LET’S LOOK
What do you think is happening in this artwork?

Does this artwork remind you of anything?

In what ways does the artist use symbolism in this piece?

Describe at least five different kinds of lines in this artwork. Why might the artist have chosen to use each type?

The women are running through a challenging situation. What is something that helps you to persevere during difficult circumstances?

ABOUT THE ARTWORK

Three female figures run barefoot through the center of the image. Each woman wears a similar dress of simple design - one green, one gold and one red. Four wolves with sharp teeth bared and white glowing eyes are gathering around the women’s legs and threatening to block their path. A swirl of lines surrounds the figures, creating a feeling of movement and urgency. An inky black border frames the scene, giving a sense of encroaching darkness. Perhaps the women are running through a tunnel or a cave, or moving under the shadowy cover of night. Their faces look fearful, yet they continue to move forward together. Their arms reach out, connecting them in their shared journey.

*Women Who Run With Wolves* is a linoleum print, made by carving the surface of a linoleum sheet. The resulting raised areas are covered with ink using a brayer, a tool that resembles a small paint roller. Paper is then placed on top of the plate, and both are carefully passed through a printing press. In this case, Bortner hand-painted the image with watercolors after the black printing ink had dried.

Bortner’s prints often confront challenging social issues like domestic abuse, immigration, and international conflict. *Women Who Run With Wolves* is one of several images she created in honor of the 25th anniversary of A Woman’s Place, a local shelter for women experiencing unsafe home environments. She viewed these women as heroes that overcame terrible circumstances, and figured out how to survive. Bortner remarked, “Women seem to be able to sustain and endure...That’s what women do.”
ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in Cleveland, Ohio, Selma Bortner was the child of Ukrainian immigrants. She knew early on that she loved making art. “For me, being an artist was always a question of survival. I could not survive in this world if I could not do something creative. It’s a commitment that I made when I was a child.” Bortner eventually moved to Philadelphia to study at Temple University’s Tyler School of Art, and continued her advanced studies at what is now the University of the Arts, the Graphic Sketch Club, the Print Club, and the Cheltenham Center for the Arts. As a lifelong educator, she taught art and printmaking to many students, including children in the Pennsbury, Bristol, and Neshaminy school districts for many years.

Eventually, Bortner became a professor of printmaking and design at Bucks County Community College, and also supervised art classes for Bucks County’s Project Head Start program. She was an experimental and inventive printmaker, often combining different techniques and creating many of her own art materials, including paper, from scratch. Bortner frequently used cut linoleum or fabric glued to a cardboard support, known as a collograph, as her printing plates. When she lacked access to a press early on in her career, Bortner even ran over prints with her car, although this approach proved unsuccessful. Above all, Bortner was an independent thinker and feminist concerned for the plight of poor, displaced and marginalized people. In particular, she insisted that women artists be allowed the time and space to express their creativity, and that proper recognition be given to their finished works.

In Quotes
In Robert Frost’s poem, Servant to Servants, he writes, “the best way out is always through.” Reflect on this quote and what you think it means. How does it connect to the imagery and story in Women Who Run With Wolves? Write down your ideas and share them with a partner. Together, find or create an alternative quote that would also pair well with this artwork.

Survival Mechanisms
Both animals and humans react to threatening things or situations with physical responses. These are sometimes called survival mechanisms. Research each of the following survival mechanisms and find an example of an animal that regularly uses it: fight, flight, freeze. Have you ever seen an animal utilize one of these? Consider how these same responses show up in the human world. In what ways are they helpful and in what ways are they problematic? Which survival mechanism(s) do you find yourself reaching for most often?

Helping Hands
This image would feel very different if only one woman was pictured, facing a scary situation all alone. Human connection helps lower our stress levels and feel stronger. We give and receive powerful support from each other in many ways – offering words of encouragement, taking time to listen, showing up for an important performance, or being a comforting presence during a tough time. Think of a time when having someone else’s “hand on your back” made a big difference to you. Write a paragraph about this memory. You can take it one step further by sharing this memory with the person who helped you through it, and thanking them for their support.