

# MARY ANNE BARKHOUSE

## LE RÊVE AUX LOUPS



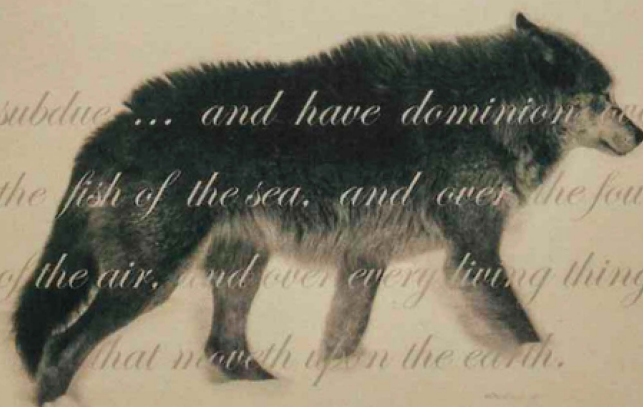
June 22 to August 20, 2017  
Koffler Gallery  
Guest Curator: Jennifer Rudder





Though I am hated by all beasts,  
I nevertheless rather enjoy that.

*subdue ... and have dominion over  
the fish of the sea, and over the fowl  
of the air, and over every living thing  
that moveth upon the earth.*





# LE RÊVE AUX LOUPS

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***Coming from a Kwakiutl background, fundamental principles for stewardship of the land were of utmost importance for the determination of individual or communal conduct. This is in stark contrast to ecclesiastical ideologies, which speak of salvation for a very few... and of a Life Everlasting that will be achieved in Heaven, and not on Earth. This can sometimes lead to the idea that it doesn't really matter what we do with the planet, as it is only a temporary construct.*** – Mary Anne Barkhouse, 2010

***Subdue...and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.*** – Genesis 1:26

Mary Anne Barkhouse's artistic practice is deeply engaged with environmental and Indigenous issues, incorporating a visual iconography of animals that play a central role. Like an interpreter, she employs the wolf, owl, bat, coyote, and even the Standard poodle as symbols of the ability of the land's animal inhabitants to adapt and persist, regenerate and repair. While reckoning with the enduring tension imposed by colonization and human settlement on Canada's Indigenous peoples, she considers the shared consequences of the colonial story on ecology and human history, which Barkhouse refers to as "the dark side of nature and how it's a wolf eat deer world out there."<sup>1</sup>

The historic clash of cultures between the natural world and the "civilized" or European world drives Barkhouse's work. Some of her most memorable installations situate finely crafted sculptures of birds and mammals within plush interiors based on French and English colonial styles. Owls, beavers and foxes perch on English dining tables made from logged Canadian trees, or lounge on French velvet chaise longues.<sup>2</sup> In *Le rêve aux loups* (the dream of wolves), Barkhouse continues to employ this strategy by juxtaposing her sculptural and photographic works with antique furniture, luxurious velvet and silk drapery, and ornate baroque picture frames.

Large photographs of wolves line the entry wall to the Koffler Gallery exhibition in homage to a different ancestral lineage. The portrait titles *Alpha I*, *Alpha II* and *Omega* make reference to power hierarchies within wolf packs. The high-ranking wolves in Barkhouse's images include a male and female Alpha (or leaders) and the Omega (or last wolf) that keeps the pack in order from behind. The portraits are encased in heavily embellished gold frames of the kind seen in European museums to frame portraits of aristocrats.

Barkhouse takes inspiration for some of her sculptures from the remarkable still life paintings of seventeenth century Dutch artist Melchior d'Hondecoeter, known for his depictions of woodland animals or exotic birds, both alive and dead, in lush, park-like settings. The central figure in d'Hondecoeter's painting *Birds Near a Balustrade* (1670) is an owl tethered by hunters to act as a lure for other birds. In Barkhouse's sculptural tableau *Arcadia*,<sup>3</sup> bronze tree branches have forced their way up through an antique wooden tabletop, as nature reclaims the cultured, domestic realm. A porcelain owl, bound to the branch by the artist, watches a scene of human conflict unfolding below. Seen from the owl's perspective, an array of miniature knights, hockey players, soldiers and "cowboys and Indians," repeat history through a mélange of stereotypes on the ground below, fighting for king and church in a display worthy of a bizarre *Star Trek* episode.



In Barkhouse's sculptures, as with d'Hondecoeter's paintings, humans tend to be conspicuously absent. *Arcadia* is the only work in the exhibition, and in fact the first work by Barkhouse, to explicitly portray people. By casting moulds and firing porcelain objects, she has transformed the mass-produced toy into a singular work of art, one unsuited for children's play. Rendered in white porcelain, the significance of the small sculptures is elevated from a cheap, plastic toy state to that reserved for delicate tableware and collectible figurines. Meaning shifts from toy to sculpture, and value and fragility are heightened by the change of medium, thereby raising a question: Is a life priceless, or worthless?

Barkhouse's polished artworks possess a quiet beauty while remarking on contentious struggles. In *Still Life with Two Hares*, a white porcelain hare bows down from above to a cast-glass hare splayed out below on a velvet hunting bag. The glass hare is a three-dimensional rendering inspired by the dead hare portrayed lying beside hunting equipment in d'Hondecoeter's *Still Life with Catch Outdoors* (1670). In both the painting and the sculpture, the dead animal's open eyes stare upward, inspiring pity in the viewer. *Two Hares* captures a poignant moment in which the live hare faces downward in a gesture of loss and respect for a fellow creature's demise. In keeping the works to scale, Barkhouse assigns full dignity to all of her animal sculptures, avoiding any whiff of anthropomorphism. The positioning of the animal figures in *Still Life with Two Hares* is reminiscent of war memorials in which a statue of a soldier bows his head to his fallen comrade below. Is there a deeper concern in Barkhouse's sculpture? Does the act of mourning extend to the threat of animal species extinction, given the continued loss of wetlands and woodland habitats as our cities expand ever deeper into farmland and bush?

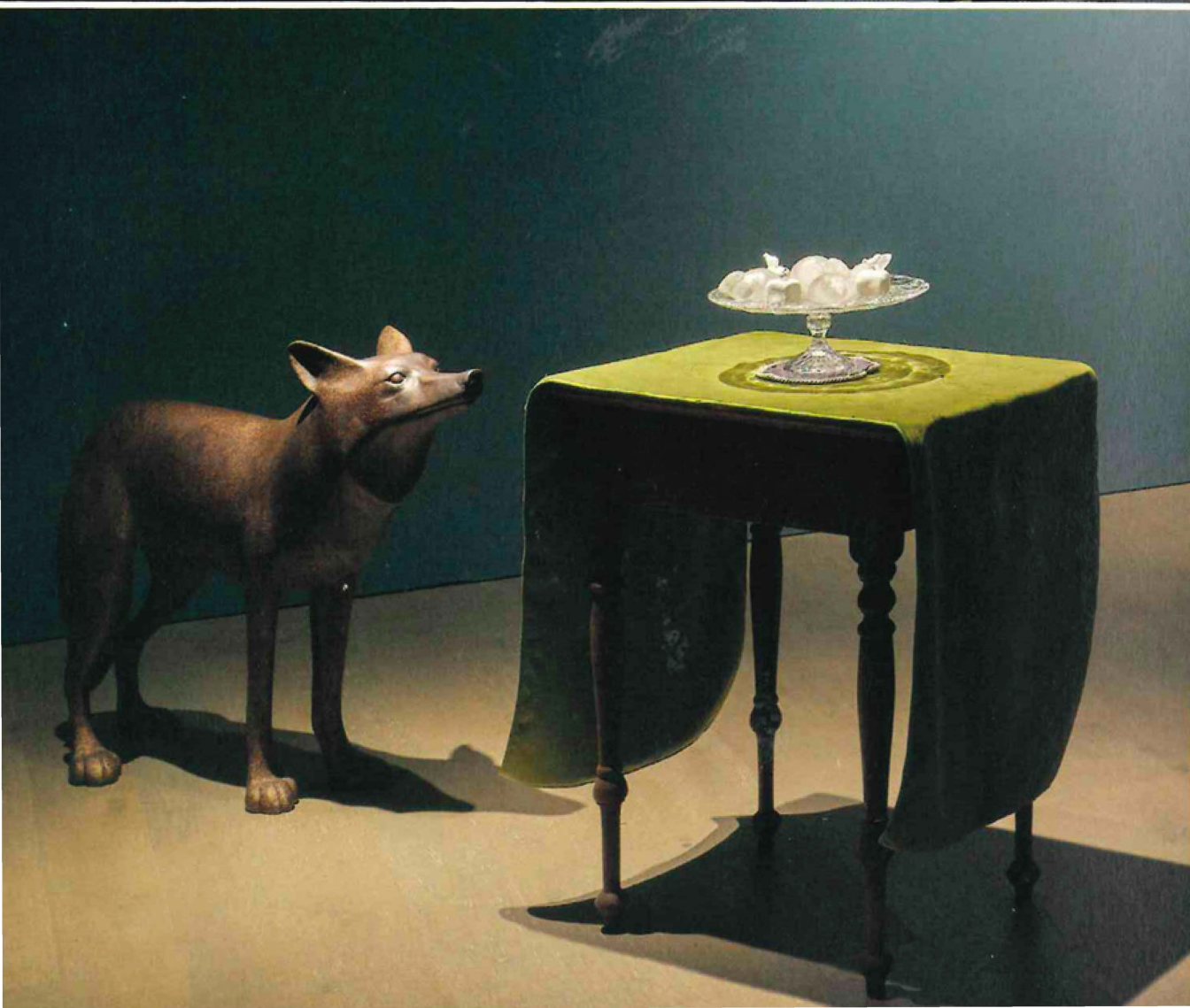
In *Treats for Coyote*, an elegant bronze coyote stands poised before a table with a dessert server, its nose raised to sniff the cast glass voles and crystal frog delicacies found there. Porcelain petit-fours share the plate, decorated with images of chickens, bunnies and sheep – the type of food coyotes find near human habitation. Here, we once again encounter an animal in a formal, colonial setting. Are the animals stand-ins for humans, perhaps for Indigenous peoples? When asked, Barkhouse states that the humans have momentarily left the room.<sup>4</sup> The artist chooses to employ the coyote in her work as a symbol of tenacity and resilience. Of all the animals that Canadians have tried to eradicate, Barkhouse finds it ironic that there are more coyotes now than when Europeans first set foot in North America.<sup>5</sup> The wolf is no longer a major predator of the boreal forest, as it once was. The coyote is the interloper, the adaptable upstart who has replaced the wolf in Ontario. It will empty your fridge and sleep in your bed. Like the crow and the raccoon, it is tough and resistant to abuse. As the Greater Toronto Area's built environment encroaches further into the wild, the predator coyote ekes out an existence in the leafy ravines, venturing into the eastern Beach and Scarborough neighbourhoods when hungry. Once sighted and reported, coyotes are captured by Animal Services and released further north of the city "into the wild," and the cycle continues.

A number of small framed photographs taken by Barkhouse during her residency at the Canada Council's Paris Studio in 2015 are exhibited throughout the gallery. Printed onto canvas, the photographs are surrounded by ornate frames similar to those found on the wolf portraits in the entry. One image, captured a few days after the Paris terrorist attacks in November 2015, depicts the graffiti that inspired the exhibition title. LE RÊVE AUX LOUPS was stencilled onto a wall, along with a small drawing of a wolf's head, in an alleyway. Another photograph documents the intervention *Ice Watch* by Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson that appeared in Paris in 2015. A dozen icebergs were shipped from Greenland and installed in front of the Place du Panthéon. The ice was so dense that the bergs melted very slowly if at all. Eliasson's critique of global warming was tied to the Paris













GENERAL STORE & CAFE

GENERAL STORE & CAFE

OPEN DAILY

GROCERIES  
DAIRY  
FREEZER  
FRUITS  
VEGETABLES  
PANTRY  
SUNDRY ITEMS



Climate Change Conference in December 2015, where world leaders met to forge national commitments on emissions and take steps to promote carbon trading. This is the same Paris Accord that American President Donald Trump famously rejected in his May 2017 statement of the United States' non-compliance.

The children's game Red Rover evolved from the game British Bulldogs, adopting the new name as the game spread from the United Kingdom to Canada, Australia and other parts of the British "Commonwealth." It could turn into a very rough game in the schoolyard depending on who was playing. In all iterations the children's game has a connection to the capture of territory and the taking of prisoners of war.<sup>6</sup> Barkhouse's floor installation *Red Rover* depicts the land mass of Alberta and British Columbia and the coastline of BC without provincial or national borders – colonial constructs that ignore Indigenous land claims. The form is cut out of children's pink and black rubber play mats, atop which opposing forces are playfully rendered as glossy painted pull toys. Wolves and Standard poodles complete with rolling platforms and pull cords carry out a satirical enactment of the wild-and-natural versus the bred-and-domesticated. Out on the "ocean," the wolves spread out and hunker down to challenge the coiffed poodles that stand their ground in military formation. *Red Rover* addresses the continuing tangle of multiple conflicts in Canada over land rights, treaties, pipelines and protection of the natural environment.

When it was created in 2012, the installation *Red Rover* presented the route of the hotly contested proposed Northern Gateway Pipeline – designated here by the black line that runs across the mountains from Alberta to the Pacific. Northern Gateway was eventually abandoned, but in November 2016 Prime Minister Trudeau gave the green light to two pipelines: Kinder Morgan's Trans Mountain pipeline and Enbridge's Line 3. The Trans Mountain pipeline shares a similar delivery route and final market in Asia as Northern Gateway, while Line 3 will be routed south and east from Alberta, replacing an existing pipeline to Wisconsin. The dark line across Barkhouse's child-like play map continues to represent a threat to the lakes, forests, rivers, the Pacific Ocean and the Indigenous territories and people in its path.

Barkhouse's outdoor sculpture 99.96% can be found on the rooftop of The Lucky Penny General Store and Café on Shaw Street, across from the Koffler Gallery and Artscape Youngplace. One block west of Trinity Bellwoods Park, the Koffler Gallery is at the epicentre of hip in its proximity to the park, with its popular off-leash dog pit in the scooped out bowl of what was once part of the riverbed for Garrison Creek. Dogs of every possible breed run free there, tended by the coffee sipping, bearded inhabitants of downtown Toronto. Up on the roof, two wooden cut-out animals come face to face: a domesticated, genetically modified and well-fed Standard poodle – an escapee from the park? – and a lean and hungry coyote, perhaps one that has wandered westward from the ravine. What do they reckon as they sniff each other? The pink poodle's scent of soap and bacon snacks both repels and attracts the coyote, leaving it confused. The poodle, while sensing a threat, struggles to recognize a long lost memory buried in the coyote's muggy scent. While coyotes are not related to wolves, the contemporary dog shares 99.96% of wolf DNA. The standoff on the roof represents the need for survival and adaptability – for both humans and animals – as well as the ideological distance between belief systems of the colonial settlers governing Canada and the land's original inhabitants.

Do wolves dream, and if so, what do they dream of? Pungent animal musk in the nostrils, the heart bursting chase of the deer, the iron taste of blood, a full belly in a wild environment with room to roam? In Indigenous cultures no hierarchy exists between animals and humans. Animals possess spirits similar to people and have their own knowledge to share. The sculptures and photographs in *Le rêve aux loups* are imbued with the same values



and respect these ancestors held toward the land and each other, centred on the holistic view that everything is interconnected. The work challenges the viewer to re-imagine their surroundings and re-think how we interact and cohabit with our environment.

Let's talk about the animals in the room. In a subversion of the narrative of land theft and politics, the animals have taken over the parlour. If the human has just left the room, the furnishings imply her refined presence of moments ago. The coyote is the trickster in Indigenous culture. Contemporary equivalents could be the hustler, the punk rocker or the squatter. As we continue to bulldoze the land, the numbers of coyote multiply and strengthen, becoming an increasingly common and aggressive presence. Who owns this land? Who is the intruder?

## Jennifer Rudder

<sup>1</sup> Mary Anne Barkhouse in conversation with Michelle LaVallee. Catalogue from the exhibition *Settlement/Regency*, Rodman Hall Art Centre (St. Catharines, Ontario: Rodman Hall Art Centre, 2014), 79.

<sup>2</sup> Two works in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada are notable: *Sovereign* (2007) and *Harvest* (2009).

<sup>3</sup> "Arcadia" is a Greek notion that refers to an idyllic pastoral life, in harmony with nature and untainted by civilization.

<sup>4</sup> Barkhouse in conversation with the author, September 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Barkhouse in conversation with LaVallee. *Settlement/Regency*, 82.

<sup>6</sup> In the game, two teams of equal numbers grasp wrists tightly and face each other from no more than thirty feet apart. Swinging their arms and chanting the call – "Red Rover, Red Rover, let (player's name) come over!" – one team chooses a person from the other side who then rushes at what they guess to be the weakest link of arms, attempting to break through. If they don't succeed, that person must leave their team and join the other side. There are variations of the game around the world with different names. In China it is known as *Forcing the City Gates*.

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**Mary Anne Barkhouse** was born in Vancouver, BC and belongs to the Nimpkish band, Kwakiutl First Nation. An established artist and sculptor, she is a descendant of a long line of internationally recognized Northwest Coast artists that includes Ellen Neel, Mungo Martin and Charlie James. Galleries that have showcased her work include the Ottawa Art Gallery, the Peterborough Art Gallery, the Robert McLaughlin Gallery in Oshawa, the Art Gallery of Sudbury, Gallery Stratford, and the Wave Hill Glyndor Gallery in New York City. Barkhouse is a member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Art and her work can be found in public parks and on college and university campuses across Ontario, as well as the collections of prestigious institutions such as the National Gallery of Canada, the Canadian Museum of Civilization, the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Mendel Art Gallery, Mackenzie Art Gallery, Art Bank of the Canada Council for the Arts, UBC Museum of Anthropology, Macdonald Stewart Art Centre, Banff Centre for the Arts and the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. In addition, her public art installations are featured at the City of Markham, Carleton University, Thunder Bay Art Gallery, University of Western Ontario, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Robert McLaughlin Gallery and the Millennium Walkway, Peterborough. Mary Anne Barkhouse lives and works in Minden, Ontario.

**Jennifer Rudder** is an independent curator who has been working in the arts in Toronto and Ontario for 25 years. She graduated from the Masters of Visual Studies: Curatorial Studies program at the University of Toronto in 2010. Inherent in all her curatorial work is a critical examination of the historical misapplication of rationalism as evidenced in scientific theories and technologies that result in harmful effects on nature and groups of people. Rudder has curated numerous exhibitions including *Glam North: Doris McCarthy and her New Contemporaries*, co-curated with Alexander Irving at the Doris McCarthy Gallery at the University of Toronto, Scarborough in 2014. Her curated solo survey exhibition of the works of Mary Anne Barkhouse developed at the Koffler Gallery will travel to the Esker Foundation in Calgary, Alberta in fall 2017. Rudder is an Assistant Professor in the Criticism and Curatorial Practice Department at the Ontario College of Art and Design University in Toronto.



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All works: Mary Anne Barkhouse. | Cover: *Treats for Coyote* (installation detail), 2017. Bronze, glass, crystal and porcelain figures, velvet, found table. | Inside cover: *Dominion*, 2011. Framed photograph with text. | Page 3: *Arcadia*, 2017. Bronze branches, porcelain and Hydrocal figures, table. | Page 4 (top): *Still Life with Two Hares*, 2017. Porcelain, cast glass, table, velvet hunting sack. | Page 4 (bottom): *Treats for Coyote*, 2017. | Page 5: 99.96%, 2017. Wood and paint. | All photos: Rafael Goldchain.

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