

Julie Buffalohead's Modern Mythology

BY MEGAN D ROBINSON JULY 31, 2018



A Little Medicine and Magic, 2018. Oil on canvas..

As part of their ongoing contemporary art series, this month the Denver Art Museum (DAM) debuts *Eyes On: Julie Buffalohead*, showcasing the work of the Minnesota-based artist and citizen of the Ponca Tribe of Oklahoma. Curator of Native Arts John Lukavic calls Buffalohead's new body of work "exceptional," saying the work connects people with "tribally specific narratives that are culture-bound, emotional, and sometimes evocative."

Buffalohead's whimsical and heartfelt work explores American Indian cultural experiences and the commercialization of American Indian culture, evoking nostalgia while remaining edgy. Her images have a post-modern mythological feel, with a rich narrative structure. Though Buffalohead works in a variety of media, including painting, printmaking, drawing, illustration, bookmaking and sculpture, this exhibition focuses on her new large-scale oil paintings.

In *A Little Medicine and Magic*, a woman with a coyote's head, dressed in a vintage 1950s-style pink dress, appears to be scolding five skunks, balancing on each other's backs. The top skunk is holding the woman's bright red purse, while the bottom skunk, holding a lipstick, has obviously been experimenting with cosmetics. All the skunks have patches of red lipstick adorning a cheek, haunch, or tail. The tonally varied blue background, which could be a cloudy seaside evening or an artistically embellished wall, adds to the mysterious, magical feel. The anthropomorphized animals, and the naughtiness of skunks caught playing with lipstick, evokes the wonder at the heart of childhood stories and memories, while the coyote-woman adds layers of ancient myth and social commentary.

Buffalohead's work has been shown at the National Museum of the American Indian in New York, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, the Eiteljorg Museum, and the Bockley Gallery in Minneapolis.