



Santee Smith appointed to the Order of Canada

Kaha:wi Dance Theatre's Artistic Director Santee Smith Tekaronhiákhkwa has been appointed a Member of the Order of Canada in recognition of her outstanding contributions to the arts.

[New appointments to the Order of Canada and promotions within the Order | The Governor General of Canada](#)

Member: Santee Smith Tekaronhiákhkwa, C.M.

Ohswé:ken, Six Nations of the Grand River, Ontario

For her contributions as a leading Indigenous artist in performance and dance.



Photo by Make Emarthle of Shutter Shell Studio

Smith is from the Kahnyen'kehàka Nation from Ohswé:ken/Six Nations of the Grand River. She is one of Canada's leading artists and holds McMaster University degrees in Physical Education and Psychology along with a Master of Arts in Dance from York University.

"It's a great honour to be a member of the Order of Canada and to receive this incredible recognition for my artistic contribution," Smith says.

"My path has led me from classical ballet to contemporary Indigenous performance, from Six Nations to around the world and back to my ancestral homelands in upper state New York. I've gone from a kid playing in my grandmother's clay, to working in my parent's pottery studio to creating large scale ceramic sculptures and performances in clay. For me Indigenous performance is Indigenous knowledge in action. My creative research on and within the land is a way I activate Onkwehon:we'neha – the traditional knowledge and practices of the Onkwehón:we / *people of the way of forever.*"



Talking Earth 2023 at the Gardiner Museum. Photo by David Hou

Smith's 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. Her artistic work speaks about identity, Indigenous narratives, creative process, and representation.

It's been an exciting and rewarding June 2023 for Kaha:wi Dance Theatre. The company's production *Homelands* took home an amazing win for collaborators at the 43rd Annual Dora Mavor Moore Awards for Outstanding Achievement in Design, with a total of 4 nominations.

Talking Earth was remounted in celebration of summer solstice and National Indigenous People's Day on the steps of the Gardiner Museum, Toronto. *Talking Earth* acknowledges the ancestral connection to pottery-making, revived in Six Nations by Smith's grandmother, Elda "Bun" Smith. In a multimedia performance activation of her Gardiner Museum Public Art Commission, Smith performs a duet alongside her daughter Semiah Smith. [Talking Earth - Gardiner Museum](#)

Chancellor Smith presided over the June Convocation 2023 for McMaster University. An honorary position she is proud to hold at her alma mater.

Smith's performances, tours and talks are impactful, offering awareness and education about Indigenous stories and truth. Her independent production, *The Mush Hole* has received accolades for its moving depiction of the experiences of children at the Mohawk Institute Residential School and [won five Dora Mavor Moore Awards](#).

"In 2016, a public call for participation in the University of Waterloo and Woodland Cultural Centre's, The Mush Hole Project was circulated. I didn't respond to the call, later, I was recruited to participate, and I accepted. My initial reluctance was due to confronting my family connections to The Mush Hole, it would mean opening a deep wound of intergenerational trauma, and a part of family history I knew little about. It was important for me to work with young artists and the Mush Hole Survivors," Smith says.



Continuance: Yonkwa'nikonhrakontáhkwen - Our Consciousness Continues Unchanged. Photo by Ian R Maracle

During the pandemic, Kaha:wi Dance Theatre created several dance videos filmed at the Mohawk Institute including *Continuance: Yonkwa'nikonhrakontáhkwen - Our Consciousness Continues Unchanged* commissioned for the National Arts Centre's Grand Acts of Theatre and *The Return - The Mush Hole Project 2.0* co-produced by the Woodland Cultural Centre.

[Continuance: Yonkwa'nikonhrakontáhkwen - Grand Acts of Theatre | Envolées théâtrales](#)

Smith is the recipient of numerous awards including the inaugural Johanna Metcalf Prize for the Performing Arts; Hamilton Creator Award; Celebration of Nations - Outstanding Achievement in the Performing Arts; OAC - Chalmers Award; K.M. Hunter Award; Canada Council's Victor Martyn Lynch-Staunton Award; John Hobday Award; Hamilton Music Award for *Kaha:wi*; Six Nations Polytechnic Community Scholar and Hnatyshyn Foundation's REVEAL Indigenous Arts Award, among others.

Smith says about her work, "My life experience is a wonderful dance. With passion, I will continue to share my gifts and cultivate the next generation of artists through my intergenerational work and offering "Inviting the Land to Shape Us" series for professional development. I'm grateful for the support of ancestors, family, teachers, collaborators, audiences, and funders who have fostered creativity."

Kaha:wi Dance Theatre is preparing for "Inviting the Land to Shape Us" programming, performances of *Otsi'tsa'kó:wa – Beings of Light*, and a remount of *Homelands* as a part of Celebration of Nations, FirstON Performing Arts Centre, St.Catherines, ON.

Link to Website can be found [HERE](#).

Recent Works of Santee Smith can be found [HERE](#).