper at her canines.

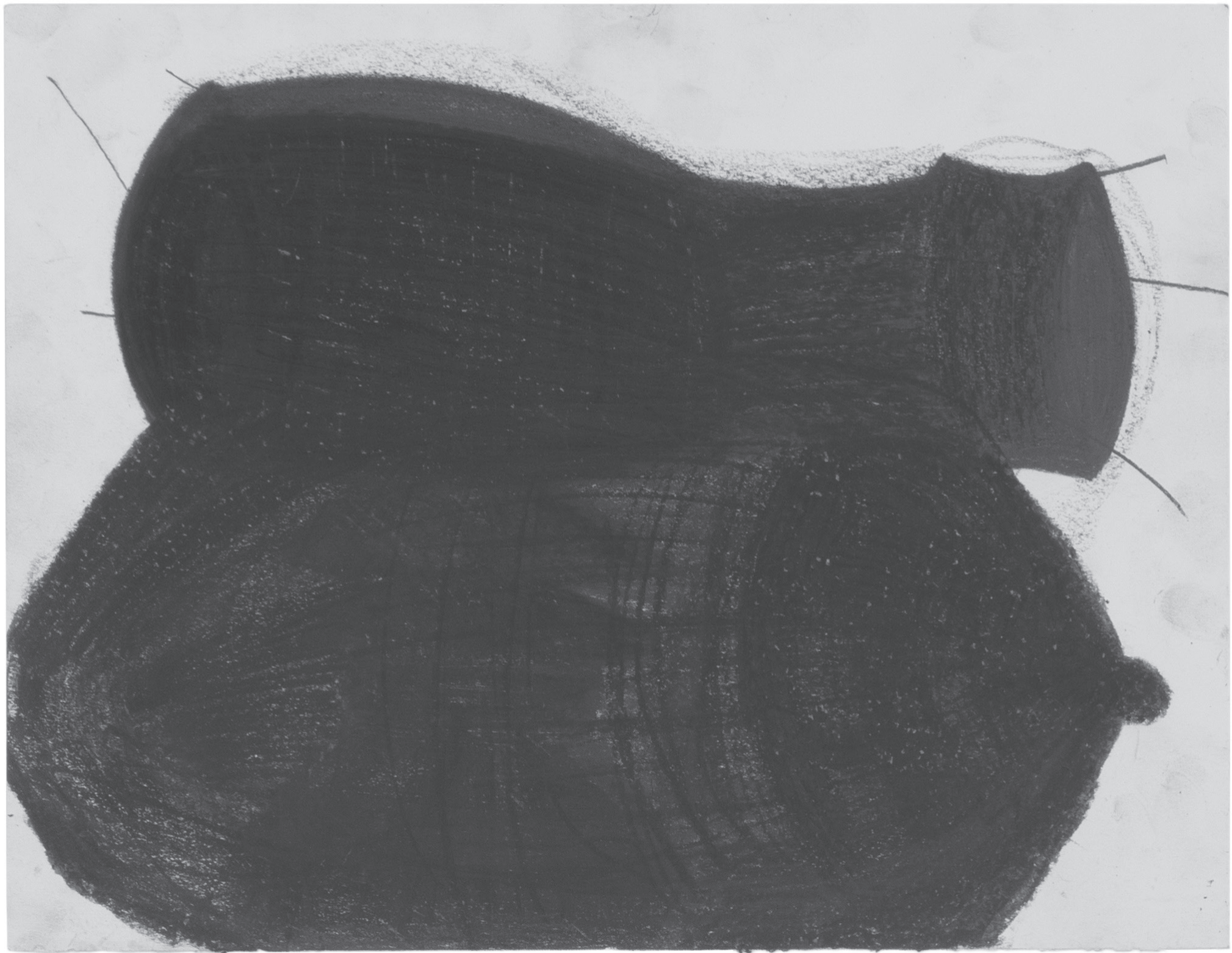
(The proximity of the hook didn't make her wince as she thought it should.) They looked like inverted mountaintops, jagged, with pieces missing due to both erosion and trauma. This—the dentist went so far as to tap the mountains' eroded edges, and despite the pain, she had no reflex—is not natural. (Her childhood had made sure of that, she thought, and the onyx gleamed.) She was sent from the office with a fresh script for Vicodin.

That night at dinner, which she cannot eat—last night the gnashing nearly tore through her mouthguard—she tells her husband she wishes for a body that does not self-destruct. (She's taken the lukewarm smoothie he's made for her as license to whine.) What she does not say—his only response was to hold her, and now she lays with a cheek against his chest, childishly—is that she also wonders how love works, how wholeness can be okay with something so broken. That this remains unsaid makes her ruffle, if ever so slightly, with pride: she's learned not to let the pain do the talking, at least not out loud. And relief, evincing the line, however shaky, between present and past. The thickness of one, the flimsiness of the other.

Her sister calls (at the idiotic cry of her ringtone, a song she no longer likes, she's shimmied to extract her phone from her back pocket). Against her better judgment—it's getting late on a weeknight—she suggests a spot downtown for a drink. Her dinner portion of Vicodin hasn't kicked in.







PANAMA
RENDERI
VIENTI
MUSCIE!



I used to dig holes in the woods with a shovel until I got lost in a trance. Digging was a compulsion: a way for me to uncover secrets by breaking ground & disappearing into action. I would exhaust myself into meditation through repetition.

In the holes I found containers (bottles). The holes would fill with rain water (from above) and ground water (from below). I usually left the holes empty.

1-21-23

"Act of self forgetfulness" = merging with action

Digging as a form of research
digging as a form of refuge
(for intrapsychic turmoil) -

it creates a space (is generative)
an abscis - potential - you
could put or store something
in there

but I never did. It's a signal:
the relief is in the repetition of
action - expulsion

(Labor)

not the negative space created
but the removal of material

mirror of cracking something
open

physically register + "prove" some-
thing happened here - the hole
is evidence of penetration -
breaking + rearranging the
surface.

rearranging ~~the~~ undisturbed latitude
(of a surface)

Labor and an homage to labor
removal, upheaval, redistribution so
what was previously flat - the barrier
between subterrain + sky membrane
threshold

is now an object - a pile - the
"natural enemy of the hole" -

the pile contains options too - as
we say: "go fish!" (defer to the
pile, try again) but the hole can
become anything. "The possibilities
are endless."

- breaking surface
- repetition yields negative space
- what negated the hole is now
a positive → results of research
(visible)

absence = potential



The

BLR

Birch

THIS



Once, back in New York, I slept with a man who said he was a painter. It was a low point for me, and I didn't have much control. The man took a picture of me positioned against a graffitied wall. The photo was clearly to show his friends, and while I questioned the aesthetic, I was vulnerable to the compliment. Back at his apartment the man showed me paintings on thin canvas board. The paintings were flat and ugly with big women's heads popping into the frames at jarring angles. The heads floated over detailed rooms which were the best part of the paintings—I liked how he rendered a particular striped sofa and the funny cat-paw shapes he used to signify handles on a sink. The women themselves had muddy, green-toned skin and their little tongues hung from their mouths, blaringly red. When I asked about the skin, the man said he was still learning to mix paint, but I didn't believe him. He made the paintings after his girlfriend broke up with him. He'd cheated on her with another artist, and the girlfriend wanted specifics; she wanted to know if he'd gone down on the other woman. The painter's response was to paint close-cropped portraits of women getting head in every room of his childhood home. It was clear from the excess of paintings that he grew up in a large house with multiple bathrooms. It was also clear that the women, with their crooked necks and bulging eyes, were very dead. I didn't want to talk about his paintings so instead I let him pour white wine straight down my throat and fuck me on the couch. When I tried to reposition things between us he said, "Babe I'm too tired, in the morning I'll learn all about what makes you come." In the morning we woke to his boss calling. "My phone got lost between the couch cushions," the painter told his boss while pulling on pants and fumbling with his belt. "Is the couch tall and blond?" the boss asked on speaker. I began to dress spitefully slow but sped up when that proved self-defeating.

I think about the painter on my chaise lounge because the guys look like the dead girls. They're healthier of skin, but they pulse between comic and frightening. I have to narrow my eyes to transform them back to what they are: shirtless men lying on the beach, basking in the sun. They're doing what's expected, but I don't believe in their pleasure.

I take off my shades and hover into the sea. This is the real point of it all. The color combinations create enough friction to assault my eyes with a visual equivalent of sped-up sound. The chalky sand is a high and hot contrast next to the aqua of sea. It makes my eyes water to become part of it. Things stay shallow for a long way out and I take slow steps so I can feel the kiss, encircle and release, kiss encircle and release, as I move through the brine. I float as soon as I'm able. On my back I hear the crackling of bones breaking, the static of coral meshed into water. I picture the sound as a support for my body. My hair spreads in mermaid tendrils and the sun beats furious at my face. When my face is baked good and through I slowly rotate and push away the water with flat hands, gliding. The colors play a trick: because the blue is very vivid and surrounds my sightline, the horizon lights up as a magenta cloud. Small fish bite at my toes. I get so spiritual out in the water that I don't recognize myself. The complement of blue is orange because orange holds no blue. My eyes are full of blue so I should see orange breathing over the horizon, but I get magenta because the water is the blue of ice packs and Gatorade. I fry my eyes so I can print the image for another day.





Pain and pleasure intermingle in my back, which is both aching and covered in skin so sensitive to your fingertips, it's like a new sex organ. I woke up this morning with my body out of sorts and also flush with delight. Sun poured through our tall window from a yard full of birds.

Please stroke my back.

My body has been needy lately, for a number of years really. She requires more maintenance than expected, sending me signals over and over: *I'm hurting, I'm hurting* ... I know, I know. I've attended to her as best I could, and she's quieting, slowly.

I often feel in two places at once, standing on the corner laughing with you and shifting my weight to my heels to release my low back, which is aching again.

Can I lie next to you?

I asked this question, in different words, to the artists and writers here. We all feel pleasure and pain, the sweet and the bitter, mixing into each other in unseen zones. Can you hang out in that in-between with me? I need company.

Felipe Baeza

- 48–49 *I feel as bare as open flesh*, 2021
Ink, twine, acrylic, and découpage
on paper in two (2) parts
83.8 x 122.6 cm, 33 x 48 ¼ in

Sarah Faux

- Cover *Study for "Little trouble girl"*, 2022
Pencil and oil on paper
19.1 x 27.9 cm, 7 ½ x 11 in
- 01 *Sketchbook drawing*, 2022
Pencil on paper
25.4 x 19.1 cm, 10 x 7 ½ in
- 02–03 *Sketchbook drawing*, 2022
Pencil on paper
25.4 x 38.1 cm, 10 x 15 in
- 26–27 *Study for "Voices carry"*, 2022
Pencil and oil on paper
25.4 x 38.1 cm, 10 x 15 in
- 28–29 *Sketchbook drawing*, 2022
Pencil on paper
25.4 x 38.1 cm, 10 x 15 in

Gaby Collins-Fernández

- 14–15 *Other Blooms*, 2023
Digital photo collage
Dimensions variable

Chitra Ganesh

- 04 *untitled*
Linocut
- 05 *untitled*
Ink on paper

Emilie Louise Gossiaux

- 10 *Loving You*, 2023
Pen on paper
19.1 x 24.8 cm, 7 ½ x 9 ¾ in
- 11 *Sneaky Butter*, 2023
Pen on paper
19.1 x 24.8 cm, 7 ½ x 9 ¾ in

Clare Grill

- 40–41 *The Births*, 2023
Oil pastel on paper
45.7 x 30.5 cm, 18 x 12 in

Em Kettner

- 42–43 *curtain call (fever dream)*, 2023
Ink on paper
12.7 x 15.2 cm, 5 x 6 in

Doron Langberg

- 12–13 *Lovers at Night*, 2023
Graphite on paper
22.9 x 30.5 cm, 9 x 12 in

Estefania Puerta

- 06 *Malcriada I*, 2023
Graphite on paper
22.9 x 15.2 cm, 9 x 6 in
- 07 *Malcriada II*, 2023
Graphite on paper
22.9 x 15.2 cm, 9 x 6 in

Kaveri Raina

- 30–31 *Untitled (I shall not surrender series)*, 2021–2022
Graphite, oil pastel, and crayons on paper
27.9 x 35.6 cm, 11 x 14 in

Victoria Roth

- 20–21 *Encroachment*, 2023
Pen on paper
22.9 x 30.5 cm, 9 x 12 in

Tao Siqi 陶斯祺

- 38–39 *Locked Up 桎梏*, 2022
Oil on canvas
15 x 20 cm, 5 7/8 x 7 7/8 in

Ruby T

- 18–19 *Tethered Beyond Earth*, 2023
Ink and pencil on paper
22.9 x 30.5 cm, 9 x 12 in

Sam Vernon

- 47 *Legs*, 2009
Xerographic print with pen and ink
27.9 x 21.6 cm, 11 x 8 ½ in

Gray Wielebinski

- 32 *Muscle! Violent! Tender! Pain! Cum!*, 2022
Ink on paper
- 33 *Bonding*, 2020
Pen and ink

Mie Yim

- 22 *Quarantine drawings #272*, 2022
Pastel on paper
27.9 x 21.6 cm, 11 x 8 ½ in
- 23 *Quarantine drawings #250*, 2022
Pastel on paper
27.9 x 21.6 cm, 11 x 8 ½ in

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