

**A Continuing Saga:  
Resistance and Resilience**  
Norm Barney





Bingo in Banff, Mixed media

## A Continuing Saga: Resistance and Resilience

Resistance and resilience have been abiding themes in Norman Barney's work. Through his playful interrogations of popular culture, he exposes the hidden racism implicit in consumer culture even as he celebrates the enduring power of creativity to transform.

Norm doesn't start with a distinct idea in his head. He takes disparate objects from his vast collection of ceramic figurines and objects, placing them together intuitively and in the moment. He then develops these works with paints and paper mache, recycling them within new contexts and shifting meanings. This is a process that can take years to accomplish.

Due to his gathering activities in junk and antique stores, Barney amassed an extensive number of tourist items depicting stereotypical representations of the 'Indian'. Norm's past experiences and friendships with First Nations peoples in particular (an early influence was his Anishinaabe grandfather) trickled into his work over many years.

Norm's work has many layers of meaning and emotion. Irony, playfulness, and poignancy can be present in the same work. His large painting *Reconciliation* is based on two different postcards that Barney cut out and found that the sizes of the two figures fit nicely into a small collage. He then made this into a large painting. The hearts and the text were added to accentuate the work's absurdity, humour, and irony.



Last of the Wild Bison, Mixed Media

Bingo In Banff is playful with its curving lines and complicated patterns and, like Tomson Highway's famous play *The Rez Sisters*, references the pleasure and hope of playing bingo. *The Last of the Wild Bison* is poignant because the systematic destruction of the bison caused the collapse of the Plains Indians' way of life and forced them to accept living on reservations to not starve to death. *Crown Land* is a work that takes children's plastic toys to show the struggle to keep hold of the land and the embedding of damaging cultural stereotypes within the dominant culture. *Once Upon a Time* shows innocent children dressed up like First Nations children, but their faces are white. This is an example of the long-time appropriation of their culture for entertainment purposes.

Norm's work is unique. His artistic practice is fluid and organic, and his themes are rich and nuanced. Each piece differs from the last, but overall each is identifiable as a Norman Barney artwork.

~ Jane Austin



Once Upon A Time, Mixed Media

## Bios

**Norman Barney** is a multimedia artist whose themes are based on cultural stereotypes, politics, nostalgia, and tourism. His work often uses irony and satire to express his views on culture and society. Having an Ojibway grandfather who avoided talking about his past and having friendships with First Nations' members gives him an understanding of the history and plight of those peoples and an admiration for their continuing resistance to being overwhelmed by our dominant society. This is one of the themes of his work and is reflected in this show.

Norman has no formal art education, however, he is self-educated through visiting art galleries, attending art residencies, and showing, interacting and collaborating with professional artists. Norm is often called an Outsider Artist because of his lack of formal training, unconditioned way of working and because of his use of bright colour, pattern, and found objects. However, Norman prefers to simply call himself a contemporary artist.

**Laurie Langford** is an artist and writer living in Chatham, Ontario. She holds a BA in English Literature and Art History for the University of Toronto.

**Jane Austin** is an artist, photographer and writer about art who lives in Petrolia. She has been following Norman Barney's art career for 40 years.

# A Continuing Saga: Resistance and Resilience

Norm Barney

April 26, 2023 - June 10, 2023

Opening Reception: April 28, 2023 | 7PM

Guest Curator: Laurie Langford

Essay: Jane Austin

Curator: Phil Vanderwall

Assistant Curator: Michaela Lucio

Program Coordinator: Irene MacCreadie

Design: Donna Nolan

ISBN 978-1-928127-35-2

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## List of works

*Last of the Wild Bison*, 2011; Mixed media; 14 in x 16.5 in

*Bingo in Banff*, 2016; Mixed media; 62 in x 44 in

*History*, 2015; Mixed media; 12 in x 20 in x 5 in

*Indian Summer*, 2021; Mixed media; 32 in x 15 in x 3 in

*Reconciliation*, 2020; Acrylic on canvas; 48 in x 36 in

*Run Little Deer*, 2022; Mixed media; 24.5 in x 26.5 in x 9 in

*Spirit Lake*, 2010; Mixed media; 28.5 in x 28.5 in

*Taming the Noble Savage*, 2009; Mixed media; 14 in X 12 in x 25 in

*The Strong Arm of Christianity*, 2022; Mixed media; 17 in x 19 in x 9 in

*Totem*, 2008; Mixed media; 20 in x 52 x 4 in

*Fur Trade*, 2013; Mixed media; 47 in x 12 in x 88 in

*Save Our Waters for Our Granddaughters*, 2014; Mixed media; 12 in x 75 in x 12 in

*Once Upon A Time*, 2015; Mixed media; 12 in x 28 in x 6 in

*New Year's Deer*, 2016; Mixed media; 14 in x 26 in x 19 in

**Cover image:** *New Year's Deer*, 2016; Mixed media



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