

Brenda Draney: Out of the Woods September 10 – November 1, 2025

Ortuzar is pleased to present *Brenda Draney: Out of the Woods*, a solo exhibition of new paintings by Brenda Draney and her first in New York. Draney's work is rooted in her upbringing in Slave Lake, Alberta, and often wrestles with the complexities of memory, intimacy and survival through fragments of everyday life. Intentionally leaving expanses of canvas bare, she sets selectively rendered figures and objects within these stretches, creating compositions that leave space for what cannot be spoken, remembered or fully pictured.

For this new body of work, Draney invokes the Witiko, a cannibalistic monster from Cree folklore that represents the loss of humanity. To Draney, the Witiko is not an external enemy, but something that can inhabit those closest to us and grow stronger over time, like a parasite—an image for the slow erosion of empathy, connection or care. In the paintings on view, motifs such as a blanket, a mattress or a capsized ferry become sites where traces of trauma and transformation linger, rendered with a haunting spareness that is at once intimate and unsettling. In *Breach* (2025), the depicted ferry might first appear calm and steady on the water, but upon closer inspection, it is sinking. What unsettles Draney is not just the threat of collapse but the dissonance between appearance and reality: like a loved one who has become unrecognizable, the vessel seems familiar and safe until the moment you suddenly realize it's not.

Draney's practice has long been rooted in storytelling and personal narrative, yet it resists straightforward autobiography. Instead, she distills individual experiences into images that open onto collective memory and shared histories. In this exhibition, the dissolution of a long-term relationship becomes a point of departure for Draney, generating a recurring sense of estrangement: people and places once familiar now appear altered. Works such as *Teeth* (2025) capture this disquieting shift: a young girl smiles widely, yet the image recalls the artist viewing a child's dental x-ray, where adult teeth wait just above the baby teeth. What is usually seen as innocent and comforting—a smile—is revealed to harbor something unsettling just beneath the surface. In another work, *Watcher* (2025), Draney draws on a story she heard about a server at the Banff Centre, an artist residency program, who would deliver food to guests in secluded cottages. One evening, after delivering steaks through the woods, a guest pointed out a coyote lurking nearby, a moment that prompted Draney to imagine the scene from the animal's perspective. Painted with a muted palette and loose gestural brushwork, *Watcher* captures the sensation of looking from the outside in, embodying both vigilance and estrangement.

Brenda Draney (b. 1976, Edmonton, Canada) is a Cree artist from Sawridge First Nation, Treaty 8. She lives and works in Edmonton, Canada. Her survey exhibition, *Drink from the river*, began at The Power Plant, Toronto (2023), and traveled to The Arts Club of Chicago (2023) and The Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton (2024). Other recent solo exhibitions include *Brenda Draney*, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Canada (2020); Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff, Canada (2019); *Smelling Salts*, Fogo Island Arts (2019); and *Tell me about yesterday tomorrow*, NS Dokumentationszentrum, München (2019). Draney has been included in group exhibitions at institutions such as the Albuquerque Museum; Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, Virginia; Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Quebec City; Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Canada; Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada, among others. She won both the 2009 RBC Painting Competition and 2014's Eldon and Anne Foote Visual Arts Prize in Edmonton and was short-listed for the 2016 Sobey Art Award at the National Gallery of Canada. In 2016, she created *Trapline*, a public art project that traces a family friend's animal trapping route in bronze, commissioned by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts and on view at MacEwan University.