

opimihaw

Mary Anne Barkhouse

May 2021 - October 2021

curator, Olivia Kristoff

Kwakiutl sculptor Mary Anne Barkhouse visited Wanuskewin in the summer of 2019, and was inspired by the ecology of the Opimihaw Valley. Incorporating past works with brand new pieces, Opimihaw showcases the themes of reconciliation, restoration, healing, and the integrity and strength in the human and natural 'ecosystems'.



Mary Anne Barkhouse was born in Vancouver, British Columbia but has strong ties to both coasts as her mother is from the Nimpkish band, Kwakiutl First Nation of Alert Bay, BC and her father is of German and British descent from Nova Scotia. She is a descendant of a long line of internationally recognized Northwest Coast artists that includes Ellen Neel, Mungo Martin and Charlie James. She graduated with Honours from the Ontario College of Art in Toronto and has exhibited widely across Canada and the United States.

As a result of personal and family experience with land and water stewardship, Barkhouse's work examines ecological concerns and intersections of culture through the use of animal imagery. Inspired by issues surrounding empire and survival, Barkhouse creates installations that evoke consideration of the self as a response to history and environment.

Image: Rosalie Favell from Facing the Camera Series

Opimihaw

The tabletop is crafted from maple sourced from the Haliburton Highlands. To create the image of Opimihaw creek running down the centre of the table, Barkhouse first routed the curves into the maple and then poured hot glass into the groove, causing the wood to catch fire and produce the scorch marks. The legs of the table are designed to give the impression of several bison walking past, this is in reference to their significant role in driving the ecosystem of the Great Plains. The piece represents nature working together, and all fighting for a seat at the table. The coyote and badger sculptures were chosen because of the unique relationship. They hunt together and are not friends, but allies. Nature shows us that alliances can be built that further collective interests through cooperation.

Dominion

This work represents sovereignty and the role of nature. It is styled in a grand way to communicate the respect of a prominent member of a family or clan. The quote is from the Book of Genesis, It has been interpreted both as a call to responsible stewardship, Others have taken it as a declaration of dominance.

Alpha I

Alpha II

Omega

The titles of these works reference the hierarchies of power that exist within the wolf packs themselves. The Alpha wolves are the two breeding pack leaders, while the Omega wolves are at the bottom of the ranking. Even though the Omega wolves occupy a lower rank within their intrinsic hierarchy, as strong predators they occupy the seat of power within the totem of animals.

The placement of the wolves in the corner of the gallery space highlights their roles as careful and calculated hunters. A reminder of an ever present threat to their prey, and an integral presence in the food chain.

Transect (invitation to play)

One of the researcher's tools in the field of ecological study is the transect, such as a sample strip of land where measurements of observations are made at regular intervals to monitor plant distribution, animal populations, and so forth, within a given area.

In this installation a child's rocking-style toy, in this case fashioned in the form of a

bison instead of the usual horse, is positioned across a narrow strip of carpeting, engaged in the semblance of perpetual motion across the figure of a small coyote toy.

While the two are not in any apparent imminent conflict, the coyote has a pose of inquisitive alertness, almost as if to say "what are you doing here? well, you've been gone a long time".

Bison/ Gate

This tapestry features a panorama image of the Opimihaw Valley, The images of Bison are taken from different eras.

The Stargate represents Wanuskewins role as a 'Portal in Time', taking us back 6000 years through archeology and history.

Tapestry I (Tapestry of Voices)

The beaver chews and sculpture represent the resilience of Indigenous peoples, as beavers too are often considered a nuisance and there is an attempt to drive them out (much like at Wanuskewins creek) but they are hard to get rid of. This tapestry features the entirety of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Executive Summary (536 pages). The birds on this piece are commonly used as clan symbols

and hold meaning such as good parenting, community protection, and leadership. Barkhouse highlights the strength and resilience in our community, with this important document on the treatment of the Indigenous community and residential school, and outlines what happened, when it happened, how it happened and what needs to be done.

Bison Series

Et in Arcadia Ego means "Even in paradise, here I am..." with images of European settlers being confronted by the Bison as they arrive in Canada. Paradise as a lost world of idyllic bliss, but not without death. The borders are species that are linked to the ecosystem engineered by the presence of the Bison. The Baroque style represents the significant events that were unfolding between the Indigenous peoples of the Americas at that time. The content is through an Indigenous gaze despite the European presentation.