LIVECTV NEWS CHANNEL

Mother-daughter art exhibit: Weaving broken bonds

Details of a trade blanket made by Ida Baptiste and Lara Kramer are seen in a provided image from an exhibit at MAI in Montreal.

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Colourful trade blankets hang on the walls of a Montreal gallery as a striking symbol of beauty emerging from the pain of residential schools and the generations of trauma they inflicted.

They are the work of Ida Baptiste and Lara Kramer, a mother-daughter team behind the exhibit titled Ji zoongde'eyaang (To Have a Strong Heart) showing at MAI, a multi-media cultural space.

Baptiste is an Anishinaabe Oji-Cree artist and Ojibwa language teacher living in Rama, Ont. She was just four years old when she was taken to Brandon Indian Residential School in Manitoba.

She recalls crying as she arrived at the school and the fear she lived with for years.

"The boys who tried to run away were made to carry a hundred-pound bag of potatoes," she says. "And the principal would stand there with a horse whip to use if one of them fell down. I remember seeing that, and the fear I had, thinking 'Why am I here?'"

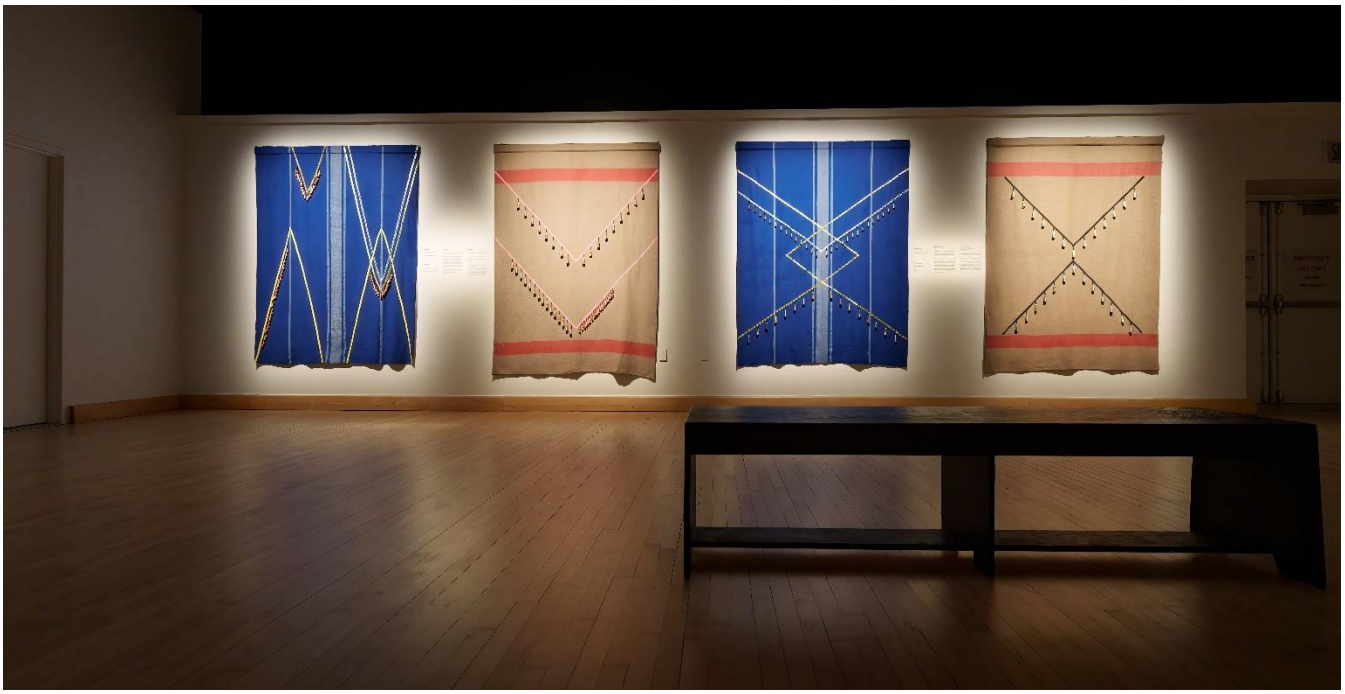
Those are memories she tried to suppress for years, but that she now shares with her daughter by her side.

The duo first teamed up during the pandemic, in 2021. Kramer, a performer, choreographer and multi-disciplinary artist, was asked to design two public billboards to be exhibited in downtown Montreal. The images feature Kramer cloaked in a trade blanket, the kind used in the fur trade. Through oral tradition, countless stories of their use as fabric of biological warfare to infect Indigenous people with small pox have emerged.

Kramer reached out to her mother for help designing two trade blankets and adorning them with jingles that symbolize healing.

"It was really these notions of healing, grounding ourselves in history and moving forward together that I wanted to explore," says Kramer.

After that project was over, she realized there was much more to be done and came up with the idea of the exhibit. They dedicated hours to the project, working together with Kramer's own children playing around them. In those moments, the two artists thought of the bonds residential school severed across generations.



"I didn't grow up in a real family," says Baptiste. "When I had my own children I was able to give them a foundation when they were little, but when they became adolescents I was fearful and scared, so I ran away from them not fully realizing the impact that would have on my family."

One of their trade blankets now on display is in honour of Baptiste's mother, Kramer's grandmother. All of her 14 children were taken away, either during the Sixties Scoop or to residential school. Another blanket depicts what Baptiste calls her spiritual journey, with lines representing generations past, present and future.

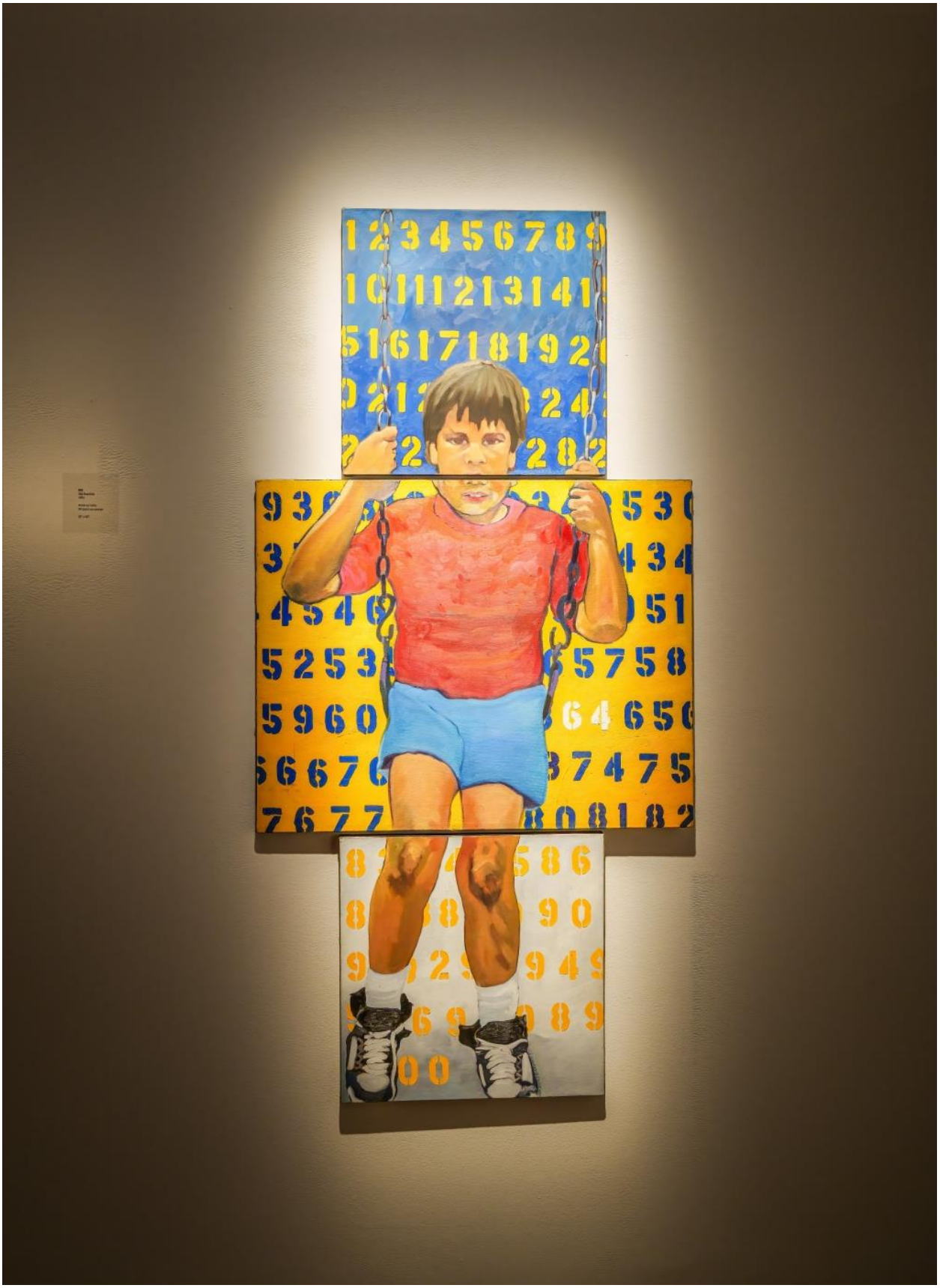
But there is more than the blankets to this exhibit.

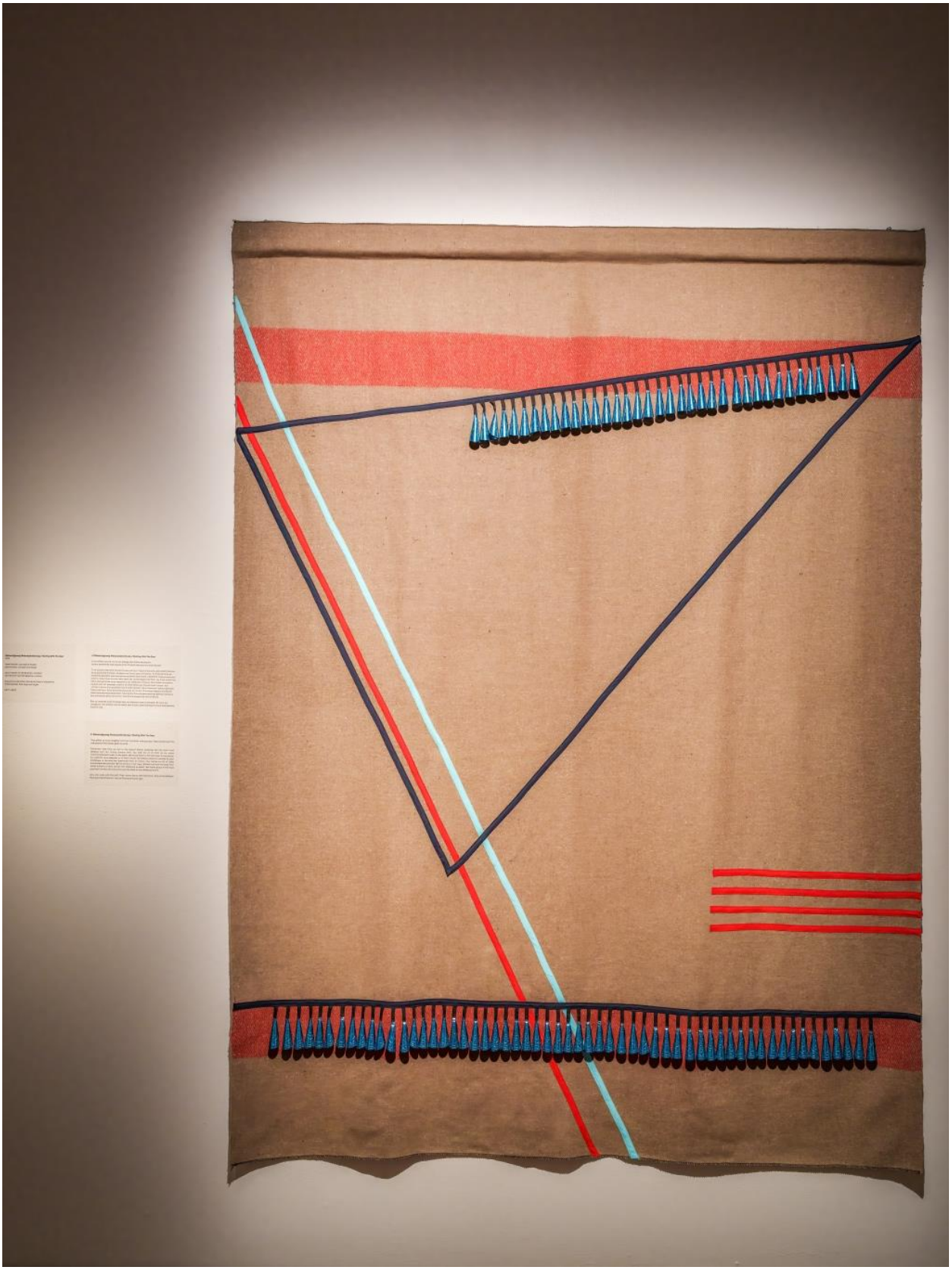
As Kramer looked (or "snooped," as she put it) around her mother's home, she uncovered a series of paintings Baptiste completed in the 1990s. She convinced her mother to include those in the project.

"I felt that this is the moment. Maybe 30 years ago, it wasn't time, but in the current climate, and where she is on her journey, it is now time."

The paintings depict children, left without a voice in their schools. One is of a child on a swing on a background filled with numbers.

"We all had numbers," says Baptiste. "Mine was 64."



Ji zoongde'eyaang is on until Nov. 19 at the MAI (Montreal, arts interculturels).

All embedded images show the exhibit at the MAI created by Ida Baptiste and Lara Kramer, and were provided to CTV News.