



***Souvenir*** Brett Littman

When walking the grounds that host The Olnick Spanu Art Program in Garrison, New York, after passing the bird sanctuaries, which house the couples rare breeds of chickens, ducks, Guinea hens, pheasants and peacocks, one turns a corner on the path and is confronted by the silhouettes of three larger than life she-wolves on a raised rocky, tree lined area. The sculptures are so well suited to their environs that at first they are almost invisible to the naked eye. But once you notice them — you feel immediately that this pack of she-wolves are standing watch over their surroundings in a protective and vaguely menacing way.

The three sculptures are by Paolo Canevari, an internationally recognized Roman artist. The artwork is entitled *Souvenir* (2015). It is the current sculpture commission by Nancy Olnick and Giorgio Spanu and represents the 10th year that they have commissioned an Italian artist to develop a unique site-specific work for their property. Last year Canevari presented Nancy and Giorgio with a three-dimensional scale maquette of the commission. The maquette is a work of art in and of itself. Canevari collected indigenous branches and rocks during his many site visits and included them in the model, giving the whole tableau a sense of natural authenticity. According to Nancy and Giorgio, they were so moved by the presentation that they were rendered speechless, which in turn made Canevari nervous that they didn't like the proposal.

The three distinct sculptural she-wolves were developed from scans of Canevari's hand drawings of the wolves in different poses from the model. These drawings were then vectorized in Illustrator and AutoCAD so they could be proportionally enlarged for metal fabrication. The files were sent to the metal shop and the forms were then cut out from single large metal sheets using CNC guided oxy-acetylene torches. The resulting positive forms were then sanded and fabricated with

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The final color chosen for the outer  
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(ESD), was raven black, which in the sunlight turns an almost reflective silver color. Then under the watch of the artist himself, they were placed into the landscape in their specific locations by long reach cranes. One interesting aspect about the sculptures is that Canevari didn't want to have any kind of man-made pedestal or foundation at their base, so the she-wolves simply rest on the terrain where they were placed. They are braced by the tree trunks they stand in front of and the only point of structure is a high-tension wire that affixes to two points on the back of the sculpture and ties around the tree.

Canevari's *Souvenir* clearly reference the *Capitoline She-Wolf* (5th–4th century BCE), the ancient bronze sculpture which depicts the she-wolf nursing Romulus and Remus now housed in *Palazzo dei Conservatori* in the Capitoline Museum in Rome. Today, this image is the most ubiquitous animal icon in all Rome, which is a city filled with zoological icons. The fantastic legend of the twins Romulus and Remus, left to die by the swelling banks of the Tiber by their great-uncle Amulius' servants, getting washed up on the shores of the Palatine Hill, being saved by a feral she-wolf with engorged teats filled with milk, and being nursed and cared for by the she-wolf and her companion, a woodpecker, in Lupercal, a cave located in the southwest corner of the Palatine Hill, has become de facto the origin story of the Roman capital and defines the conflicted essence of the eternal city.

As the art historian Bernard Andrea writes, "*The Capitoline She-Wolf as emblem of Rome is charged with an intensity of significance such as is associated with no other emblem, sign or symbol of any other city, ancient or modern. Neither the owl of Athens nor the bear of Berlin is immediately and forcefully and unmistakably identified with the city for the which it acts as a kind of totem.*"<sup>1</sup> The she-wolf represents the nexus of the past and the future of Rome, a maternal savior and protector of fugitives and outcasts, a wild man-eating predator, and a prostitute or whore (*Lupa*, the Latin word for wolf is the same as the word for prostitute). It is a highly controversial and complex image—one made even more uncertain because the original sculpture leaves ambiguous the intentions of the she-wolf and what she plans to do with the twins when she is finished feeding them.

However, somehow, over the centuries this multifaceted image of the she-wolf has become one of the most reproduced touristic souvenirs in Rome. What defines a souvenir? A souvenir often is something kitschy like a keychain of the Eiffel Tower, a dishtowel with the image of the Royal Family or a skyscraper snow globe with the visage of New York inside of it. Its meaning for us, of course, transcends the objects physical presence or inherent authenticity. It is a personal talisman that triggers the memory of a specific place and time and a desire to travel and explore. A souvenir performs the psychological function for the owner of activating memory and making the past present.

Canevari's understanding of the inherent nostalgia for the personally significant associated with the souvenir itself, in a way, acts as an interesting metaphor for all of the couple's commissions. Each of their projects have been based on very specific determinants like general Italian art historical references or more specific

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with artists and art.



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1. Bernard Andreae, *The Art of Rome*, trans. Robert Erich Wolf, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1977, p36.

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