

# About the Kanaktí:yo mural

## In the Artist's words:

This mural shows the history of the Land in Ontario from an oral tradition that dates back thousands of years. These stories come from the creation stories of Indigenous people who occupy the Land to this day.

First, we have the Ojibway who have been known through oral histories to have been here on this Land for two to three Ice Ages. This is a time frame unheard of, that places the Ojibway here a million or more years ago, backed through the writings and teachings of Stewart King, Edward Benton Banai and Basil Johnson.

The Ojibway people appear at the start of this mural on the left. It shows the first man and his connection to the animal kingdom, as he looks forward at the first woman and her father, the fire keeper in the east. These are all crucial points in time, just like the transference of knowledge about the sacred fire and the meeting of the first woman.

The next stage is the pictograph showing the history of the Ojibway people as depicted by Elder James Redsky in the book *The Sacred Scrolls of the Southern Ojibway*, by Selwyn Dudley, 1975. This is a timeline from two or more Ice Ages ago to the present day. The end of the row of boxes is where we are today in this prophecy, where Indigenous people are preparing to take their place as leaders in this new time called the Eighth Fire. Behind this pictograph sits a circle of an ancient symbol known by our ancestors who were hunting the megafauna as the Rib-Stone. In the time of the Ice Runners, or as our elders would say the 'Oh-kwa-ming-i-nini-wug', this symbol was a method of organizing their communities, dividing into family pods to live in harmony and balance with nature.

Above is the symbol of the buffalo, and just below is the image of the Seven Grandfathers. They are on a boat leading us along the edge

of the underworld. If we follow our traditions we will be able to hear them showing us the way. Next to the Seven Grandfathers is the magnificent Thunderbird, who was given creation powers by the Creator to help new life come into the world. These powers usher in Turtle Island coming down in this image from the sky. The Turtle is a symbol of life, that rises up to assist the people. For some, this represents a new beginning and for others, it is the beginning of their creation stories.

The Wendat, Neutral and Petun people came into the world on the Turtle's back. Next to them is the Haudenosaunee people with their Sky Woman story, eventually becoming known as the Haudenosaunee confederacy with its fifty chiefs led by chief Tadodaho. The circle wampum is a symbol of all the chiefs working together to help the people. You can see Sky Woman coming down through the hole in the sky. The birds come near to catch her fall and help her come down safely. As she comes down to give birth to her twins, the Panther brings a gift for the prosperity of the new nation by offering a mortar with which they can grind corn and other goods.

There is much to be unpacked in this amazing visual story of this Land and the original Indigenous voices that have passed them down through the generations.

### **Philip Cote**

*MFA, Young Spiritual Elder, Artist, Activist, Educator, and Cultural Interpreter*

*The mural is located in the Kanaktí:yo Indigenous gathering space at Mohawk College's Fennell campus.*

