

## STEPHANIE HEIT

*Continuum*, 2017  
Oil on canvas, 48 x48 in.



COURTESY THE ARTIST

## PAM HOUSTON

# Ranch Almanac: Donkey Chasing

The mini-donkeys vs.  
the dogs in competition  
for pack leader

**W**hen the mini-donkeys first arrived at that ranch, there was some—I would have to call it good-natured—chasing. And to be fair, the wolfhounds were used to my returning from work trips with a squeaky toy for each of them. When I brought home the mini-donks, they probably just thought I'd out-done myself.

One thing I had not considered when I agreed to rescue the bonded pair was that my pasture was fenced to keep horses and cattle, but nothing much shorter or skinnier than that. My corral, especially, was not mini-donkey-proof, and neither were a few of the pasture corners that had been left with a small space open so people could slip through. Also, the donkeys really liked people. They would follow me around the yard while I did my chores. They'd pick things up in their mouths—a hose, a rope, a stuffed lobster dog toy—and play tug-of-war with it, mostly, it seemed, for my amusement. They had no problem negotiating with their little high-heeled hooves the three steps that led up to the dog porch where they would spend several minutes sniffing the bowls and beds as if solving a great mystery. If I had let them, I believe they would have followed me right through the front door into the living room and curled up with me on the couch.

The wolfhounds at first were curious about the donkeys and then affronted at their hubris. Fenton, especially, had a strong belief system around animals staying in their place. He felt Mr. Kitty belonged outside, in the mudroom, or in the basement. The sheep and the chickens belonged in their enclosure. Horses belonged in the corral, the barn, and the pasture. Who were these newcomers who'd been given the run of the place?

Fenton would watch them nervously for hours until his outrage got the better of him and then with no particular provocation, he would leap up and chase the donkeys around the yard. And because William did everything Fenton did exactly one half second later, the donkeys found themselves on the run a couple of times each day.

The wolfhounds are just about a head taller than the donkeys, and the donkeys were younger and maybe even a little smaller back then. I don't believe the dogs had any intention of hurting the donkeys, but wolfhounds are bred to chase fast-moving objects, and those little donkeys can turn it on, in spite of their super short legs.