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**SEPT 02
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2026-27**

CURATED BY

**Lisa
Deanne
Smith**

Returning to Ourselves: Rebecca Baird and Kenny Alvin Baird

**A Retrospective of
Art and Design by
Cree Métis Siblings**



Returning to Ourselves: Rebecca Baird and Kenny Alvin Baird

A Retrospective of Art and Design
by Cree Métis Siblings

BY **Lisa
Deanne
Smith**

Onsite Gallery is pleased to present *Returning to Ourselves*, the first retrospective exhibition by Cree Métis siblings Rebecca Baird and Kenny Alvin Baird. Both are influential figures in Canadian contemporary art and design whose intertwined careers span more than four decades. Their practices weave together Indigenous heritage, countercultural experimentation, and community-centred approaches, demonstrating an unrelenting commitment to creativity, craft, and critical inquiry. The exhibition brings together their individual and collaborative works in sculpture, painting, public art, and traditional material practices alongside interior design, art direction for music videos and TV, and graphic design.

Rebecca Baird and
Kenny Alvin Baird, *All
Magic is in the Will*,
1990, glass, deer hide,
31 x 45 x 1.4 inches.
Image courtesy of
the artists.



Born in the mid-fifties to a Cree Métis father and a mother of Scottish and German descent, the Baird siblings experienced a transient early life, moving between Edmonton, Kirkland Lake, and the James Bay area (Chapais/Chibougamau) before settling north of Cornwall in 1962 (where their mother remarried and their sister, Kris, was born). Coming of age during a period marked by distrust in institutions and the fading optimism of the 1960s, they were drawn to grassroots identity politics. By the late 1970s, both had arrived in Toronto, where they became active participants in the “wonderful chaos”¹ of the Queen Street West scene, contributing to a dynamic cultural milieu fuelled by glam rock’s “anything goes if you look fabulous” attitude and punk’s angry DIY ethos. For a few magic years, before the silos formed, the Queen Street West scene fostered all types of experimental expression.

Like the two crows depicted in their new mural for this exhibition, the siblings are intelligent, resilient, and deeply relational. Their distinct practices often operate in generative tension with one another. Rebecca Baird’s research-based work is characterized by radiant, accessible abstractions, influenced



Rebecca Baird, *Stand By Your Plant*, still, 1981, Super 8, sound, 7 minutes. Image courtesy of the artist.



Rebecca Baird, *Yea Yea*, still, 1981, Super 8, sound, 7 minutes. Image courtesy of the artist.

Rebecca Baird and Kenny
Alvin Baird, *Nest*, 1989,
assemblage painting, acrylic
on canvas, 72 x 60 inches.
Image courtesy of the artists.
From the Collection of Karen
Hughes and Eddie Smith.

by Cree Métis material culture, incorporating celebratory motifs reflective of the earth and the beings within it. Her multimedia practice includes painting, sculpture, Super 8 film, site-specific installation, traditional Indigenous materials, and large-scale architectural commissions. Known for bridging Indigenous knowledge systems with contemporary public space, her public works can be viewed at Queen West Community Health Centre, Lester B. Pearson Airport, CAMH, Woodbine Casino, and other sites in Toronto and beyond. An important aspect to her practice is working with traditional Cree Métis materials to connect with her histories, stories, and ancestors, and to continue these traditions through leading community workshops in beading and quillwork.

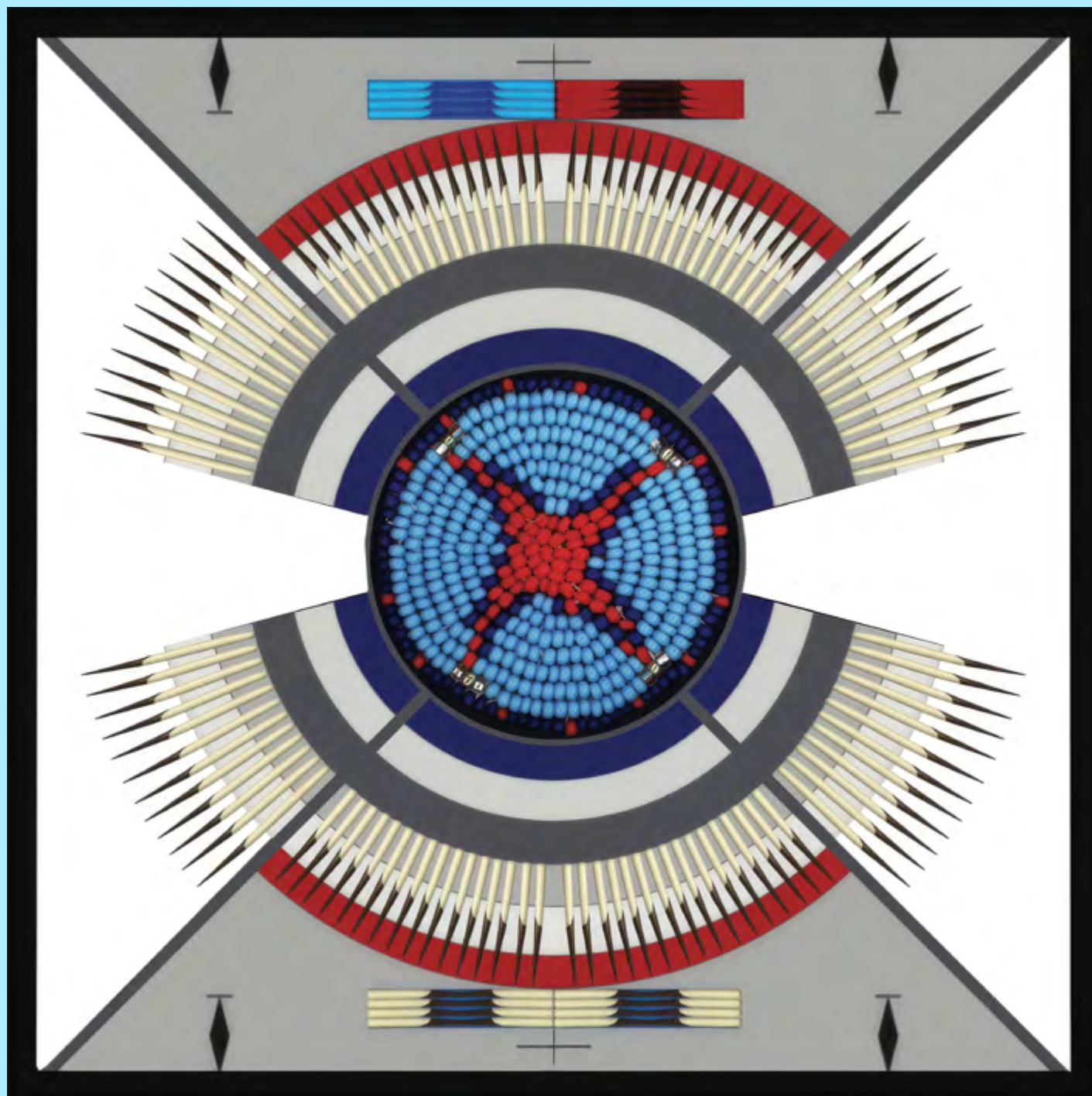


Designer: Kenny Alvin Baird,
Little Wonder, set for David
Bowie music video, 1997.
Photo by Floria Sigismondi.

Creatively, Kenny embraces the dark. His projects conjure a haunting beauty found within the unconscious parts of the human psyche. His creations often challenge what is acceptable to present in public. He forms imaginary and real spaces in which people can play with who they are and what they desire. Through sensitivity to materials and astounding craftsmanship, he evokes environments that blur the line between the conscious world and imagination. His work has been realized in many forms including graphic design, fashion, interior design, film, illustration, and visual art. He has contributed to projects ranging from *FILE* and *Impulse* magazines and iconic nightclubs such as AREA (New York City) and CiRCA (Toronto), to design roles for artists including David Bowie, Leonard Cohen, and Nine Inch Nails, as well as work in film and television.

When challenged personally and/or technically, collaboration is a key component to how the Baird siblings have thrived as





Rebecca Baird, *Test Pattern #2*, 2014, airbrush on board, 24 x 24 x 2 inches. Image courtesy of the artist.

creative people. Their relationship with each other and their varied Indigenous, punk, artist, and design communities is integral to their practices. Their careers inherently challenge the outdated Romantic-era myth of the “lone artist genius” and acknowledge a lineage of historical and contemporary peers, and cultural conversations, that their art and design works sit within and continue to shape.

Returning to Ourselves provides a vital overview of their lengthy careers, highlighting two intertwined journeys that through art and design practices refuse the prescribed “imaginary Indian”² and extractive settler roles. Instead they have built lives and creative practices in which they flourish as full, complicated, artistic people in relation with their family and communities. ■

— LISA DEANNE SMITH, 2026

Lisa Deanne Smith is Senior Curator of Onsite Gallery at OCAD University. Her curatorial practice examines voice, embodied knowledge, non-human-centred worldviews, and the processes through which knowledge is created and shared. As part of this inquiry, Smith became a certified Forest Therapy guide, deepening her engagement with land-based learning.

Recent curatorial projects include *The Sunshine Eaters*, *How to Breathe Forever*, *power*, and *How will we be with you?*. These multidisciplinary exhibitions included works by Mary Anne Barkhouse, Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, Shary Boyle, Nick Cave, Rocky Dobey, John Greyson, Brian Jungen, Jessica Karuhanga, Natalie King, Qavavau Manumie, Ekow Nimako, Alanis Obomsawin, Ebony G. Patterson, Rajni Perera, Pejvak, and Winnie Truong, among others.

NOTES

¹Kenny Baird, “Punk, Creed and Cree Métis on Queen West,” *Museum of Toronto*, accessed June 19, 2026, <https://soundcloud.com/museumoftoronto>.

²Marcia Crosby, “Construction of the Imaginary Indian,” in *Vancouver Anthology: The Institutional Politics of Art*, ed. Stan Douglas (Talonbooks, 1991), 267–291.

Rebecca Baid, *returning to ourselves*, 2018, orange glass seed beads on blue cotton fabric, 24 x 5.5 inches. Image courtesy of the artist.



‘returning to ourselves’



BY
Tanya
Senk

Returning to Ourselves: The Cree Métis Kinship Collaborations of Siblings Rebecca and Kenny Alvin Baird

Rebecca Baird,
*Rebecca Baird and
Kenny Alvin Baird*,
1991. Image courtesy
of the artists.

The Canadian contemporary art landscape has been permanently altered by the collaborative brilliance of Cree Métis siblings Rebecca and Kenny Baird.

Spanning over four decades, their joint practice serves as a vital map for contemporary Indigenous artistic practice. *Returning to Ourselves*, is a retrospective celebrating a lifelong creative partnership that has nurtured a multidisciplinary/interdisciplinary dialogue across installations, murals, paintings, film, and fashion. Just to name a few. Together, they have carved out an autonomous, uncompromised space for Indigenous representation, guided by Indigenous knowledge systems, and by the timeless, disruptive presence of the trickster.

Rooted in Toronto's vibrant Queen Street West art and punk scene of the late 1970s and 1980s, the Baird's intersected counterculture and Indigeneity. They were foundational in crucial art hubs like Art Metropole and The Cameron House. In spaces like the Rivoli, The Parrot, and the Queen Mother Café, where their conversations set vital pathways within this burgeoning subculture. Alongside other activists and creatives at the legendary Embassy Cultural House (ECH) in London, Ontario, they fiercely stitched ancestral reclamation into spaces that historically attempted to overlook them. Today, the ECH has shifted cultural tides from physical venues to contemporary, collaborative, virtual ecosystems of experimentation.

The Baird's creations are kinship offerings centering the sacred *Nēhiyaw* (Cree) worldview of *wâhkôhtowin*, the foundational concept of relationality and cosmic interconnectedness where everything is alive, sacred, and interrelated. Operating within the rhythm of Cree Métis cosmology, they understand that materials are never passive, they are alive and sacred. In this, their practices are deeply interwoven.

Through their continued complimentary practice they activate the Cree concept of *Mamatowisiwin*, a concept articulated by Cree Scholar Wille Ermine, as the capacity to connect to the creative life force that makes anything and everything possible. This concept represents an internal, spiritual attunement where the artist enters a subjective space to retrieve ancestral knowledge and truths.

Rebecca practices *Mamatowisiwin*, the capacity to connect to the creative life force by meticulously stringing glass beads to transform colonial histories into brilliant celestial star maps, acting as transmitters of ancestral light like the Going Home Star (*Kīwētin*). Kenny grounds these sky-world concepts into structural spatial installations, connecting his avant-garde artistic practice to the visceral power of the tornado and the crow. The crow flies directly into the eye of the storm and navigates the atmospheric whirlwinds of chaos and change with razor-sharp instinct. Sky and earth meet harmoniously in collaborative works, *Heartland* and *All My Relations*.

Through Cree Métis ways of knowing, being, doing, and seeing creation is an act of visiting and re/visiting, (*Kīwēwin*), memory, and remembering. The Baird's distinct geopolitical and spiritual reality manifests a living application

of Indigenous epistemologies. They have never operated in silos, as they are connected by umbilical cords to their kinship throughout time and space that connects the past, present, and future.

By blending *Mamatowisiwin* (the internal spiritual world) with *Wâhkôhtowin* (the external world of relations), the Baird siblings reveal that creation is a spiritual responsibility. *Returning to Ourselves* documents a forty-year journey, reminding us that when we delve into the inner life force, creation is always a journey of returning home and to kin. ■

— TANYA SENK, 2026



Portrait of
Tanya Senk

Tanya Senk is a Cree-Métis/Saulteaux educator, writer, scholar, speaker, and a member of Cowessess First Nation (Treaty 4). She has spent more than 25 years leading systemic change and centering Indigenous perspectives in education and the arts. Tanya is honoured to contribute to OCAD University's Onsite Gallery celebration of *Returning to Ourselves: Rebecca Baird and Kenny Alvin Baird—A Retrospective of Art and Design by Cree Métis Siblings*.

Currently, Tanya serves as the Director of Indigenous Initiatives and Indigenous House at the University of Toronto Scarborough Campus (UTSC), and is a member of the Executive Team. Prior to this role, she made profound systemic impacts within the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), Canada's largest school board, as the first Indigenous System Superintendent of Indigenous Education, the Centrally Assigned Principal of

the Urban Indigenous Education Centre, and the Principal of Kapapamahchakwew – Wandering Spirit School, K-12. Throughout her multi-faceted career, Tanya has viewed the arts as vital conduits in education. Her work focuses on transformative practices in advancing Indigenous perspectives in education and building community relationships.

Tanya holds a BFA, Visual Arts Honours Specialist (York University), a BEd (OISE/UT), and a MEd (York University), Indigenous Education. As a PhD candidate, Tanya's research mobilizes wahkotowin, the Cree perspective of interconnectedness, relationality, and kinship with all of creation, and centres *mamatowisiwin*, the Cree concept of reflecting "the wonder we are born with" in creative practice to decolonize educational spaces. She uses creative storytelling and visual dialogue to amplify sovereign Indigenous narratives.

Tanya's deep connection to the Baird siblings stretches back to the 1980s Queen Street West counterculture scene in Toronto. As peers navigating that vibrant era of creative explosion, they shared a commitment to pushing artistic boundaries and challenging mainstream narratives. Her entire career reflects transformational work that bridges contemporary scholarship with Indigenous practices.



Photo by Larry Miller.



Photo by Mike Mansor.

Rebecca Baird: Born 1954, Edmonton, Alberta. First Nations Affiliation: Status Cree Métis, Michel Callihoo Nation Society.

As a Cree Métis (Scot/German) artist, my practice engages Indigenous histories, identity, and cultural memory through installation, sculpture, Super 8 film, painting, printmaking, and animation.

Working with materials such as sweetgrass, porcupine quills, and glass seed beads, I draw upon Indigenous knowledge systems and material traditions while engaging contemporary visual language. Through these layered processes, inherited forms become expressions of cultural continuity, relational knowledge, and self-determination.

Over several decades my work has been exhibited widely across Canada and internationally, with pieces held in significant public and private collections. Early landmark exhibitions include *From Sea to Shining Sea* at The Power Plant (1987) and the groundbreaking exhibition *INDIGENA: Perspectives of Indigenous Peoples of 500 Years* (1992-1995) at the former Museum of Civilization, developed in collaboration with my sibling, artist Kenny Baird. Projects such as *Cree Star Blanket* (2014) and *Looking Hawk and the Buffalo Nation* (2016) continue this work across moving images. In 2022, the Museum of Toronto presented *Punk, Creed & Cree Métis*, a recording and walking tour of Queen Street West narrated by Kenny and myself, reflecting on our formative artistic experiences within Toronto's late-1970s and early '80s cultural landscape.

Public artworks—*The Great Mystery* (1996), *All My Relations* (2018), *Star Blanket* (2019), *North Star* (2022), and *The First Treaty Was Between the Earth and the Sky* (2023)—and recent commissions for South Niagara Hospital (2024) and the George Street Revitalization Project (2025) continue to explore relationships between land, community, and collective experience.

Kenny Alvin Baird: Born 1956, Kirkland Lake, Ontario. First Nations Affiliation: Status Cree Métis, Michel Callihoo Nation Society.

Kenny Baird is a multidisciplinary artist and designer whose work spans illustration, costume, set, interior design, and film art direction. Together with his sister, artist Rebecca Baird, he shares a history of collaborative projects exhibited at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Walter Phillips Gallery, and MOCCA.

Baird's creative practice extends to film, music, and hospitality design. He has collaborated on projects with David Bowie, Leonard Cohen, Lisa Marie Presley, Nine Inch Nails, and Marilyn Manson. He was a creative director at AREA (an art installation nightclub in New York City) and designed and illustrated principal character wigs for Milos Forman's *Amadeus*, earning Paul Leblanc and Dick Smith an Academy Award for best makeup in 1985. He worked with Tony King on the Rolling Stones private media rooms during two major North and South American tours. He designed Madonna's *Music* record release event, created costumes for the *Pee-wee's Playhouse* television series, and designed and fabricated interiors for Toronto venues including the Drake Hotel, CiRCA Nightclub, INK entertainment, the Boa Café, and Cameron Public House.

Baird has received multiple Canada Council for the Arts, Ontario Arts Council, and Toronto Arts Council awards, as well as a residency scholarship at Banff Centre for the Arts. In addition to a Juno Award and nominations for several MTV and Much Music art direction awards, he was honoured with a Hnatyshyn Foundation REVEAL Indigenous Art Award (2017).

Onsite Gallery presents contemporary, Indigenous, and public art and design to advance knowledge creation and stimulate local and international conversations on the urgent issues of our time.

ONSITE GALLERY FREE PUBLIC EVENTS

Wednesday, September 23, 2026, 12:30 - 2 p.m.
Women of Wampum: lecture and workshop
led by artist Katsitsakatste Lindsay Delaronde
 Onsite Gallery

Friday, October 16, 2026, 12 to 3 p.m.
Beaded Rosette Workshop with Rebecca Baird
 Onsite Gallery

Saturday, October 24, 2026, 1 to 3 p.m.
In Conversation | Rebecca Baird and Kenny Baird
with Lisa Deanne Smith and Lilian Radovac
 Onsite Gallery

Wednesday, October 28, 5 to 6:30 p.m.
now and then Artist / Curator Talk: Michael Massie in
Conversation with Alysa Procida
 Onsite Gallery

Friday, November 20, 2026, 12 to 3 p.m.
Bracelet Making Workshop with Rebecca Baird
 Onsite Gallery

Wednesday, December 2, 2026, 5 to 6:30 p.m.
Returning to Ourselves | Curatorial Tour
with Lisa Deanne Smith
 Onsite Gallery

Wednesday, January 20, 2027, 4 to 5 p.m.
Michael Massie: now and then
Curatorial Tour with Alysa Procida
 Onsite Gallery

ONSITE GALLERY

Returning to Ourselves:
Rebecca Baird and
Kenny Alvin Baird

A RETROSPECTIVE OF ART AND
 DESIGN BY CREE MÉTIS SIBLINGS

SPECIAL PROJECTS GALLERY

Michael Massie:
now and then

STREET-LEVEL MURAL
Lost in the Right
Direction, 2026
 REBECCA BAIRD AND
 KENNY ALVIN BAIRD

SEPTEMBER 2, 2026 → JANUARY 30, 2027



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Ryan Rice, Executive Director + Curator, Indigenous Art
Lisa Deanne Smith, Senior Curator
Susan Jama, Programs + Community Coordinator
Kesa Smith, Curatorial Coordinator
Heather Darling Pigat, Collections Steward

DESIGN: Tom Chaggarris
 © Onsite Gallery 2026

COVER: Artist: Rebecca Baird, Designers: Kenny Alvin Baird, Mike Mansor, *North Star* (Woodbine Casino), 2022, stainless steel, aluminum and custom powder, 15x15x2 feet. Fabrication by Eventscape Inc. Photo by Luca Dichio. Photo of Rebecca Baird, 1983, by Miklos Legrady. Photo of Kenny Alvin Baird, 1982, by Richard Picton.



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Wednesday
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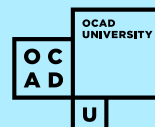
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