

Gone Are the Days: Melding The Muses

By [Luke Bowden](#)

"Yeah babe we've come such a long way," Tiiu Millistver opens her new album *Gone Are The Days* with these lines from 'Modern Day Woman.'

"I've built a career, I can make a home, I can go anywhere," She sings to the love of her life, but the sentiments hold equally true for her dear friend and fellow artist Candace Sepulis.

Tiiu and Candace met several years ago at Art On The Street, connecting at first over their shared, uncommon middle name – Tiiu. Finding they had more in common than their Estonian heritage and Baltic personalities the two artists – one musical one visual – forged a bond. In order to mark their personal and professional growth and promote their respective work in an engaging fashion they teamed up to launch Tiiu's new EP and Candace's art opening. The fit seemed natural – Candace had designed the cover art for *Gone Are The Days* and their lives and careers shared a similar arc.

"It's really cool that we met years ago, kicking around, trying and fumbling through a world that had all these larger artists", remarked Sepulis in conversation. She was referring to local visual artists like Tammy Ratcliffe and Pearl Van Geest who welcomed the young Candace into the Guelph art community.

Likewise Tiiu has had strong female mentors including Ottawa musician Lynn Miles as well as Toronto's Serena Ryder and blues guitarist Suzie Vinnick. "I started looking up to a lot of people that are now mentors but before were this intangible force- something Other- and now it's becoming my community and I'm starting to find my place in it and feel my voice has its place in it," echoes Millistver.

"It's great for the two of us to be at a point where we're getting it done and putting it together..... It's worth sticking with people who are committed. It's a really nice way to show we've both risen," says Sepulis, stopping short of saying 'we've arrived.' In what proves to be her trademark humility she states plainly, "I have a long way to go. I won't say I've arrived". It's easy to get the impression that Sepulis in particular has done just that – arrived. Having become a recognizable and commercially successful artist in Guelph she has now created a whole host of new opportunities for herself. Many know Sepulis through her Guelph card series, which depict various downtown, notably drinking, locales (the Albion, Van Gogh's Ear, Jimmy Jazz, Cornerstone), but also landmarks like the Heffernan foot bridge over the Speed River. These small and saleable neo-realistic works with their typically blue, light blue, grey, black and white colour schemes capture for many the nostalgia they feel towards Guelph cloaked in darkness. These cartoonish, but not clownish, stary nights have been a very successful calling card for the young Candace. A later unrelated poster series ultimately landed her a book cover for *Writer's Gym*, a forthcoming Penguin collection of fiction writing exercises and tips edited by Eliza Clarke with contributions from notables like Margaret Atwood and Dave Eggers.

The posters, one of which landed in a Penguin staffers office, featured typical Sepulis vintage fare (a typewriter and a radio). Her new collection is rendered quite differently than both the poster series and what she colloquially calls her 'Blues.' The works are large, silk screened and on board with the sides blowtorched. Candace builds up layers of paint, "then sands through certain areas to bring back a nostalgic feel of what it was." Here she's talking about the previous layer of paint that's been exposed to 'shine' through the upper layer but it's interesting that even in talking about the execution of her work she makes reference to nostalgia. Nostalgia is at the heart of Sepulis' diverse artistic expressions independent of their subject matter.

This collection when it shows in Toronto will be called, fittingly, *You Were There*. The strongest pieces in the collection work from vintage glimpses of various inanimate objects seemingly out of time: buildings (Brooklyn Morning, Brooklyn Fire, Coco Theatre), gas pumps (Prairie Star), cars (the Getaway Car), and streetcars (Toronto Streetcar). Works like the Getaway Car and perhaps the strongest of the collection Toronto Streetcar seem to be plucked out of their own time and place (like a streetcar gone sedentary in a farmer's field). They are also literally out of time, there time has been spent- it has lapsed. It is gone forever except in the work where it lives forever.

Toronto Streetcar works particularly well along these lines, leveraging as it does off of the strong and evocative design of the Toronto Transit Commission of yore. Nothing appears in the piece except the solitary streetcar, which while static seems to be speeding somewhere. The TTC's trademark yellow is brought to the surface, fused with the interior and exterior light, through Sepulis' sanding and layering technique. The bulk of the piece is devoted to a negative space of mottled burgundy, reds and oranges suggesting a streetscape now subject to the erasure of time.

Candace uses a similar colour scheme on the cover of *Gone Are The Days*, which features a lone, leafless tree. While stark, and somewhat despairing, there is a wind of change, which blows up from the earth and seems to protect the dormant, but not barren, tree. On the inside cover this same 'wind of change' carries a lone crow – a creature that holds meaning for both Tiiu. When first presented with the completed EP Sepulis says she heard in its five songs, "a dusty road."

"It sounded like a transition, like heartache ending but happily ending, as happy as heartbreak can end. This is ending but so much more is coming out of it," she explains.

Beyond their personal kinship there is a remarkable common identity in Millistver's songs and Sepulis' world-worn images. On "Sweet Poppa," itself inspired by the old time "Blue Yodel No. 10 (Ground Hog Rootin' In My Back Yard)," Millistver sings: "It ain't long 'til I'm over the to and fro of this game."

Elsewhere, on "Ruth's Song," Tiiu retells a love tale about Woody Guthrie: "That story takes place when he was hitch hiking through the southern states with just his guitar and this family picked him up and in the car was a woman named Ruth and they fell instantly, madly in love. But she was a farmer and the car broke down and she and her family stayed to work on an apricot farm and his truth was getting back on the road and sharing his music."

Millistver takes this older layer of music and myth and sands away at it bringing out her own story of love and ultimately redemption.

"I could see it from both sides being the traveling musician but also being in Ontario while my love was in Australia and him having to go. So I could write the story from two sides and explore love in that way," she explains.

Both Candace and Tiiu find themselves moving on from Guelph soon. The CD design and book publishing work greatly interests Candace and, similarly, "Toronto keeps opening its doors" for Tiiu. Neither is maudlin at the thought of the transition.

"I don't think it will go away. I found myself in this city," confides Sepulis. "I found these beautiful buildings, these beautiful people to draw things about, to create art about, to grow with. I don't think it will ever leave me. There'll be the buildings when I come back."

Melding Of The Muses

Art Opening / EP Release

Tuesday, January 16 @ Ebar

41 Quebec St, Guelph

821-3333

7-9pm Art Reception / 9pm Music

www.tiiumillistver.com

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