

Julie Buffalohead: "Indigenous A&E: Trickster art, an artisan online market and new music"

By Sandra Hale Schulman

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A solo exhibit from Ponca artist Julie Buffalohead opened Nov. 10, 2022, at Jessica Silverman in San Francisco and will remain open through Jan. 7, 2023. (Photo by Nathanael Flink, courtesy of Jessica Silverman)

ART: Coyotes and rabbits as painted tricksters

Memory, childhood and mothering feature in the whimsical paintings of Julie Buffalohead, Ponca Tribe of Oklahoma, whose solo exhibit, "Noble Coyotes," opened this month at Jessica Silverman in San Francisco.

Using metaphor and humor, Buffalohead conjures up a cast of animals straight from Indigenous stories.

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In seven oil paintings and nine ink drawings, ermines, coyotes, rabbits, foxes, and muskrat tell enchanting tales of community, sacrifice, protest and morals.

The largest work, "All Are Welcome," from 2022, depicts a group of ermines gated inside a miniature picket fence. While one sign says, "Private community, no trespassing," another reads, "All are welcome here." Looking on are a fox who cuts off his own tail, a bewildered raccoon and rabbit spirits rendered in ghostly white.

Another 2022 work, "The Noble Savage," depicts an archetypal Native who is given beads and snakes by a playful band of otters. Nearby is a trickster coyote wearing a red dress with high heels. The coyote looks askance at the offerings, questioning both the givers and the given.

"Using an eclectic palette, my painting juxtaposes evolving representations of animal spirit, deer, and coyote forms, and speaks to issues of commercialization of Native culture," Buffalohead said in a statement. "I'm always waiting for animals to talk again."

Buffalohead received her bachelor's of fine arts from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design and her master's from Cornell University. She is the recipient of numerous awards and fellowships.

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