

# Julie Buffalohead & Nathanael Flink

Full artist statements, bios

## **Julie Buffalohead:**

My work has focused thematically upon describing a cultural experience, an Indian experience, through a personal language which is a kind of iconography. My imagery is very personal but also provocative. I use storytelling in a specific way to reference figures with traditional significance, where spirit and identity intermingle in nonlinear and interwoven narrative form. These narratives are evocative of a range of concerns I have from historical, political, cultural, as well as personal history, motherhood and childhood. Animals figure prominently in my work.

My imagery is so personal it's hard to think about the viewer, but I try to be provocative. I use stereotypes because Indians didn't have a hand in creating them. It's my way of saying 'This is not who we are. This is your invention.'

The characters occupy a fictional territory that seem both out of place and time. They are not fairy tales, nor wholly products of fantasy, in the sense that they aren't simply just invented. In many ways the characterizations are akin to staged facsimiles presenting specific archetypal or oppositional personalities, perhaps, in a way, as a dramatist would.

It is common in Native stories and imagery to find polymorphic beings. This figuration in masks, pottery, and dress, manifests as a taking of the animal spirit to protect, to defeat, or as a didactic force.

Wielding mythic power to cope with the perils of human experience is a central concept in the work. Tapping into the animal within is a way to connect to some of the mysterious, impossible questions of daily life.

While sifting through what is evocative, my process begins on a mechanical level with a series of pencil on vellum cut-ups that serve the compositional need. It is driven by autobiography, on multiple levels, including historical references.

Intuitively and emotively, things and creatures begin to coalesce together. Their world is psychically built, as one would put together (or tear apart) a set for a marionette scene or perhaps, a ship in a bottle. This is my internal world.

When taped together fragments of the montage become realized, the work begins on the paper with a painterly draft upon an earthy, transparent support called Lokta. The Lokta paper is made by hand in Nepal from shrub bark pounded into pulp - it's a really beautiful readymade.

I keep things minimal, using negative space. The spatial treatment is horizon-less and groundless, which emphasizes a precariousness in the layout that helps to shatter the familiar pictorial context of perspective and foreshortening. This realm is both extremely heavy, but weightless. Totemic figural and non-figural elements have gravity, but also ambivalence and enigma. The work is intimate and heartfelt. Does it avoid irreducibility? Sometimes just barely, while ultimately reinforcing pictorial tension, such that a kind of mythic spatial-figural relationship emerges.

The narrative that emerges in this mythic space is mostly opaque. As a parallel to traditional knowledge, the animals come out of the woods to meet with humans. The cast of characters are drawn from Native stories, the raven and the coyote. There exists a rosy nostalgia at times, in the work, but with a hard edge to it. I chose objects from childhood, furniture, kid's toys, things with polaroid-photo vivid colors. This sweet surface disguises the less pretty realities of parenting, pain and worry.

I began this autobiographical work to encapsulate my emotions about motherhood and to de-construct romanticized visions of childhood. But these characters sometimes attack stereotypes of Native people, exposing their artificiality through children's games. I use this iconography of childhood to explore the deeper and darker themes in order to exorcise them.

### **Nathanael Flink:**

Nathanael Flink (b 1972) was born and raised in St. Paul, Minnesota and earned his BFA from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design in 1994.

Throughout my career, I have worked in series' that bridge multiple themes, stylistic qualities, and media. With each successive iteration of works, there are remnants of a practice of seeing. My recent work is a continuation of an exploration of the visual language of color and form.

This work investigates an inherent materiality of the physical spaces people inhabit. There is a narrative to one's domestic surroundings – the objects, decorations that adorn the home, workplace or even the body. In a few ways, my recent pieces seek to explore the visual process of how we create the mental construct of the interior space we inhabit. The boundary and temporality of the interior space shifts to a perspective of the exterior. When something is not really a piece of furniture but also not really a landscape, but a little of both. There is a fragility to objects in the world that we create.

In this modern world, we insulate ourselves, literally, from aesthetic experiences with clothes to keep us warm and sofa cushions to make us comfortable. We send items we value around the world and ship the most mundane items to destinations carefully protected. This detritus is interesting as an anthropology. Our protectionism of banalities can interfere with perception. While I am intrigued by narrative and metaphor, it is often semaphore that is emergent.

I consider the canon of painting, but I sort of don't like the idea of just pure formalism. It can be decedent and unapproachable. Yet color and form is a fundamental of aesthetics. I like to build up layers within a field until a personality emerges. Each successive wave of changes shapes a vibe, until nothing can be added or removed without a collapse. I often follow pathways without a terminus. What finally emerges is a synergy of previously failed conditions.



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