

Gardiner Museum to celebrate National Indigenous Peoples Day with free public performances by Kaha:wi Dance Theatre

Talking Earth will be performed in front of the Museum on June 20 and 21



Talking Earth by Kaha:wi Dance Theatre / Santee Smith. Photo: Vladimir Kanic

Toronto—On June 20 and 21, in honour of National Indigenous Peoples Day, the Gardiner Museum will co-present two free public performances of *Talking Earth* with Kaha:wi Dance Theatre, featuring multidisciplinary artist and Director of Kaha:wi Dance Theatre, Tekaronhiáhkwa / Santee Smith.

Talking Earth, which debuted at the Gardiner in June 2022, activates Smith's permanent public artwork commission of the same name through embodied storytelling, vocalizations, and projection mapping by AVA Animation & Visual Arts that illuminate the Museum's façade on Queen's Park. The projections include photos of Smith's family, namely her grandmother, Elda "Bun" Smith, who is credited with reviving the tradition of pottery making on Ohswé:ken, Six Nations of the Grand River.

Santee Smith is joined by her daughter, Semiah Smith, who activates the performance through vocal sounding and durational hand-built pottery making.



Talking Earth by Kaha:wi Dance Theatre / Santee Smith. Photo: Vladimir Kanic

Part of ArtworxTO: Toronto's Year of Public Art 2021–2022, the public sculpture, installed at the entrance to the Gardiner Museum, honours the ongoing Indigenous presence on Turtle Island. It takes the form of a Rotinohnsyonni four-cornered earthen pottery vessel, fractured and partially reconstructed, with light shining through the cracks between the broken shards.

The vessel symbolizes the disruption and trauma caused by colonization, including the legacy of the residential school system, assimilative policies imposed on womxn, and the crisis of Missing & Murdered Indigenous Womxn and Girls. Moving toward intactness, it evokes the process of re-assembling culture, memory, and ancestral knowledge.

“My family lineage is grounded in the reclamation of Kahnyen’kehàka pottery, initiated by my grandmother Elda “Bun” Smith. I am inspired by my grandmother’s drive to rediscover and connect to our ancient practices. I’m a third generation potter, following in the footsteps of my parents Steve and Leigh Smith,” said Santee Smith.

Guided by the concept “We are made of clay,” the permanent artwork and performance channel the earth’s voice and story.

“Now is a time for listening. Listening to the story of the land and what is cradled and buried within Yethi’nihsténha tsyonhwentsyà:te / Mother Earth,” said Smith. “The performance is a call and response to and with natural forces of creation. It’s a resonant invocation, a spiritual unfolding that reaches to the ancestral to the present moment over the concrete of the city.”

The performances are generously supported by The Barry and Laurie Green Charitable Trust and Lindy Green Family Foundation. They are co-produced by Kaha:wi Dance Theatre, with support from the Canada Council for the Arts, Ontario Arts Council, and Toronto Arts Council.

Visit gardinermuseum.com for more information.

ABOUT SANTEE SMITH / TEKARONHIÁHKWA

Santee is a multidisciplinary artist from the Kahnnyen’kehàka Nation, Turtle Clan, Ohswé:ken/Six Nations of the Grand River. She trained at Canada’s National Ballet School and completed Physical Education and Psychology degrees from McMaster University and a M.A. in Dance from York University. Her debut work Kaha:wi – a family creation story premiered in 2004 and one year later she founded Kaha:wi Dance Theatre which has grown into an internationally renowned company based in Six Nations and Tkarón:to’/Toronto. Santee’s artistic work speaks about identity, Indigenous narratives, creative process, and representation. Her body of work includes numerous productions, and she leads international Indigenous collaborative projects. She is the recipient of numerous awards, commissions and is often called upon as guest curator/director. Santee recently premiered multimedia performance Homelands presented by Harbourfront Centre to rave reviews. Santee is a sought-after teacher and speaker on the performing arts, Indigenous performance, and culture. She spearheads “Inviting the Land to Shape Us” embodiment with land series at the Talking Earth Studio & Gardens. Smith is the 19th Chancellor of McMaster University.

ABOUT THE GARDINER MUSEUM

The Gardiner Museum brings together people of all ages and communities through the shared values of creativity, wonder, and community that clay and ceramic traditions inspire.

We engage audiences with exhibitions, programs, and hands-on classes, while stewarding a significant permanent collection. We interpret historical ceramics to emphasize their relevance today, and champion

emerging and established Canadian artists and their role in the broader world. The Gardiner Museum innovates through clay education, as we bring together the experience of making with a deeper understanding of the art of ceramics.

We believe in making, looking, and thinking through clay.

The Gardiner Museum has a collection of over 4,000 objects from the Ancient Americas, Europe, Japan and China, as well as contemporary works with an emphasis on leading Canadian artists. It is among the few museums in the world focused on ceramics and is one of the world's most notable specialty museums.

For more information, please visit: gardinermuseum.com.

Media Contact:

Rachel Weiner
Senior Manager, Marketing, Gardiner Museum
416.408.5062
rachelw@gardinermuseum.com

Acknowledgements:

Talking Earth: Ceramic Commission

Public Art Commission: Gardiner Museum; Inspiration: Elda “Bun” Smith, Steven T. Smith, Leigh Smith; Concept/Design/Ceramic Sculptural: Santee Smith; Ceramic Sculptural Builder: Jordi Alfaro; Ceramic Technical: Carmela Laganse; Clay Slip: Steven T. Smith; Consultants: Leigh Smith and Steven T. Smith; Technical Build/Framing: Mike Kukucska at Hamilton Scenic Specialty Inc.; Engineer: Azra Ross at Epiphany Engineering; Digital Media/3D Animation: Emma Lopez, Pedro Narvaez at AVA Animation & Visual Arts Inc.; A/V studio: Thru The Red Door; Creation/Production Partner: McMaster Studio Arts, Operations and Productions, Faculty of Humanities – McMaster University; Operations and Production Manager: Patrick Brennan; Technical support/Documentation: James Kendal; Studio support: Troy Coulterman, Briana Palmer, Ana Maria Skrtic, Judy Major-Girardin, Eric Euler, Alex Roberts, Benjamin Cummings; Additional facility and studio support/firing: Sumanth Shankar; Documentary Footage of Steven T. Smith: Ralph Brown at Waterfront Productions

Performance

Producer: Kaha:wi Dance Theatre; Creator/Design/Performer: Santee Smith; Live Vocalist/Durational Potter: Semiah Smith; Dramaturgy: Monique Mojica; Animation Projection: AVA Animation & Visual Arts, co-directors Emma Lopez and Pedro Narvaez; Musical Score: Energies featuring the vocals by Jennifer

Kreisberg, Impending Doom by Adrian Dion Harjo; Ohnekanos the Waters by David R. Maracle with additional mixing by Donald Quan; Here On Earth – Opening and Duet songs composed and performed by Donald Quan; Kaha:wi Soundtrack – Death produced by Santee Smith with Dan Hill (flute) and Bob Doidge; Clay composed and performed by Jennifer Kreisberg; Music Recording and Mixing: Brody Joseph, Thru The Red Door; Pottery: Steve T. Smith; Costume Designer: Elaine Redding; Production Manager: James Kendal; Production Stage Manager: Senjuti Sarker; Event Technical Production: Solotech Inc.; Video of Steve Smith courtesy of Ralph Brown, Waterfront Productions; Archival Photography courtesy of the Smith Family; Funding support: Canada Council for the Arts, Ontario Arts Council, Toronto Arts Council



We acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts.

