

Title: Aanikoobijigan [ancestor/great-grandparent/great-grandchild]

Year: 2026

Runtime: 80 mins

Country of Production: USA / Denmark

Languages: English, Anishinaabemowin

Tech Specs: 1080p HD, Color, 24 fps

Awards: The Audience Award: Next at Sundance 2026

LOGLINE

Trapped in museum archives, Ancestors bend time and space to find their way home. History, spirituality, and the law collide as tribal repatriation specialists fight to return and rebury Indigenous human remains, offering a revealing look at the still-pervasive worldviews that justified collecting them in the first place.

DIRECTOR BIOS

Adam Khalil, a member of the Sault Ste Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, is an artist whose practice attempts to subvert traditional forms of image-making through humor, relation, and transgression. Khalil is the co-director and co-editor of the feature documentary INAATE/SE/ [*it shines a certain way. to a certain place./ it flies. falls./*] (2016) which premiered as the closing night film of the Museum of Modern Art's Doc Fortnight Film Festival, and the experimental documentary short *The Violence of a Civilization without Secrets* (2018) which premiered at Sundance. Khalil is a core contributor to New Red Order and a co-founder of COUSINS Collective. Khalil's work has been exhibited/screened at the Museum of Modern Art, Sundance Film Festival, New York Film Festival, Tate Modern, HKW, Walker Arts Center, Lincoln Center, Palais de Tokyo, Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Creative Time, Toronto Biennial 2019, Whitney Biennial 2019, Sharjah Biennial 15, Counterpublic Triennial 2023, among other institutions. Khalil is the recipient of various fellowships and grants, including but not limited to a 2021 Creative Capital Award, 2020 Herb Alpert Award, Sundance Art of Nonfiction, Jerome Artist Fellowship, Cinereach and the Gates Millennium Scholarship.

Zack Khalil, a member of the Sault Ste Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, is a filmmaker and artist whose work centers Indigenous narratives in the present—and looks towards the future—through the use of innovative nonfiction forms. Khalil is a core contributor to New Red Order, a public-secret society which calls attraction toward indigeneity into question, yet promotes this desire, and enjoins potential non-Indigenous accomplices to participate in the co-examination and expansion of Indigenous agency. Khalil is the co-director and co-editor of the feature documentary INAATE/SE/ [*it shines a certain way. to a certain place./ it flies. falls./*] (2016) which premiered as the closing night film of the Museum of Modern Art's Doc Fortnight Film Festival, and the experimental documentary short *The Violence of a Civilization without*

Secrets (2018) which premiered at Sundance. Khalil also works professionally as a video editor, most recently co-editing Alison O'Daniels feature film The Tuba Thieves (2023), which premiered at Sundance. Khalil's own work has been shown at the Museum of Modern Art, Sundance Film Festival, New York Film Festival, CPH: DOX, HKW, Walker Arts Center, Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Creative Time, Toronto Biennial 2019, Whitney Biennial 2019, 59th Venice Biennale, Sharjah Biennial 15, Counterpublic Triennial 2023, among other institutions. Khalil is the recipient of various fellowships and grants, including a Jerome Hill Artist Fellowship, United States Artists Fellowship, Sundance Art of Nonfiction, and Gates Millennium Scholarship.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Aanikoobjigan [ancestor/great-grandparent/great-grandchild] documents the emotional and vital work of MACPRA (Michigan Anishinaabek Cultural Preservation and Repatriation Alliance). This alliance, made up of repatriation specialists representing all Michigan tribes, fights to bring their Ancestors and funerary objects home from settler colonial institutions like museums, libraries, and archives.

Adam and Zack Khalil's monumental and formally daring film follows the pressing struggle to rebury Indigenous human remains that have been held in sterile storage, laying bare the history of Indigenous collections and the battle to recognize and enforce the laws intended to facilitate their repatriation to the communities they were originally stolen from. Using an essayistic approach alongside vérité portraits, the film celebrates the courageous individuals who carry out this hard and emotionally draining labor of return. — Sundance

LONG SYNOPSIS

One morning in 1784, Thomas Jefferson became America's first archeologist when he decided to indulge his curiosity and unearth human remains from a Monacan Indian burial mound which he considered to be in his "neighborhood". Since that day archaeologists, anthropologists, amateur explorers, and hobbyists have collected and sent thousands of boxes of Indigenous human remains to museums and universities, often in the hope that they would become the objects of scientific study and help prove widely held beliefs about Indigenous racial inferiority.

In 1990 the passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) signaled a shift in settler-colonial attitudes towards Indigenous people and our Ancestor's remains. The law required institutions to complete a full inventory of their "skeletal collections" to receive Federal funding, and compelled them to repatriate Ancestors to the nearest possible descendants by working with Federally recognized tribes. Since the law passed over 50,000 ancestors have been repatriated, but over half a million are still waiting in cardboard boxes in sterile archives in museums across the country, with countless more scattered throughout institutions around the world.

Aanikoobijigan [ancestor/great-grandparent/great-grandchild] documents the struggle to repatriate the remains of our Ancestors, and takes a critical look at the reasoning that justified unearthing and collecting them in the first place. The film focuses on the passionate and compelling individuals that make up the Michigan Anishinaabek Cultural Preservation & Repatriation Alliance (MACPRA). MACPRA is composed of repatriation specialists who each represent one of Michigan's federally recognized tribes. The members range in age from 26 to 80+ and have all been led to this calling for different reasons. They do the hard work of carving out a space for Indigenous worldviews in America's intellectual halls of power by demanding respect for our Ancestors and petitioning for their return.

These repatriation specialists must overcome immense bureaucratic injustice through protracted institutional and legal battles. These are interspersed with brief but incredibly intense and rewarding moments when justice is finally achieved, and Ancestors who have been trapped in cold storage for generations are finally returned home and laid to rest with love and care in the womb of mother earth.

The repatriation specialists we follow represent MACPRA's remarkable diversity. With perspectives from elders who have been involved in repatriation efforts for decades, as well as younger members coming-of-age into their career and life path, we witness not only how the work they're doing changes institutional attitudes towards indigenous people, but also transforms themselves, and their communities.

While the narrative thrust and character development in the film comes from vérité accounts of the most compelling MACPRA repatriations, these are interwoven with essayistic sections which provide broader historical context that informs the work the repatriations specialists are doing today. These formally inventive vignettes illustrate the ideological underpinnings of this longstanding conflict between institutions of science and Indigenous peoples.

The vignettes progressively build on each other and thematically coincide with developments in the MACPRA repatriations. The intention of these interventions is not to provide an exhaustive analysis of these historical phenomena, but rather to unveil the ideological web that western science has built to support its claim to all knowledge, including that held in the bones of our Ancestors. We use interviews with prominent Indigenous scholars to animate this history and reveal its relation to the work the repatriation specialists are doing, as well as its impact on their communities.

These vignettes move fluidly through archival and contemporary footage, mix talking heads with lyrical cinematography and graphic superimpositions. A versatile and evolving electro-acoustic soundscape guides viewers through the film, facilitating these formal and thematic shifts. Footage of state of the art archives that house ancestral remains, and the labs that study them, elucidate visually the scientist's compartmentalized worldview. These science-fiction like spaces are presented in an austere and compelling way, to make them feel as surreal as they might to an Ancestor trapped inside.

Audiences leave the film with a deeper understanding of the ways Indigenous worldviews can and should be respected by this nation's institutions. They will carry this knowledge with them, and perhaps wonder what's in the archive the next time they visit their favorite museum.

CREDITS

DIRECTOR/PRODUCER CREDITS

DIRECTORS

Adam Khalil
Zack Khalil

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

Francene Blythe-Lewis
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Tribal Repatriation Specialists

Elvyn Douglas "Doug" Bissonette
Thomas Brings
Matthew Bussler
Joseph Catches Enemy
Mike Catches Enemy

Wakinyan Luta Catches Enemy
Paula Carrick
Kevin Daugherty
Majel DeMarsh
Benedict Good Buffalo
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Terry Kemper
Gary Loonsfoot
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George Martin
Daisy McGeshick
Blaire Morseau
Christine Morseau
Gary Morseau Sr.
Cecil Pavlat
Justin Pourier
Marie Richards
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Dwight "Bucko" Teeple
Robert Two Crow
Colleen Utter
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Marcus Winchester
Steve Winchester

Museum Professionals and Scholars

Sonya Atalay
Robin Beck
Tim Carpenter
Holly Cusack-McVeigh
Philip J. Deloria
Stephen Forrest
Michael Galaty
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Samuel Redman
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Jessica Yann

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Jim Fletcher
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Dave Houghton
Jackie Robinson
Elizabeth Bernadette Young

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Oresti Tsonopoulos
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Joseph Ernest Wemigwans

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Jacque Clark
Zack Khalil

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Jonas Khalil

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Ray Segal

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Oliver Franklin Anderson

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Dougal Henken
Emma Waggoner
Kris Nuzzi
Isa Eugenio

ORIGINAL SCORE

Leila Bordreuil
lucky dragons

SOUND DESIGN

Eli Cohn
Ernst Karel

SOUND MIX

Nocturnal Sound
Eli Cohn

CAPTION WRITER

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Tobi Akinde L.L.B

FILMING & RESEARCH LOCATIONS

American Museum of Natural History

The Field Museum

Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology

Museum of Us

Bishop Museum

Eiteljorg Museum

St. Louis Art Museum

Harvard University

University of Michigan

Michigan State University

University of Notre Dame

University of Massachusetts Amherst

ARCHIVAL CREDITS

ARCHIVAL MATERIALS COURTESY OF

Alamy Inc

Bancroft Library

Bridgeman Images
Dwight "Bucko" Teeple
CriticalPast
FBI Records
The Field Museum Archives
George HW Bush Presidential Library
Getty Images
Huntley Film Archives
Illinois State University
The Library of Congress
The Los Angeles Times
Missouri Historical Society
National Park Service
NBC News
Oglala Sioux Tribe
Penn Museum
Periscope Films
San Diego History Center
Scientific American
Screenocean/Channel 4/RDF Media Ltd
St Louis Art Museum
The Peabody Museum
The Smithsonian Archives
University of Iowa Office of the State Archaeologist
Veritone Digital/CBS News

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

2929 Films
60 Minutes
ABC News
Amazon MGM Studios
BBC News
CBS Mornings
CSPAN
The Disney Channel
KRON-TV
NBC News
Paramount Pictures
PBS Newshour
Rob Goebel/The Star News
The Science Channel
Walt Disney Pictures
Warner Bros
WTHR Channel 13

MUSIC SONGS

"Untitled 2"

Written by: William Basinski & Richard Chartier (2004)

Performed by: Richard Chartier & William Basinski

Courtesy of: LINE, Richard Chartier & William Basinski

"Tracing"

Written and Performed by: Richard Chartier

Courtesy of: Richard Chartier

"Actual Reality (Flute)"

Written and Performed by: lucky dragons

Courtesy of: lucky dragons

"A Ray Array A"

Written and Performed by: lucky dragons

Courtesy of: lucky dragons

"A Ray Array B"

Written and Performed by: lucky dragons

Courtesy of: lucky dragons

"ooee 2 or 1"

Written by: Oldofredi, Matthias

Performed by: Mietze Conte

Courtesy of: Kobalt Music Services Ltd & Mietze Conte

"Rumble"

Written By: Fred Lincoln Wray, Jr. & Milton Grant

Performed by: Link Wray & His Ray Men

Courtesy of: Cadence Records by arrangement with Silver Side Productions,

Productions Della Blue Music LLC & Link Wray Music/Royalty Recovery, Inc.

"Sky Wax (NYC)"

Written & Performed by: Luke Younger

Courtesy of: Luke Younger and Mute Song

by arrangement with Bank Robber Music

"Over the Rainbow"

Written and Performed By: HTRK

Courtesy of: Ghostly International & HTRK

"The Sun XIX"

Written and Performed by: Sofie Birch

Courtesy of: Sofie Birch & Christian Rohde Lindinger

"Borg Pillow"

Written and Performed by: CEP (Caroline Polachek)

Courtesy of: Avant Garcon & Pannonica LLC

"Part 2"

Written and Performed by: Mike Tolan

Courtesy of: Superstorms & Mike Tolan

"Bloodless Village"

Written and Performed by: Leaders of Technology

Courtesy of: Patrick Vincenzo Frunzio

"Mixing Up Songs"

Written and Performed by: Warren Realrider

Courtesy of: Warren Realrider

"Requiem for CS70 and Strings"

Written by: Floating Points

Performed by: Floating Points

Courtesy of: BMG Rights Management (US) LLC & Ninja Tune

"The Upward Spiral (Side B)"

Written and Performed by: lucky dragons

Courtesy of: lucky dragons

"Hawks and Sparrows I"

Written and Performed by: lucky dragons

Courtesy of: lucky dragons

"Caged in Stammheim"

Written and Performed by: Demdike Stare

Courtesy of: Modern Love & Henkle Music Limited

"The Stars are Moving"

Written and Performed by: Demdike Stare

Courtesy of: Modern Love & Henkle Music Limited

"Looking You in Silence"

Written and Performed by: Suso Saiz

Courtesy of: Music From Memory / Suso Saiz

"Under the Sycamore Tree"

Written and Performed by: Les Halles

Courtesy of: Trona

"Main Character NRG"

Written and Performed by: Spivak

Courtesy of: Spivak & Electroménager

"Heart of Waterfall"

Written and Performed by: Sofie Birch & Antonina Nowacka

Courtesy of: Fundacja Tone – Muzyka i Nowe Formy Sztuki

"Rise and Fall"

Written and Performed by: Oliver Coates

Courtesy of: PRAH Recordings & Universal Music Publishing Group

"Shape Tape (Side A)"

Written and Performed by: lucky dragons

Courtesy of: lucky dragons

"Shape Tape (Side B)"

Written and Performed by: lucky dragons

Courtesy of: lucky dragons

"Music For No Reason – Readymades w/ Rhythm"

Written and Performed by: lucky dragons

Courtesy of: lucky dragons

"Parasol (Version)"

Written and Performed by: lucky dragons

Courtesy of: lucky dragons

"I'll Do Whatever You Want"

Written by: Shabaka Akua Lumumba Kamau Hutchings, Samuel Shepherd, & Edward Larry G Gordon Jr.

Performed by: Shabaka ft. Floating Points & Laraaji

Courtesy of: BMG Rights Management (US) LLC, Warp Publishing, & Verve Records under license from Universal Music Enterprises

"To Apeiron"

Written by: Jonas Teglund and Isak Sundström

Performed by: Weils

Courtesy of: Teg Publishing

"wet"

Written and Performed by: Taylor Deupree

Courtesy of: Nettwerk Music Group Inc & Taylor Deupree

"Behind the Hill"

Written by: Sofie Birch & Antonina Nowacka

Performed by: Sofie Birch & Antonina Nowacka

Courtesy of: Fundacja Tone – Muzyka i Nowe Formy Sztuki

"Ao Longo Do Rio"

Written by: Kevin Gabriel Wettstein

Performed by: Kevin Gabriel Wettstein (all instruments except flute) & Amin O'Tore (flute)

Courtesy of: Kevin Gabriel Wettstein, Radicalis Music GmbH & Wise Music Group

"When I See Scissors, I Can't Help But Think Of You"

Written and Performed by: The Dead Texan

Courtesy of: Universal Songs Of PolyGram Int., Inc. on behalf of Lidmusic & Kranksy, Ltd.

"Chewing Springs"

Written and Performed by: Andrew PM Hunt

Courtesy of: Andrew PM Hunt

"Lillian's Pavilions"

Written and Performed by: CEP (Caroline Polachek)

Courtesy of: Avant Garcon & Pannonica LLC

"data.flex"

Written and Performed by: Ryoji Ikeda

Courtesy of: Downtown Music Publishing & Ryoji Ikeda Studio

"Fried"

Written by: Sean Patrick Holland

Performed by: Patrick Holland

Courtesy of: Patrick Holland

"New Wren Kitch"

Written & Performed by By: Mica Levi and Oliver Coates

Courtesy of: Beggars Music Limited, Warp, Slip Imprint &

Universal Songs Of PolyGram Int., Inc. on behalf of Bright Notion Music Ltd.

"Mwanza Market Place"

Written and Performed by: Tak Shindo

Courtesy of: Sundazed Music, LLC & Lee Grey Music Publishing, LLC

"Missed Exit"

Written and Performed by: CEP (Caroline Polachek)

Courtesy of: Avant Garcon & Pannonica LLC

"Melismata"

Written and Performed by: Les Halles

Courtesy of: Trona

"Black Sun"

Written and Performed by: Demdike Stare

Courtesy of: Modern Love & Henkle Music Limited

"Mystic of The Great Elevator"

Written and Performed by: Les Halles

Courtesy of: Noumenal Loom

"oo oo"

Written by: Oldofredi, Matthias

Performed by: Mietze Conte

Courtesy of: Kobalt Music Services Ltd / Mietze Conte

"oo"

Written by: Oldofredi, Matthias

Performed by: Mietze Conte

Courtesy of: Kobalt Music Services Ltd & Mietze Conte

"so oo ee"

Written by: Oldofredi, Matthias

Performed by: Mietze Conte

Courtesy of: Kobalt Music Services Ltd & Mietze Conte

"None but The Lonely Flutes"

Written and Performed by: Les Halles

Courtesy of: Trona

"The Blue of Distance"

Written and Performed by: Elori Saxl

Courtesy of: Wixen Music, Western Vinyl & Ribbon Music

"Borderlines Pt.1"

Written by: Tim Hecker

Performed by: Tim Hecker

Courtesy of: Sunblind Studios & Warp Publishing

"ch. 1222"

Written and Performed by: Joe Rainey

Courtesy of: 37d03d

ADDITIONAL MUSIC & SOUNDS

bbeellss.aiff by tim.kahn -- <https://freesound.org/s/180629/> -- License: Attribution 4.0

"Particles"

Written and Performed by: Bjørn Ottar Undset

"Dry your Fears"

Written and Performed by: Matthew Edward Harvey CAE

"Free at Last"

Written and Performed by: Jody Jenkins

Insects in the Field by Oneirophile -- <https://freesound.org/s/162166/> -- License: Attribution 4.0

FIELD AMBIENCE - open field ambience by Anika11 -- <https://freesound.org/s/325694/> --

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Bay Mills Indian Community
Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians
Hannahville Potawatomi Indian Community
Keweenaw Bay Indian Community
Lac Vieux Desert Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians
Little River Band of Ottawa Indians
Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians
Match-e-be-nash-she-wish Band of Potawatomi Indians of Michigan
Nottawaseppi Huron Band of the Potawatomi Indians
Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians
Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe
Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians

SPECIAL THANKS - COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Association on American Indian Affairs
Bay Mills Community College
Bay Mills Indian Community's History Department
Gun Lake Pow Wow Committee
Jijak Foundation
Lake Superior Provincial Park
The Mary Murray Culture Camp
Pokagon Band Center of History & Culture
Pokagon Band Traditions and Repatriations Committee
Sanilac Petroglyphs Historic State Park
Sault Tribe Language & Culture
Sault Tribe Youth Education and Activities
Sugar Island Pow Wow Committee
Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture & Lifeways

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Peggy Ahwesh
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Justin Bensley
Max Bowens
Julianna Brannum
Everett Osceola
Ash Ngu
Mary Hudetz
Logan Jaffe
Jillian Kumagai
Stephanie Krebs
Chris Krebs
Tony Krebs
Richard Lewis
Ivy MacDonald
Ivan MacDonald
Shannon Martin
David Michener & Wil Strickland
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James Robertson
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Lisa Riordan Seville
Ben Secunda
Rezarta Seferi
Punkin Shananaquet
Bayley Sweitzer
Tobias Trevor
Michele Wellman-Teeple

IN MEMORIAM

Jonnie “Jay” Sam II
Elizabeth Bernadette Young
Allison “Ally” Krebs

All the Ancestors

DEDICATION

Stella Allison Meinild Khalil

All the Ancestors