

On the Precipice: An Ekphrastic Exhibit **Paintings & Poems by Linda Alice Dewey and Anne-Marie Oomen**

During the summer of the pandemic, Anne-Marie posted a photograph she had taken at Bay View National Forest campground, of children climbing a bluff near an ancient tree that had been undermined by rising waters. The roots exposed, it looked about to fall. Anne-Marie thought: *This is what we leave them, the precipice*. She posted the image.

Linda Alice Dewey, visual artist, saw it and asked if she could paint it. When Linda posted the resulting pastel painting, Anne-Marie was so impressed that she revised a poem she had started about the image and sent it to Linda. Delighted with the connection, they asked themselves, could they repeat it and make a thematic series based on these interactions? They met on a rainy afternoon, masked, and selected nine images to work with more deeply, focusing on how they saw this beautiful world delicately balanced on a precarious brink. Thus began an ekphrastic conversation—that is, writing inspired by art to make meaning through the connections between them.

Ekphrastic poems are a practice running through Anne-Marie’s work. The need to bring language to the visual, to open the moment of the visual experience to the narrative imagination, is spiritual and irresistible for her. Her passion springs from an urge to break the boundaries between language and image, and in that responding, the mind enlarges (at least momentarily) its capacity for connection. Instead of breakage, it melds. From that, story-making rises, the device by which we remember and interpret image. Put image and language together, and they may enhance each other. Ekphrasis invites all viewers to participate by making tangible the thoughts that are evoked in visual. The root of the word means to *give voice to the silent*.

Linda’s passion is to connect with viewers through art so that they feel its mood, sense its presence. She was new to the word, but not the practice, having long taught her pastel students to see the story in their paintings. While Anne-Marie attempted to give voice to the silent painting, Linda’s input made it possible to create spaces, shapes, and colors in the poems that would not have occurred otherwise.

Linda and Anne-Marie agreed on the following: ours is time of turmoil and change—the precipice. They agreed that climate change was approaching, if not at, a point of no return. They sensed imminent change just below the surface of our daily lives and didn’t want to merely recreate lovely images and comforting sentiment. They both wished their statement to be an act of quiet resistance, and though they wanted to honor beauty, they didn’t want to veer entirely from upheaval. Instead, Linda’s images and Anne-Marie’s accompanying poems would nod to the mood of the world. They talked much of the threats to the environment, and how it affects people personally. Linda voiced the concepts she endeavored to portray through her pastels; Anne-Marie talked about how to read the “slice of life” in her poems. Thus, the collection “On the Precipice” became a way to honor an artistic as well as cultural cusp—even in the title. With this, Linda feels reason to hope—as reflected in her vivid use of color, allowing Anne-Marie’s poems to contrast in quiet melancholy.

Linda and Anne-Marie offer a pairing of nine pastel paintings of favorite cultural places or experiences in Leelanau County coupled with poems that were built in response. The pairings are designed to enhance connection and invite insight to places positioned here at the precipice where we all now live—even here in this idyllic place.