

COYOTE CONNECTIONS

University of New England • Portland, ME • une.edu/artgallery • Through January 11, 2015

The coyote tends to get a bad rap. Google the carnivore and you'll find news stories about its "incursions" into neighborhoods where it snatches cats and small dogs. The curator of this exhibition, Geri Vistein, a conservation biologist, has made it her mission to counter this negative press. In addition to hosting the website "Coyote Lives in Maine," she turns to artists to highlight the ecological significance—and handsome features—of this much-maligned species (including the exhibition *I Am Coyote* at the Belfast Free Library in 2012).

This time out, working with UNE Art Gallery director Anne Zill, Vistein has recruited



Janice Kasper, *When Animals Dream*, 2005, oil on canvas, 44 x 36". Courtesy of the artist.

32 Maine artists to offer their takes on the animal. Some of them, like Janice Kasper, are well known for their animal activist-inflected vision. Kasper offers a painting from her remarkable 2005–2006 "What Animals Dream" series showing a sleeping coyote surrounded by images that might haunt its slumber: a leaping deer, a fleeing rabbit and the angry teeth of a metal trap.

In her painting *Open Season*, Sandra Crowell depicts a coyote standing in front of rows of small pelts that resemble patterned wallpaper. She might be referencing "An Act to Reduce Deer Predation," signed into

law in 2012 by Governor Paul LePage, which included \$100,000 to support a bounty on coyotes.

There is an engaging mix of styles here, from Richard Brown Lethem's loosely rendered *Leaping Coyote*, which appears to be coming out of the canvas, to Gwen Sylvester's playful *Skyote*, which might be an illustration in a children's book. A number of Maine's most notable animaliers are represented, including printmaker Susan Amons, sculptor Forest Hart and award-winning illustrator Rebekah Raye.

Mark McCullough's *The Ghosts of Evergreen Cemetery* has a Dr. Zhivago feel to it: coyotes roam among the snow-topped Victorian headstones of this expansive graveyard near the UNE Art Gallery. In a statement to accompany his painting, McCullough, a wildlife biologist for the US Fish and Wildlife Service in Orono, avers that the coyote will be here "long after we are gone," a prediction to which the many portraits in this exhibition bear witness.

—Carl Little