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Julie Buffalohead, *Tea Party Day Three*, 2008, mixed media on paper, 20 x 30".

SAINT PAUL

Julie Buffalohead

MINNESOTA MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
141 E. 4th Street
December 18–February 22

Each painting or drawing by [Julie Buffalohead](#) could be an illustration from a storybook, one that might read as a wry parable about the intersection of American Indian and European cultures. Buffalohead's first major museum exhibition offers an opportunity to follow this

story as it's developed over the past twelve years of her career.

All of the work on display here depicts animals—most often coyotes, foxes, deer, rabbits, and owls, though a menagerie of other creatures, including humans, also appear. In Buffalohead's works on paper, over half of the total pieces in the show, these characters float in expanses of negative space. In contrast, her large oil paintings investigate fully realized landscapes. Buffalohead's animals often don masks of other animals, evoking the artist's recurrent theme of identity in flux.

In ways that are both playful and pointed, the characters emphasize motifs of Buffalohead's Ponca tribe, crossing lines with traditional Western tales such as *Alice in Wonderland* and "The Three Little Pigs," in which animals also play a central role. In *Standoff*, 2012, a slender woman joins a teddy bear, owl, wolf, and doe for a tea party; each wears a mask (the woman sports the face of a wolf, the owl is garbed as a rabbit, the doe dons the face of a cat). Pop culture iconography figures in works like *Mine*, 2005, in which a fierce coyote, standing on its hind legs, feeds a bottle of milk to a small toy version of Wile E. Coyote. Minnesota's state bird, the Common Loon, shows up in the unambiguously symbolic *Untitled*, 2008, bathing in a pool of tears wept by a prone coyote. With a solemnity leavened by wit and charm, Buffalohead's work conjures an unsettling vision of a world in turmoil, of icons unmoored.

—[Jay Gabler](#)

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