



NORVAL MORRISSEAU

Life & Work

By Carmen Robertson

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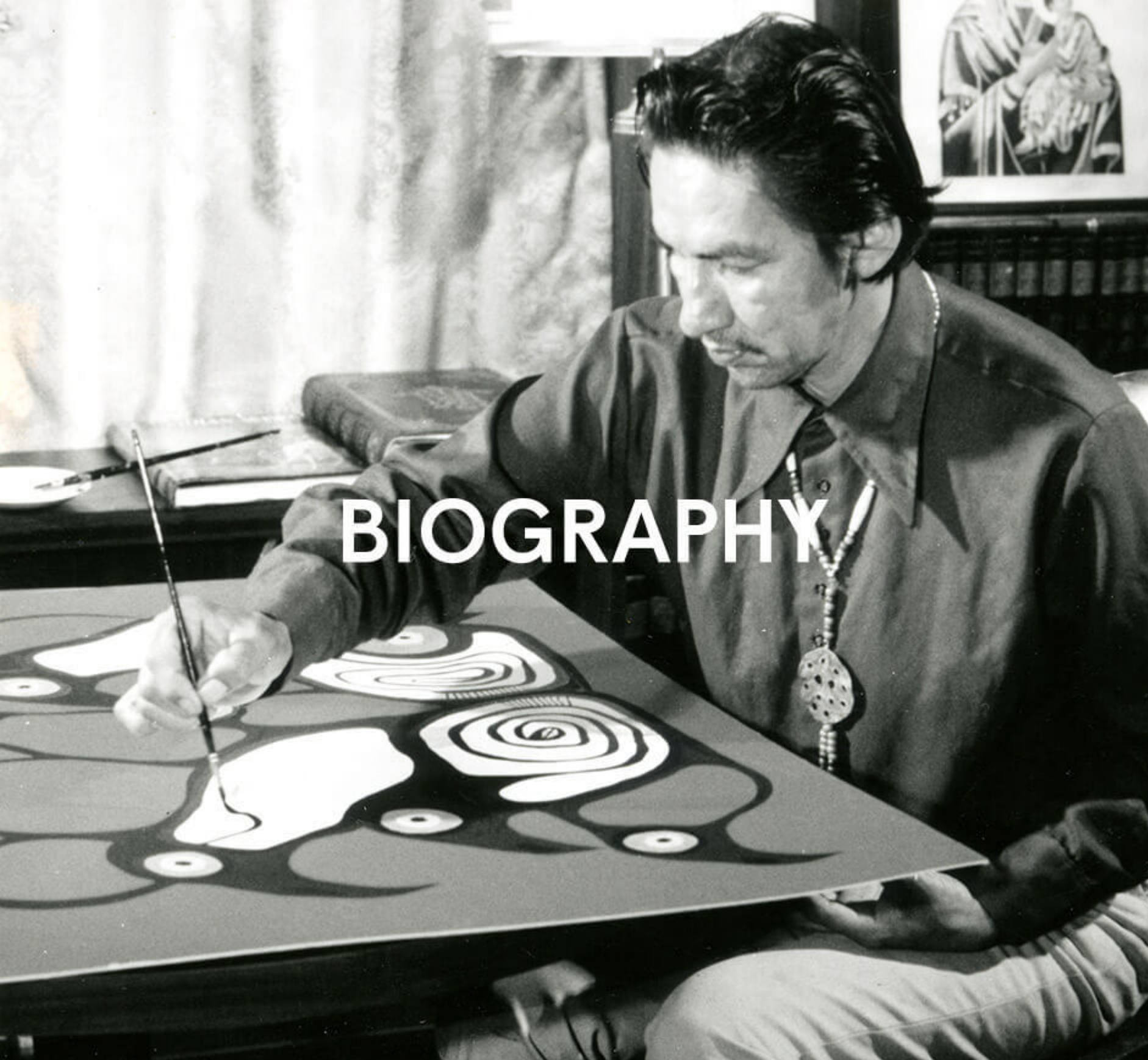
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Norval Morrisseau (1931–2007) is considered by many to be the *Mishomis*, or grandfather, of contemporary Indigenous art in Canada. His life has been sensationalized in newspapers and documentaries while his unique artistic style has pushed the boundaries of visual storytelling. The creator of the Woodland School of art and a prominent member of the Indian Group of Seven, Morrisseau is best known for using bright colours and portraying traditional stories, spiritual themes, and political messages in his work.

EARLY YEARS

Anishinaabe artist Norval Morrisseau was born in 1931 at a time when Indigenous¹ peoples in Canada were confined to reserves, forced to attend residential schools, and banned from practising traditional ceremonial activities.² He was the oldest of five children born to Grace Theresa Nanakonagos and Abel Morrisseau, and, in keeping with Anishinaabe tradition, he was sent to live with his maternal grandparents at Sand Point reserve on the shores of Lake Nipigon, Ontario. There, Morrisseau learned the stories and cultural traditions of his peoples from his grandfather Moses Potan Nanakonagos, a shaman trained within the Midewiwin spiritual tradition. From his grandmother Veronique Nanakonagos, he learned about Catholicism.



A present-day map of Northern Ontario showing the communities where Norval Morrisseau lived. Over time some of these place names have changed. Fort William amalgamated with Port Arthur in 1970 to become Thunder Bay. Sand Point is now known as Bingwi Neyaashi Anishinaabek.

At age six, Morrisseau was sent to a residential school, part of an education system set up by the Canadian government in the 1880s. Residential schools, which operated until the last decades of the twentieth century, forcibly separated Indigenous children from their families and forbade them from acknowledging their cultures or speaking their traditional languages. At St. Joseph's Indian Residential School in Fort William, Ontario, Morrisseau faced sexual and psychological abuse that left him with deep emotional scars. After two years at St. Joseph's, and two more at another nearby school, he returned to Sand Point to attend a public school in nearby Beardmore.³

Morrisseau left school at age ten because, according to curator Greg Hill, "Morrisseau was not like other children in his community. The young artist preferred to spend his time in the company of elders listening and learning, or completely alone, drawing."⁴ Morrisseau was interested in local petroglyphs and birchbark scroll images, but never received any formal art training. He wanted to draw things he had heard about or seen—like the sacred bear that had come to him in a vision quest, or spirit-beings such as Micipijiu or Thunderbird that were drawn on cliffs—but community members and relatives discouraged him, as Anishinaabe cultural protocols forbid the sharing of this ceremonial knowledge. When he was not drawing, Morrisseau spent time fishing, hunting, trapping, picking berries, and holding pulpwood-cutting and highway-construction jobs. In his early teens, he also began drinking alcohol.



Rock painting of Thunderbird at Cliff Lake in Wabakimi Provincial Park, Ontario.

When he was nineteen, Morrisseau became critically ill. His family arranged a healing ceremony, during which he received the name "Miskwaabik Animiiki" (Copper Thunderbird). Morrisseau explained, "That was a very, very powerful new name; and it cured me."⁵ When he was about twenty-three, however, Morrisseau became sick with tuberculosis and was sent to a sanatorium in Fort William. There he met Harriet Kakegamic, a fellow patient from the remote northern Cree community of Sandy Lake reserve. They married in the late 1950s and lived in Beardmore, where Morrisseau began to devote more time to his art. He painted on birchbark baskets made by his mother-in-law, Patricia Kakegamic, and on other objects.



LEFT: (Clockwise from top left) Harriet, Norval, Pierre, and Victoria Morriseau photographed in Toronto in March 1964. RIGHT: Norval Morriseau, *Artist's Wife and Daughter*, c. 1975, acrylic on hardboard, 101.6 x 81.3 cm, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, ON. Norval and Harriet Morriseau had seven children together: Victoria, David, Pierre, Eugene, Christian, Michael, and Lisa.

AN EMERGING ARTIST

Like many young artists, Norval Morriseau did not earn enough on which to live. Around 1958, he found a job at a gold mine and moved with Harriet to Cochenour, near Red Lake, Ontario. There he met Dr. Joseph Weinstein, a doctor who had trained as an artist in Paris, where he had developed ties to the European modern art scene. Joseph's wife, fellow artist Esther Weinstein, recalled a visit to McDougal's, the local general store, where "to my surprise, I saw those two very unusual paintings [including *Untitled (Thunderbird Transformation)*, c. 1958–60] standing on the floor." Esther Weinstein asked the store proprietor, Fergus McDougal, to invite the artist to visit their home.⁶ *Untitled*, c. 1958, from that same period, may be the second painting to which she was alluding.



Norval Morriseau, *Untitled*, c. 1958, watercolour and ink on birchbark, 71.3 x 111.3 cm, Weinstein Collection, Canadian Museum of History, Gatineau, QC. This work was acquired by Joseph and Esther Weinstein in Red Lake in the late 1950s.

When Morriseau knocked on the Weinsteins' door a few days later with paintings to sell, the couple quickly welcomed him, and he spent many hours reading their art books and discussing art with them. Art historian Ruth B. Phillips notes that Dr. Weinstein supplied Morriseau with high-quality art supplies, such as paper and gouache paints, and encouraged him to consider himself a professional artist "in the Western sense, rather than as a producer of tourist souvenirs."⁷ This chance alliance between an Indigenous man and a cosmopolitan couple clearly introduced Morriseau to a wider understanding of art, which inspired him.⁸

Morrisseau's early work was also championed by Selwyn Dewdney, an anthropologist and artist who was recording pictograph sites in the area. In 1960, local police constable Bob Sheppard, who was stationed on McKenzie Island, near Cochenour, wrote to his friend Dewdney and suggested that he meet Morrisseau. The two were introduced in 1960, and, like the Weinsteins, Dewdney shared with Morrisseau his interest in modern art, including Mexican mural painting by Diego Rivera (1886–1957), Surrealist art by Salvador Dalí (1904–1989), and works by such artists as Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) and Henri Matisse (1869–1954). Unlike the Weinsteins, however, Dewdney initially

encouraged Morrisseau to work in traditional media like birchbark and leather, though he also supported the artist's early experimentation in oils.⁹ He also likely pushed Morrisseau to sign his work in Cree syllabics, an alphabet

Morrisseau had learned from his wife.¹⁰ Morrisseau in turn shared his cultural knowledge of rock art with Dewdney, who studied and wrote on the subject. Their correspondence offers insight into Morrisseau's aim to educate Canadians about Indigenous art and culture. Later, Dewdney urged Morrisseau to record a series of stories explaining the images in his art, which resulted in a book edited by Dewdney entitled *Legends of My People: The Great Ojibway*.¹¹

Around 1958, Morrisseau was also introduced to Susan Ross (1915–2006), a printmaker and painter from Thunder Bay who was sketching in the Cochenour area and specialized in painting portraits of local Indigenous people in a Post-Impressionist style. They became friends and Morrisseau came to depend on Ross for art supplies and answers to his questions about art.¹² Morrisseau would send his paintings to Ross on the train from Red Lake to Thunder Bay, and he relied on her to sell them. With the proceeds from those sales, Ross bought Morrisseau art supplies and also a tape recorder so that he could better record the Anishinaabe stories told by his Elders. Their correspondence reveals Morrisseau's growing confidence in his role as an artist and his increasing awareness of European concepts of art.

Word of Morrisseau's art spread. Ross discussed it with Toronto gallery owner Jack Pollock, who then planned to seek Morrisseau out while on a trip to Beardmore in 1962 to teach a painting workshop sponsored by the Ontario government. Pollock later explained that it was Morrisseau who approached him.¹³ Describing Morrisseau as an odd artist with no artistic ties and living an isolated existence, Pollock noted that he was intrigued by the paintings and



Norval Morrisseau, *Susan*, 1983, pen and black ink on wove paper, 58.6 x 73.8 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

drawings he saw because of their “unique sense of space” and “effortless and flowing” composition.¹⁴ “I knew that Morrisseau was an artist with vision,” he wrote later, “and I decided then and there that I would show them [the paintings] in Toronto.”¹⁵

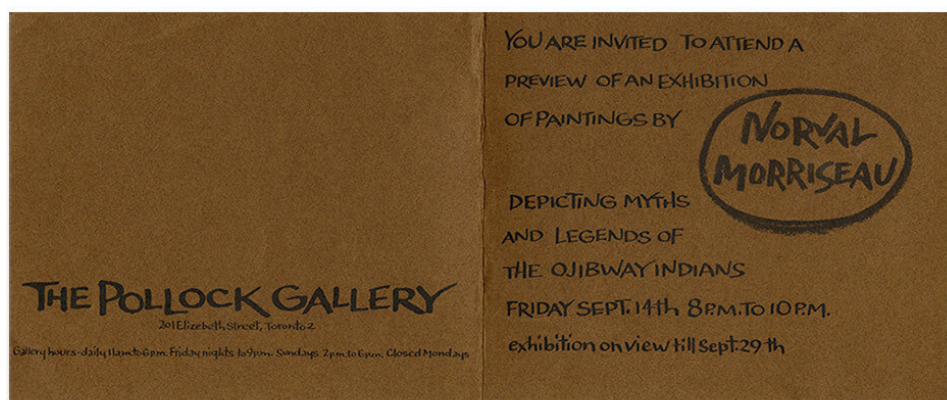


Film still of Norval Morrisseau and Jack Pollock from the National Film Board documentary *The Paradox of Norval Morrisseau*, 1974.

COMMERCIAL SUCCESS

The 1962 exhibition of Norval Morrisseau’s work at the Pollock Gallery in Toronto marked the first time an Indigenous artist had shown work in a contemporary art gallery in Canada, and the media hailed the debut as a new development in Canadian art.¹⁶ All the paintings sold on the first day and the exhibition instantly made Morrisseau a celebrity artist and a public figure.

Yet success was a mixed blessing: both Morrisseau’s work and his private life were subjected to scrutiny. His art received mixed reviews, judged by critics as either modern or primitive or a combination of the two, and Morrisseau himself was framed as a painter of legends, in keeping with the images of the “Imaginary Indian,” the “Noble Savage,” and the “Hollywood Indian” peddled by popular culture.¹⁷ This stereotypical



Invitation to Norval Morrisseau’s first solo exhibition, held at Pollock Gallery in 1962.

attitude was moulded by deeply entrenched colonial views and had little to do with Morrisseau as an individual or an artist. Astutely, Morrisseau defied these conceptions: he attempted to take charge of his life story by challenging interviewers and critics. For example, in the *Toronto Star* in 1975, he responded to art critic Gary Michael Dault's query about the media's scrutiny of his private life:

I am tired of hearing about Norval the drunkard, Norval with the hangover, Norval in jail, Norval torn apart by his allegiance both to Christianity and to the old Indian ways.... They speak about this tortured man, Norval Morrisseau—I'm not tortured. I've had a marvelous time. When I was drinking. Now that I'm not drinking. I've had a marvelous time in my life.¹⁸

This effort had mixed results, as press reports typically characterized his challenges as rants.

Still, Morrisseau's paintings began to command attention in art circles, and his success generated interest in the work of other Indigenous artists across Canada. Collectors started to take contemporary Indigenous arts more seriously, and although Morrisseau was still living in Beardmore with Harriet and their growing family, he began to travel to Toronto to sell his works to dealers and to negotiate new commissions. He often relied on art dealers, politicians, and government employees to aid him in his efforts to promote his work. In 1965, the Glenbow Foundation in Calgary purchased eleven Morrisseau works, including *Jo-Go Way Moose Dream*, c. 1964, shown here. This significant sale led to more exhibitions, including one at the Musée du Québec (now the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec) in Quebec City the following year, that signalled a growing national interest in the artist's work.¹⁹



Norval Morrisseau, *Jo-Go Way Moose Dream*, c. 1964, tempera on brown paper, 81.3 x 132 cm, Glenbow Museum, Calgary. As noted by the Glenbow Museum, Morrisseau recreates the story of a dream of an Ojibwa named Luke Onanakongos (Jo-Go Way): "In dreams of my youth, my spirit dwelled inside a huge moose, and I was protected from hardships of this earth. In middle life, the moose discharged my spirit from his body and it became one with my earthly self. The moose told me to purify myself spiritually and I did this for a time. Finally, in my old age, I rebelled and left forever the dream that pulled me toward that era."

Shortly after his exhibition at the Musée du Québec, Morrisseau was one of nine Indigenous artists commissioned to create work for the Indians of Canada Pavilion at Expo 67 in Montreal. His large-scale exterior mural showed bear cubs being nursed by Mother Earth, and when organizers raised concerns about this unorthodox image, Morrisseau decided to leave the project rather than censor his drawing. The mural was changed and completed by his friend and fellow artist Carl Ray (1943–1978). Through that commission, however, Morrisseau had met Herbert T. Schwarz, a consultant on the Expo pavilion, an antique dealer, and the owner of Galerie Cartier in Montreal. Schwarz

encouraged Morrisseau to illustrate eight traditional Anishinaabe legends, which he published as *Windigo and Other Tales of the Ojibways* (1968).



Norval Morrisseau's mural for the Indians of Canada Pavilion at Expo 67. Commissioning Indigenous artists to design the Indians of Canada Pavilion at Expo 67 is now considered a pivotal step in acknowledging activism around and awareness of Indigenous issues in Canada, but Morrisseau left the project when government officials deemed his mural design of bear cubs nursing from Mother Earth to be too controversial.

Schwarz also organized Morrisseau's first international exhibition. Based on a solo show held at Galerie Cartier in 1967, a selection of works travelled to the Art Gallery of Newport, in Newport, Rhode Island, in 1968 and then on to Saint

Paul Galerie in Saint-Paul-de-Vence in the south of France in 1969. Held in an area populated by European modern artists such as Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) and Marc Chagall (1887–1985), this show added to Morrisseau's credibility as an artist and established his international reputation. It is also when he became widely known as "Picasso of the North," which is how Schwarz marketed Morrisseau in the posters advertising the French exhibition.²⁰

MORRISSEAU'S DECADE

The 1960s established Norval Morrisseau as a noteworthy contemporary Indigenous artist in Canada, and he soon became an advocate for emerging artists. In 1971, artist Daphne Odjig (b. 1919), who owned Odjig Indian Prints of Canada Ltd., opened a small store of the same name on Donald Street in Winnipeg, which became a gathering place for artists working in the Indigenous art scene. Odjig then founded the Professional Native Indian Artists Inc. (PNIAI), which came to be known as the Indian Group of Seven, to promote and support Indigenous artists throughout Canada and to change the public's perceptions about them.²¹ In 1974, Odjig expanded her shop and established the New Warehouse Gallery, where the PNIAI's inaugural exhibition featured more than two hundred works. At the time, work by Indigenous artists was shown in museums of anthropology or mythologized as "souvenir" art rather than being exhibited in mainstream art galleries. The PNIAI, of which Morrisseau was a key member, was featured in exhibitions in Winnipeg, Montreal, and London, England.



Daphne Odjig, *So Great Was Their Love*, 1975, acrylic on canvas, 101.6 x 81.3 cm, private collection.

Morrisseau, along with his brother-in-law Joshim Kakegamic (1952–1993) and fellow PNIAI member Carl Ray (1943–1978), worked to further awareness of Indigenous art by taking part in a series of educational workshops organized by the Ontario Department of Education at local schools and community clubs in northwestern Ontario. In these workshops, Morrisseau and his artist colleagues introduced budding Indigenous artists to their approaches to painting and drawing while demonstrating a form of visual storytelling.

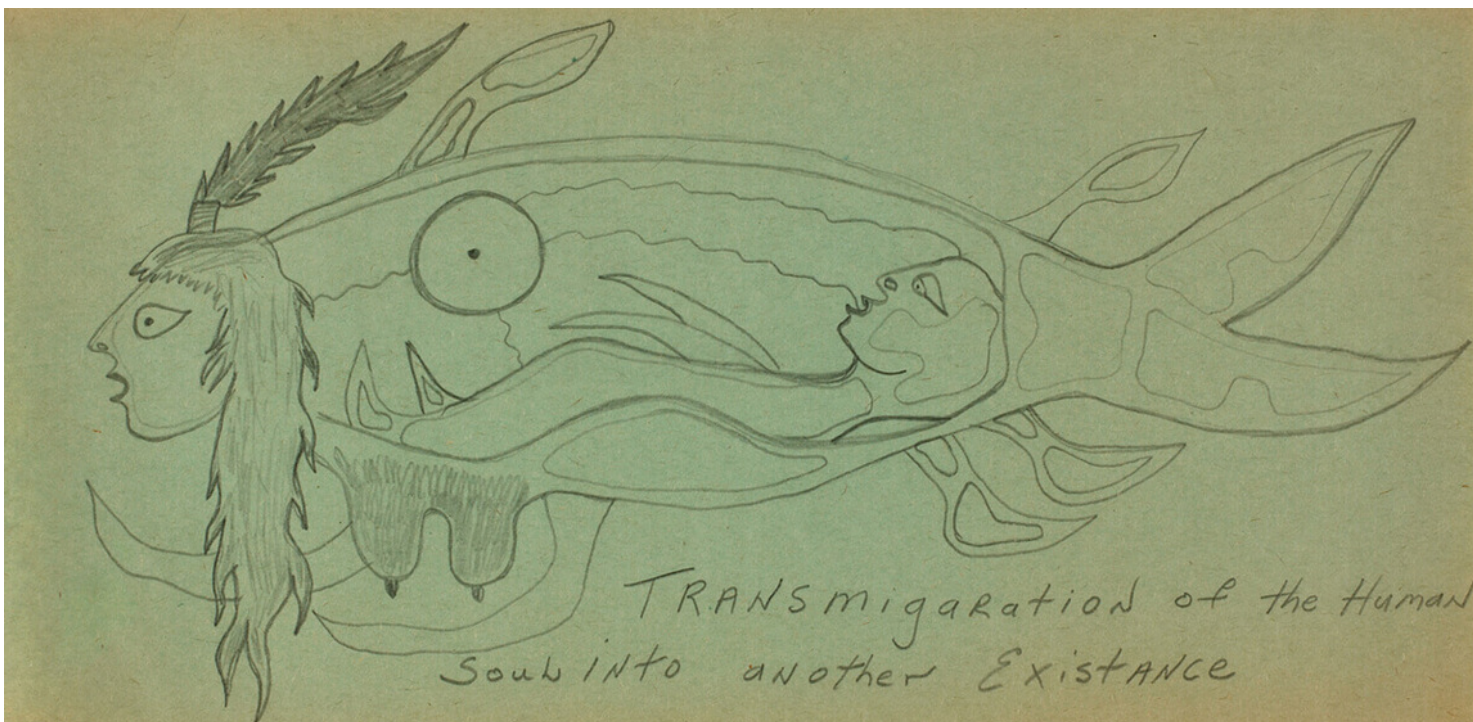
Around the same time, three of Morrisseau's brothers-in-law, Henry, Joshim, and Goyce Kakegamic, formed the Triple K Cooperative in Red Lake, Ontario. It was a silkscreen company designed to give Indigenous artists control over the art they produced and access to new Indigenous and mainstream audiences. Morrisseau also began to produce graphic art, disseminating prints much more widely than his paintings and thereby strengthening an art movement built around his artistic vocabulary.



Norval Morrisseau standing in front of a mural at the Red Lake Indian Friendship Centre, 1960s. Morrisseau painted the figure in the centre section of the mural while Carl Ray painted the bird at left and Joshim Kakegamic painted the bear at right.

Morrisseau's position as a contemporary artist continued to confound the museum establishment in Canada, however. In 1972, when the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) in Toronto purchased eleven paintings by Morrisseau, its curator of ethnology, Dr. Edward Rogers, acknowledged it was the first time the museum had acquired contemporary paintings.²² The Glenbow Museum in Calgary and the Museum of Civilization (now the Museum of History) in Gatineau also purchased Morrisseau's works, yet, like the ROM, did not know quite where to place them. Morrisseau had drawn attention to just how difficult it was for contemporary Indigenous artists to have their work taken seriously in the Canadian art scene.

Although this period was one of immense artistic productivity, Morrisseau continued to struggle with alcoholism, which had plagued him since his youth. In 1973 he was arrested for public drunkenness and incarcerated for six months in Kenora, Ontario. Ironically, it was a highly industrious time for the artist, as he was provided with an additional cell to use as an art studio and given a lot of time to paint. While in prison, Morrisseau created a series of sketches on paper towel, including *Transmigration of the Human Soul into Another Existence*, 1972-73, and such noteworthy paintings as *Indian Jesus Christ*, 1974. Upon his release, Morrisseau became the subject of two National Film Board of Canada documentary films, *The Colours of Pride* (1973) and *The Paradox of Norval Morrisseau* (1974).²³ While the films reflect the assimilationist movement of the time, which aimed to extinguish Indigenous cultural distinctiveness, they also raised Morrisseau's profile in Canada and set the stage for significant public acceptance.

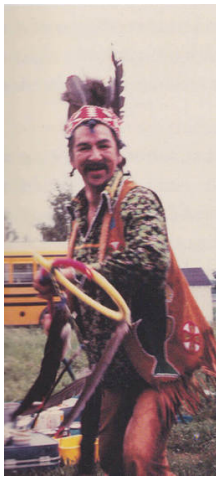


Norval Morrisseau, *Transmigration of the Human Soul into Another Existence*, 1972-73, graphite on wove paper, 18 x 36.5 cm irregular, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. This is one of approximately sixty drawings Morrisseau completed while imprisoned in Kenora Jail for a short time in the early 1970s.

ECKANKAR: A NEW SPIRITUALITY

From the beginning of his career, Norval Morrisseau had featured strong Anishinaabe and Christian themes in his art; in the mid-1970s, however, he began to display a more personal hybrid spirituality. During this period, Morrisseau continued to work with art dealer Jack Pollock, whose assistant, Eva Quan, introduced him to the spiritual movement Eckankar. This doctrine combines Eastern spiritual traditions from India and China, and Morrisseau was primarily interested in two specific aspects: astral travel and spiritual light. "Through Eckankar, Morrisseau develops a vocabulary for his shamanism," wrote Greg Hill, and it is true that Morrisseau soon began to cast himself as a shaman artist beyond the strict protocols of Anishinaabe culture.²⁴

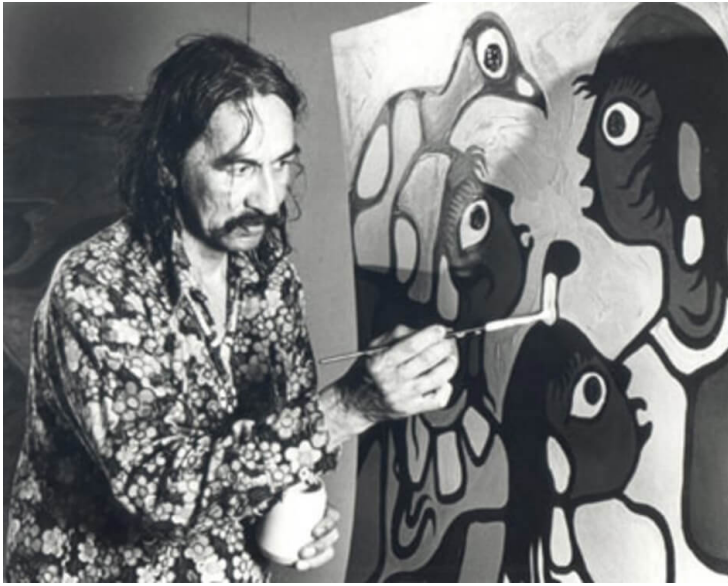
In the summer of 1978, Morrisseau, long fascinated with the British Royal Family (he named his eldest daughter Victoria), purchased china and a silver tea set in Toronto and told his art dealer that he dreamed of hosting a Buckingham Palace-style tea party. Pollock jumped at the opportunity to market this idea and flew a group of art collectors, art critics, journalists, and friends to Beardmore for the event.



Documentation of Norval Morrisseau's tea party held in Beardmore, ON, 1978.

Morrisseau performed the role of shaman for his guests, leading a smudging ceremony and serving blueberry tea.²⁵ The party, like the exploration of Eckankar, seemed to prompt Morrisseau to engage the notion of himself as a shaman artist publicly and led to artworks that fused Anishinaabe and Eckankar teachings. It was a path Morrisseau would pursue until the end of his career.

That fall, Morrisseau was appointed to the Order of Canada in recognition of his contributions to Canadian art. He had previously been awarded the Canada Centennial Medal in 1968 and had been made a member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Art in 1973, yet this honour solidified his reputation as an artist of national and international stature. An exhibition entitled *Art of the Woodland Indian* at the recently created McMichael Canadian Art Collection in Kleinburg, Ontario, also included an artist's residency at Tom Thomson's Shack on the gallery grounds, where Morrisseau painted and also met with visitors. It was proof that Morrisseau was riding a tide and being recognized as a significant force in Indigenous art.



Norval Morrisseau working on a painting while artist in residence at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection in 1979. Photograph by Ian Samson.

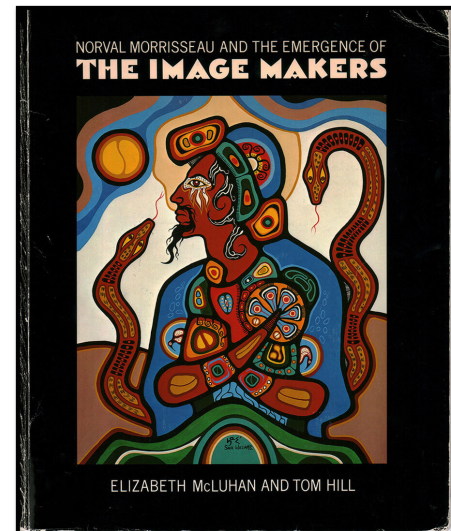


Norval Morrisseau, *Shaman and Disciples*, 1979, acrylic on canvas, 180.5 x 211.5 cm, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, ON.

SOLIDIFYING HIS LEGACY

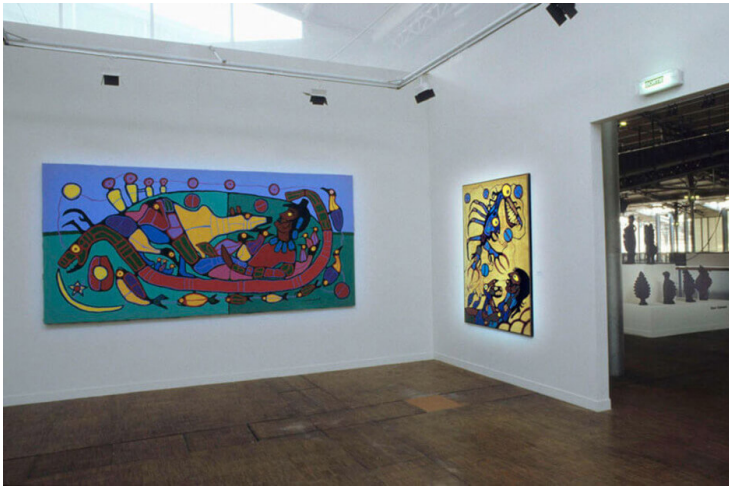
By the 1980s, it was clear that Norval Morrisseau had inspired a new generation of artists. An exhibition curated by Tom Hill and Elizabeth McLuhan in 1984 at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto placed Morrisseau's work among pieces created by a larger group of artists, including Daphne Odjig (b. 1919), Carl Ray (1943-1978), Joshim Kakegamic (1952-1993), Roy Thomas (1949-2004), and Blake Debassige (b. 1956), who had followed Morrisseau's lead stylistically to create their own unique expressions. The show, entitled *Norval Morrisseau and the Emergence of the Image Makers*, celebrated Morrisseau's significance as an artist and a trailblazer of an artistic movement called the Woodland School. Saul Williams's (b. 1954) *Homage to Morrisseau*, 1979-80, which was featured on the cover of the exhibition catalogue, clearly illustrates how important Morrisseau's visual vocabulary was to the group.

In early 1987, Morrisseau's work was celebrated as part of a series of group art events involving other Indigenous artists, such as Saskatchewan Cree artist Allen Sapp (b. 1928). His art also appeared in a solo exhibition in Santa Barbara, California, organized by Canadian actor John Vernon. During this time, the artist, who had been sober for a number of years, returned to drinking. In March, he was discovered living on the streets of downtown Vancouver. The press pounced on the story: for most of a month, Morrisseau was front-page news as reporters charted the ups and downs of his misfortune. When Morrisseau recovered and started painting again, the press showed little interest.



Saul Williams's *Homage to Morrisseau* is featured on the cover of the exhibition catalogue *Norval Morrisseau and the Emergence of the Image Makers*, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, 1984.

In 1989, Morrisseau was included in an important international art exhibition at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris that was organized to coincide with the two hundredth anniversary of the French Revolution. *Magiciens de la Terre*, curated by Jean-Hubert Martin, included one hundred contemporary artworks: fifty by Western artists and fifty by non-Western artists. It was an attempt to counteract the ethnocentric practices of most exhibitions at the time, but it has since been scorned as one of the last shows to frame Indigenous arts within a discourse of primitivism. Still, being selected for the exhibition marked a milestone in Morrisseau's career.²⁶



Installation view of Norval Morrisseau's *Untitled*, n.d., and *Artist With Thunderbird Vision (The Visionary)*, 1977, in the *Magiciens de la Terre* exhibition in Paris, France, 1989.



Installation of Morrisseau's *Androgyny*, 1983, and *Man Changing into Thunderbird*, 1977, in the exhibition *Norval Morrisseau: Shaman Artist* at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, 2006.

For more than a decade afterward, Morrisseau, aging and suffering from Parkinson's disease, faded from view as interest in his work waned. That changed, however, when the National Gallery of Canada mounted an exhibition of Morrisseau's oeuvre in 2006. It was the first retrospective for a contemporary Indigenous artist ever held at the gallery, and it renewed interest in Morrisseau's art and shifted the public's understanding of its importance to the history of Canadian art. Because much of Morrisseau's work was scattered in private and public collections, many Canadians had never seen his paintings, and certainly had never seen so many of his key pieces in one place at the same time. Morrisseau revelled in the attention at the openings in Ottawa and subsequent locations as the exhibition travelled in Canada and the United States. The following year, on December 2, 2007, Morrisseau died of complications related to Parkinson's disease, leaving intact his legacy as the *Mishomis*, or grandfather, of contemporary Indigenous art in Canada.



NORVAL MORRISSEAU

Life & Work by Carmen Robertson



Still image of Norval Morrisseau from *The Paradox of Norval Morrisseau*, directed by Henning Jacobson and Duke Redbird, 1974.



KEY WORKS

In his lifetime, Norval Morrisseau created thousands of artworks, most of which are held in small private collections. His oeuvre has not been fully catalogued, but the key works selected here reflect the depth and breadth of his artistic practice.

UNTITLED (THUNDERBIRD TRANSFORMATION) C. 1958–60



Norval Morrisseau, *Untitled (Thunderbird Transformation)*, c. 1958–60
Watercolour and ink on birchbark, 63 x 101.3 cm
Canadian Museum of History, Gatineau, QC

This early work by Norval Morrisseau was created during a period of experimentation in which he was linking the ideas and traditions of Anishinaabe art with his own emerging artistic vision. It brings together an important spiritual figure (Thunderbird), a cultural belief (transformation), and a traditional Anishinaabe artistic medium (birchbark). In northwestern Ontario, birchbark is readily available and has long been used by Anishinaabe artists for making containers, for building canoes and dwellings, and as a surface for writing.



LEFT: Birchbark basket, Anishinaabe Ojibwa, Northeastern Woodlands, Temagami First Nation, Museum of Canadian History, Gatineau, QC. RIGHT: Birchbark basket made by Patricia Kakegamic and painted by Norval Morrisseau, 1963, 17 x 42.5 x 48.5 cm, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada Aboriginal Art Collection, Gatineau, QC.

In this image, we can already see some of the themes to which Morrisseau would return many times throughout his career. *Untitled (Thunderbird Transformation)* illustrates a traditional spiritual narrative but also highlights Morrisseau's personal identification with Thunderbird, the powerful spirit-



being that often signifies spiritual transformation. Thunderbird appears repeatedly in the artist's paintings, and this work prefigures similar concepts masterfully painted in *Man Changing into Thunderbird*, 1977.

Some hints of the style Morrisseau would adopt in the following years are also visible. The black lines that would become hallmarks of the artist's approach are here, though they are less intense than in later works. These lines create defined areas of space inside the two beings, which Morrisseau fills with detail. Here these details have a sketch-like quality and are clearly articulated—see, for example, the feathers and fingers. While he would continue to emphasize the interior space, Morrisseau would later discard this detail in favour of a more stylized design.

SELF-PORTRAIT DEVoured BY DEMONS 1964



Norval Morrisseau, *Self-Portrait Devoured by Demons*, 1964
Acrylic on paper, 209.2 x 78.7 cm
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto

Norval Morriseau painted this work two years after his gallery debut at the Pollock Gallery in Toronto. He made a number of self-representations over the course of his career and *Self-Portrait Devoured by Demons* is an early but powerful example of this aspect of Morriseau's oeuvre. He painted two other versions of himself entwined with snakes; together, these works signify the struggles Morriseau faced upon entry into the mainstream art world.

In this painting, seven snakes envelop the artist. A Freudian interpretation would read the snakes as phallic symbols. In Christian tradition, snakes are associated with evil. Yet given Morriseau's cultural background, an intersection of meanings is central to understanding this imagery. In Anishinaabe culture, the snake is not always a signifier of evil: as early twentieth-century ethnomusicologist Frances Densmore noted in her field research of the Anishinaabe, snakes also have powers to heal the sick and were used in mide rites of the Midewiwin religion.¹

The number seven, too, is significant. In Christianity, it signifies spiritual perfection and completeness. As Anishinaabe scholar Edward Benton-Banai points out, this number is highly emblematic for the Anishinaabe: seven fires, seven original clans, and seven generations.² Seven also denotes spirituality, completeness, and redemption. Benton-Banai explains that the seventh fire, for example, is a prophetic rebirth and renewal of Anishinaabe culture. Morriseau also used seven as a signifier in his painting *Water Spirit*, 1972. In this painting, he surrounds Micipijiu, the horned water lynx, with seven divided circles to reinforce the supernatural power of the spirit-being.

In *Self-Portrait Devoured by Demons*, Morriseau appears to be bound by the snakes, which may suggest the uncertainty he felt as an emerging contemporary artist. Although these snakes recall traditional stories, Morriseau may have reinterpreted their meaning to suit his contemporary situation. The snakes may be read as a visual reference to the stranglehold Morriseau's Indigeneity (both cultural and political) had on him as an artist and as an Indigenous man living in Canada in the 1960s. As he broke new ground, tentatively negotiating the terrain of Canadian cultural politics, Morriseau was clearly uncertain of his fate and he renders that sense of vulnerability here.



Norval Morriseau, *Man and Snake*, 1964, India ink and tempera on building paper, 175.3 x 81.3 cm, Glenbow Museum, Calgary. Morriseau returned to this subject in paintings and drawings several times throughout his career.

ARTIST IN UNION WITH MOTHER EARTH 1972



Norval Morrisseau, *Artist in Union with Mother Earth*, 1972

Acrylic on canvas, 77.5 x 116.8 cm

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

Artist in Union with Mother Earth is one of the many erotic works Norval Morrisseau produced in his career, though most of them are found in private collections and have seldom been seen publicly. Morrisseau's erotic works significantly reveal the artist's personal views on sexuality and they also celebrate un-sanitized versions of the profane, which play a strong role in Indigenous cultural stories. Six of these works were shown at Regina's MacKenzie Art Gallery in 1999 in an exhibition entitled *Exposed: Aesthetics of Aboriginal Erotic Art*. This painting, acquired in 2009 by the National Gallery of Canada, helps to illustrate the diversity of this little-known part of Morrisseau's oeuvre.

Morrisseau was bisexual, and curator Lee-Ann Martin notes that his paintings of the erotic fall into two categories: “many of them based on personal sexual experiences and fantasies involving men while others depict the sexual union of man and woman.¹ The phallus, especially, found its way into Morrisseau’s erotic works as a powerful symbol of masculinity and fertility. Women’s breasts and torsos are often visible also, though, as in *Artist in Union*, these sometimes belong to female spirit figures such as Mother Nature rather than to humans.



LEFT: Norval Morrisseau, *Indian Erotic Fantasy*, n.d., acrylic on canvas, 257.8 x 152.4 cm, private collection. Morrisseau produced many erotic works, but most of them have never been shown publicly. RIGHT: Norval Morrisseau, *Phallic God in Disguise*, 1972, acrylic on canvas, 119.3 x 70 cm, private collection.

Curator Michelle McGeough has found that, like elements in some of his other paintings, Morrisseau’s representations of the body reference both Christian and Anishinaabe world views.² For example, *Androgyny*, 1983, in its title and interconnected imagery, articulates an ambiguous and fluid notion of sexuality commensurate with Indigenous views of gender identity, whereas *Phallic God in Disguise*, 1972, demonstrates a phallocentric and patriarchal representation more closely aligned with Eurocentric and Christian conceptions of gender.

Artist in Union with Mother Earth portrays sex as a natural and enjoyable act. Here, a womb-like oval joins the artist with Mother Earth in coitus; both of them look satisfied, and her breasts and his phallus are prominently displayed. Yet Morrisseau implies more than physicality in this painting. Mother Earth’s legs dangle outside the limits of the canvas to symbolically articulate how sexual ecstasy overflows the confines of corporeality and reaches the sacredness of life. This sexual experience more profoundly unifies humans with all living and sacred beings.

WATER SPIRIT 1972



Norval Morrisseau, *Water Spirit*, 1972
Acrylic on brown kraft paper, 81 x 183 cm
Canadian Museum of History, Gatineau, QC

This painting of Micipijiu, sometimes described as a horned water lynx, shows the power of this manitou, or spirit-being. In Anishinaabe culture, Micipijiu expresses the duality of good and evil. Literary theorist Victoria Brehm argues that Micipijiu underwent a metamorphosis after the period of European contact: once a figure that enhanced social cohesion, Micipijiu came to be seen by shamans as an evil figure, as an effect of Western culture on the Anishinaabe world view.¹ Norval Morrisseau painted Micipijiu more than once, especially during the 1960s and 1970s, but this forceful image imposingly dominates the otherwise blank field and demonstrates the complexities of Morrisseau's assured artistic practice.

Pictographs of Micipijiu have been found at the ancient Agawa rock art site on Lake Superior in northwestern Ontario, and Morrisseau paints this Micipijiu in an earth-tone palette that recalls Anishinaabe rock art and incised birchbark representations.² Yet the work, by its scale, themes, and developed visual language, remains wholly contemporary. As in previous works, strong lines

define the image. The interior segmentation of the figure's body illustrates an incarnation of spiritual and physical power. The circular forms that surround the water spirit represent its dualities (good and evil) and symbolize the *megis*, the cowrie shell that gives balance in life to the Anishinaabe.³ The undulating



LEFT: Agawa rock art depicting Micipijiu at Lake Superior Provincial Park, Ontario, 2011. Photograph by D. Gordon E. Robertson. RIGHT: Norval Morrisseau, *Mishupishu*, n.d., felt marker on cotton, 51 x 88 cm. This painting was owned by anthropologist and artist Selwyn Dewdney, who authored *Indian Rock Paintings of the Great Lakes*, 1962.



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being signifies the turbulent waters of northwestern Ontario lakes, but also tells of the rocky times Morrisseau faced in the ten years after the success of his 1962 debut art exhibition.

This work was featured as part of an international art exhibition entitled *Canadian Indian Art '74* that was held at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto and showcased two hundred works by Indigenous people from across Canada. *Water Spirit* was also included in Morrisseau's 2006 retrospective exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa and is now part of the collection of the Canadian Museum of History in Gatineau, Quebec, which maintains the largest holding of Morrisseau works.

INDIAN JESUS CHRIST 1974



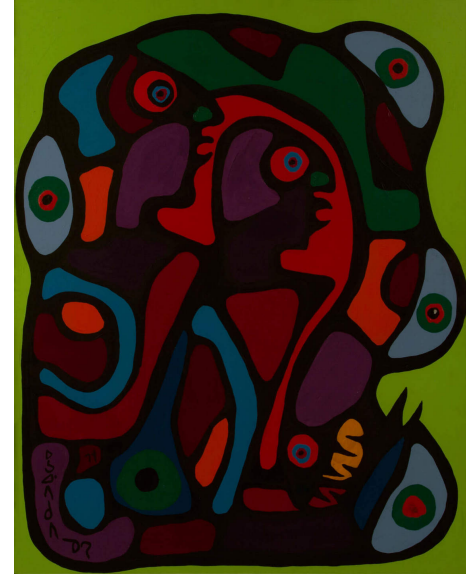
Norval Morrisseau, *Indian Jesus Christ*, 1974

Acrylic on paper, 134.6 x 68.5 cm

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada Aboriginal Art Collection,
Gatineau, QC

Indian Jesus Christ was made famous in the 1974 National Film Board documentary *The Paradox of Norval Morrisseau*, in which the artist states, "Jesus died for the white man, not for Indians." As the painting is shown onscreen, the lyrics of a song written by Duke Redbird and sung by Ojibway singer-songwriter Shingoose suggest, "You painted their Jesus, to expose their hypocrisy."¹ Given Norval Morrisseau's experience of sexual abuse at a Catholic residential school as a boy, such pointed comments are not surprising. However, this canvas and its representation in the film created controversy. Seemingly struggling to counter Morrisseau's comments, the narrator of the documentary describes the artist as someone seeking refuge in Christianity.

Before he presented Christ as Indigenous in this painting, Morrisseau had already illustrated a number of Indigenized Christian subjects, including representations of Christ (1966, 1972), the Virgin Mary (1962, 1973), and John the Baptist (1973).² In 1966, he even painted himself as a haloed Jesus Christ carrying two medicine bags and wearing a Midewiwin shamanic hood and a cross in *Portrait of the Artist as Jesus Christ*. Morrisseau painted another representation of himself as Christ in Midewiwin robes in 1972; it was published in the *Toronto Star* newspaper that year with an accompanying article that noted Morrisseau was "torn between two cultures."³ Ironically, these conflations of Christian and Anishinaabe symbolism caused little stir. *Indian Jesus Christ*, then, illustrates the complex colonial landscape in which Morrisseau was living.



Norval Morrisseau, *Adam and Eve and the Serpent*, 1974, acrylic on card, 101 x 80 cm, Thunder Bay Art Gallery, ON. Morrisseau painted a number of Indigenized Christian subjects throughout his career.

THE GIFT 1975



Norval Morrisseau, *The Gift*, 1975
Acrylic on paper, 196 x 122 cm
Helen E. Band Collection, Thunder Bay Art Gallery, ON



The Gift is a politically charged painting that demonstrates Norval Morrisseau's keen understanding of colonialism and challenges the inaccurate assumption that he is simply a painter of legends. This image of a shaman meeting a missionary directly confronts the role Christianity has played in the settling of Canada.

The "gift" to which Morrisseau refers in the title has several meanings that highlight a complex conflation of interrelated issues. First, the dots inside the three figures suggest smallpox and symbolize the historic spread of disease that arrived with Europeans and devastated Indigenous populations. Additionally, while the shaman and the missionary appear to exchange spiritual ideas, the young child seems to be captivated by the medicine bag. Though the shaman is shielding his child (and subsequent generations of Indigenous peoples), the Christian ways and European ideas signified by the missionary and the "gifts" in his medicine bag are seductive.

Other meanings of this painting are more ambiguous. While the overall palette of this work is executed in earth tones, Morrisseau incorporates the colours green and red to highlight an epistemological clashing of ways of knowing that occurred with European contact: the missionary thinks with his brain (green on red), while the shaman thinks with his heart (red on green).¹ A large black dot in the centre of the missionary's brain may signal Morrisseau's wounding experience with Christianity in a residential school, where he experienced physical and sexual abuse. The work, then, deals with both historic and contemporary problems associated with colonialism.

MAN CHANGING INTO THUNDERBIRD 1977



Norval Morrisseau, *Man Changing into Thunderbird*, 1977
Acrylic on canvas, six panels: each panel 153.5 x 125.7 cm
Private collection, on loan to the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto

Man Changing into Thunderbird is a six-panel masterpiece that throbs with colour and design and leaves viewers breathless with its intimate yet iconic rendering of Norval Morrisseau's life up to 1977. As art historian and curator Elizabeth McLuhan notes, between 1958 and 1960 Morrisseau "set out the themes and concerns he would deal with for the next twenty years," and this painting brings those ideas to fruition.¹

Morrisseau said of this work, "I've wanted to paint this picture for fifteen years but I couldn't do it in those days. This is the ultimate picture for me and I'm sharing it. Sharing it is wonderful." *Toronto Star* art critic Gary Michael Dault has concluded that *Man Changing into Thunderbird* is "the best work of his [Morrisseau's] career."²

In these six panels, Morrisseau melds his early experiences with his later adherence to Eckankar teachings. The work not only records Morrisseau's shifting vision of spirituality and his personal growth as an artist, but also charts his personal transformation into Copper Thunderbird, the spirit name he received in a healing ceremony and used as his signature. As the background colour of the panels becomes increasingly more copper, eclipsing the yellow ground in the first two panels, Morrisseau visually transforms: he is a young man embarking on a spiritual and artistic journey in panel one; a wing emerges in panel two; and a claw appears in panel three. By the fourth panel, the background has become entirely copper and two claws and a shamanic hairstyle signal the artist's evolution. In the final panel, Morrisseau's transformation is complete: he has become Copper Thunderbird. The intense colour and elaborate decorative elements in his changing headdress and regalia unite as Thunderbird, making this personal work a beautiful narrative conflation of self and artistic style.



Installation view of all six panels of Norval Morrisseau, *Man Changing into Thunderbird*, 1977, at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

THE STORYTELLER: THE ARTIST AND HIS GRANDFATHER 1978



Norval Morrisseau, *The Storyteller: The Artist and His Grandfather*, 1978
 Acrylic on canvas, diptych: each panel 176.3 x 96.6 cm
 Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada Aboriginal Art Collection,
 Gatineau, QC

Norval Morrisseau created *The Storyteller: The Artist and His Grandfather* two years after his introduction to Eckankar teachings, and here he presents himself as a young boy, respectfully acknowledging his debt to his Anishinaabek *Mishomis*, or grandfather. In the left panel of this diptych, Moses Potan Nanakonagos, the artist's maternal grandfather, appears regally enveloped in the spirits and colours of the natural and supernatural worlds, poised to convey his stories to the youngster in the right panel. The two panels connect but also diverge.

Morrisseau uses formal elements such as colour, line, and composition to reinforce the work's meaning. In drawing the grandfather and the artist with similar colours and lines of similar weight, he presents these family members as connected and thereby illustrates the respectful intergenerational transmission of knowledge. By compositionally positioning the elder storyteller as a stable pyramid, Morrisseau shows that his grandfather is grounded as a knowledge keeper. The boy receives spiritual information from his *Mishomis* but also from the form of a conflated bird/fish figure that swoops down diagonally from the opposite side of the frame.

Yet by painting two distinct panels, Morrisseau simultaneously emphasizes the differences between the two male figures. The contrast between the cool blues and mauves used in the background of the panel on the left and the warm yellows and reds of the panel on the right visually juxtaposes the two figures and their world views. Morrisseau is signalling his shift away from his Anishinaabe roots and toward the spiritual pursuit of Eckankar; curator Greg Hill acknowledges the "HU" in the right panel as a symbol for an Eckankar chant "that brings one's soul closer to God."¹ In this diptych, Morrisseau demonstrates his personal redirection as he carefully separates his grandfather's brand of shamanism from his own.



Norval Morrisseau at home in White Rock, BC, 1996. Photograph by Fred Cattrol.

ANDROGYNY 1983



Norval Morrisseau, *Androgyny*, 1983

Acrylic on canvas, 366 x 610 cm

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada

Aboriginal Art Collection, Gatineau, QC

Androgyny is breathtaking not only because of its intense colours and sheer size but also because of its intent and its complex imagery. The monumental canvas expresses Norval Morrisseau's personal understanding of life's interconnectedness and explores his notions of gender identity. At the centre of this painted cosmic universe is a dome enclosed by the outstretched wings of Thunderbird. The spirit figure is accompanied at the core of this world by other spirit-beings, or *manitous*, that represent the life force of all living things, including the snake that reaches from the underworld to the spirit world. Surrounding this centre are the turtles, muskrats, frogs, fish, birds, butterflies, trees, and men, women, and children that appear in many of Morrisseau's works.

In Anishinaabe tradition, an offering or a gift is often given to create ties, to honour, or to ask for assistance.¹ Morrisseau may have painted this mural to articulate his vision of a united Canada, and he offered it to the people of Canada as a decolonizing gesture of reconciliation, supporting artist and curator Gerald McMaster's characterization that Morrisseau's "greatest contribution to the art world was giving voice to Anishinaabe art and culture."² In a letter to the office of then-Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau explaining his planned gift, Morrisseau wrote: "The theme of the mural is A [sic] shaman that

is Androgyny in four directions, filled with all parts of nature in Canada, thunderbeings, sacred serpents and turtles, flowers, animals, and we children of Mother Earth. PS. Butterflies and Bumble Bees, too!"³ Morrisseau hoped the acceptance of this offering signalled the government's dedication to making Canada a welcoming and supportive place for all its peoples.

Androgyny was installed in the vast lobby of the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada headquarters in Gatineau, Quebec, in April 1983, where it hung, largely forgotten, until 2006, when the National Gallery of Canada chose to include it in a retrospective exhibition of Morrisseau's work. In the retrospective, *Androgyny* dominated an entire wall, drawing viewers to it and making it a favourite of visitors to the exhibition.

Because of the exposure the painting received during the retrospective, then-Governor General Michaëlle Jean arranged for it to be installed in the ballroom at her official residence, Rideau Hall. While it hung there, Prime Minister Stephen Harper chose the painting as the backdrop for the unveiling of his 2008 Cabinet. The press photos of that event show the prime minister and his Cabinet standing before Morrisseau's offering to the Canadian people.⁴ *Androgyny*, now recognized by critics and art historians as a significant work of Canadian art, reminds Canadians of the enduring bond formed by this important gift exchange.



The Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, twenty-seventh Governor General of Canada (2005-10), flanked by Norval Morrisseau's daughters Lisa and Victoria at the installation of *Androgyny*, 1983, at Rideau Hall, Ottawa, 2008.

OBSERVATIONS OF THE ASTRAL WORLD C. 1994



Norval Morrisseau, *Observations of the Astral World*, c. 1994

Acrylic on canvas, 236 x 514 cm

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

Observations of the Astral World depicts many of the Eckankar teachings that, after almost twenty years of study, Norval Morrisseau had fully adopted into his visual vocabulary. Explaining his understanding of the spiritual world and its many planes of existence, he stated, "There is a museum of the astral world that each individual goes to by his own free choice...to pick up some energy....

All the things that men will create are already up there."¹ Morrisseau also described this place as a "House of Inventions" and believed that he visited astral planes where spirits guided him to intuitively conceive of his paintings.

The astral worlds Morrisseau depicts in this large-scale work neither replace nor erase his Anishinaabe cultural vocabulary. They demonstrate a fusion. The syncretism that exists in this painting allows Morrisseau to tell stories that are meaningful to him. A flow of communication between the earthly world on the left and the spiritual worlds (shown by bands of colour) on the right illustrates the dynamics of Morrisseau's creativity. Morrisseau felt his brightly coloured canvases emitted healing powers, and due to his adoption of Eckankar beliefs, he felt that a spiritual force radiated from his colourful palette.

In this painting, the many ideas of personal and spiritual transformation that Morrisseau explored during his career culminate in a mature visual style. In the spheres or bubbles that encapsulate the different astral planes of this composition are the iconic images of animals, plants, humans, shamans, and spirit-beings that Morrisseau always painted. However, the clear lines and light-coloured palette are hallmarks of his later style, which, as art dealer Don Robinson notes, gives "viewers an overall



Norval Morrisseau, *Untitled (Shaman Traveller to Other Worlds for Blessings)*, c. 1990, acrylic on canvas, 124 x 147 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Morrisseau combined Anishinaabe and Eckankar symbolism in many of his later works.



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impression of peace, harmony and the existence of a unified life force."² A calm has descended on this painting that reflects the sense of quiet that the artist achieved in his sixties and seventies. Morrisseau has found balance in his personal life, and this symmetrical painting attests to that fact.



SIGNIFICANCE & CRITICAL ISSUES

Anishinaabe artist Norval Morrisseau worked outside the established traditions of European visual culture and on occasion used his art to make forceful political statements. He defied categorization and challenged conventional understandings of Indigenous art. Although the media judged him harshly for his alcoholism and his traditional beliefs, such as shamanism, Morrisseau succeeded in raising awareness of Indigenous aesthetics and cultural narratives as he developed an artistic vocabulary that inspired a new Canadian art movement.

RACIAL POLITICS AND ART

When Norval Morrisseau arrived on the Canadian art scene in 1962, he was something of an anomaly. At a time when enforced assimilation was national policy and First Nations had only recently been accorded the right to vote in federal elections, few Indigenous people made art that was viewed as contemporary within the narrow framework accepted in mainstream cultural circles. Most Indigenous artworks were considered artifacts, better displayed in ethnographic museums.



Norval Morrisseau painting outdoors in Red Lake, ON, August 1966. Morrisseau did not have access to an artist-studio space.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the federal government had invested heavily in the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative, and its director, James Houston (1921–2005), worked hard to market Inuit soapstone carvings, drawings, and prints as modern artistic expressions. Canadians were being primed to consider Indigenous arts as contemporary. The Canadian Guild of Crafts also supported Indigenous arts, but its shows were typically held in venues other than art galleries. Without government intervention, there appeared to be little appetite for Indigenous art in galleries in the early 1960s.

Morrisseau's 1962 exhibition at the Pollock Gallery in Toronto therefore sparked a national news event, in part because of the artist's racial identity and in part because he was creating contemporary art. Works like *Moose Dream Legend*, 1962, were hailed as both primitive and modern by critics at the time. Morrisseau's work demonstrated clear links to the oral narrative traditions of the Anishinaabe in its process and its focus on animals and spirit-beings, but also commented on how 150 years of the assimilationist policies of Canada's Indian Act, which included residential schooling, had visibly erased Indigenous issues and understandings from Canadian public life. Curator Gerald McMaster has described Morrisseau as "a latter-day neoprimitivist" because modern art had rejected all referents to things old or expressly cultural while it celebrated primitivism as a universal muse to the modern.¹



Norval Morrisseau, *Moose Dream Legend*, 1962, oil on wove paper, 54.6 x 75.3 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. This work was donated to the Art Gallery of Ontario in 1963 and was one of the earliest acquisitions of Morrisseau's art by a museum.

Morrisseau's entry onto the art scene can be best described as a rupture in Canadian art history. As the civil rights movement gained momentum in the United States and inspired Native Americans to push for greater equality, and as Indigenous populations in Mexico advanced similar struggles, Canadian Indigenous peoples also organized and confronted government practices. In June 1969, the release of the Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy (a document commonly known as the 1969 White Paper) by the Trudeau government in Ottawa triggered a series of political events. These resulted in the creation of the National Indian Brotherhood and regional factions that challenged the federal government to make changes to a system that was stacked against First Nations people.² Artists joined forces, too, to change the racialized ways art was being exhibited in Canada.

In 1967, Indigenous artists were commissioned to create the Indians of Canada Pavilion at Expo 67, a moment now considered pivotal in acknowledging activism and awareness of Indigenous issues in Canada, but Morrisseau left the project when the government officials organizing the exhibition deemed his mural design of bear cubs nursing from Mother Earth too controversial.

Morrisseau was part of a group called the Professional Native Indian Artists Inc., which was established by Odawa artist Daphne Odjig (b. 1919) in Winnipeg in 1973 and labelled the Indian Group of Seven by the press.³ Other members included Jackson Beardy (1944-1984), Alex Janvier (b. 1935), Carl

Ray (1943–1978), Eddy Cobiness (1933–1996), and Joseph Sanchez (b. 1948), and its purpose was to promote Indigenous arts and foster opportunities for emerging artists.⁴

As early as 1972, anthropologist and artist Selwyn Dewdney (1909–1979) had tried to persuade the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa to add works by Morrisseau to its collection, but his effort was unsuccessful.⁵ At the time, the ethnographic Canadian Museum of Man, then in Ottawa (now the Canadian Museum of History, Hull, Quebec), was the Canadian institution that collected contemporary Indigenous art, whereas the National Gallery bought works by non-Indigenous Canadian artists.⁶ It had been more than thirty years since Dewdney's initial request when the National Gallery of Canada purchased its first work by Norval Morrisseau. In 2006, the gallery then made him the subject of its first retrospective exhibition devoted entirely to a non-Inuit, Indigenous artist. The National Gallery of Canada mounted a retrospective exhibition of Pudlo Pudlat's art in 1990.⁷ As art critic Paul Gessel, writing in the *Ottawa Citizen*, noted under the front-page headline "An Art Pioneer Makes His Final Breakthrough," "Who would be the first Native artist to be given a show akin to the exhibitions granted such 'white' Canadian artists as Tom Thomson and Emily Carr? The consensus among the Aboriginal art community was that Norval Morrisseau...had to be the one."⁸ This media coverage repositioned Morrisseau as a major Canadian artist, validated Indigenous art as contemporary, and helped end the practice of separating Indigenous from mainstream artists in public discourse.



Norval Morrisseau in front of his painting *Androgyny*, 1983, at the opening of his solo exhibition *Norval Morrisseau—Shaman Artist* at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, 2006. Parkinson's disease confined Morrisseau to a wheelchair in the last years of his life.

A NEW DIRECTION FOR INDIGENOUS ART

Shaped largely by Anishinaabe cultural practices and his unique approach to storytelling, Norval Morrisseau's art style was distinctly different from what was fashionable in Eurocentric art circles. His visual vocabulary included heavy black lines that defined his subjects and divided their interior spaces, as well as the use of lines, colour, and composition that suggested relationships of interconnectedness. For example, a dramatic clash of colour and line might emphasize two opposing understandings of human relationships with the land, as in *The Gift*, 1975, in which Morrisseau explores colonial issues.

A new generation of artists, including Daphne Odjig (b. 1919), Carl Ray (1943–1978), Joshim Kakegamic (1952–1993), Blake Debassige (b. 1956), and Jackson

Beardy (1944–1984), was inspired to experiment with Morrisseau's style, technique, and reference to contemporary and traditional stories. This movement was described as Medicine Art or X-ray style and, collectively, the group came to be known as the Woodland School of art because many of the artists, like Morrisseau, came from northern Ontario communities. Although the name confused many people who thought the Woodland School was a physical school of art, and frustrated others who noted that it was derived from inaccurate anthropological classifications, the term stuck and continues to be used.



Daphne Odjig, *Conflict of Good and Evil*, 1966, acrylic paint on ivory wove paper, 46.2 x 63.5 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Odjig eventually moved away from this style of painting, which was influenced by Norval Morrisseau, and toward a more calligraphic style.



Joshim Kakegamic, *Honour the Sun*, c. 1970s, acrylic on paper, 55 x 74 cm, McMaster Museum of Art, Hamilton, ON. Kakegamic was Norval Morrisseau's brother-in-law and he studied with Morrisseau and fellow artist Carl Ray in the 1960s.

Norval Morrisseau and the Emergence of the Image Makers, a 1984 exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto curated by Elizabeth McLuhan and Tom Hill, charted the significance of Morrisseau's artistic innovation. Today, artists still use his lexicon in their paintings: Anishinaabe artist Christian Chapman (b. 1975), for example, makes deliberate references to Morrisseau's legacy of visual storytelling in his art.⁹ These devices have also migrated into popular culture on signs and websites in communities in northwestern Ontario, where they are signifiers of Indigeneity. The logo of the Assembly of First Nations includes elements of this style, with its defining black outlines, stylized eagle, and a sun symbol that conflates the four cardinal directions.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the work of Indigenous artists continues to be found mostly in "Native" commercial galleries across Canada rather than in mainstream art circles.



Christian Chapman, *Past, Present and Future of the Anishinabe People*, 2013, mixed media, three panels: each panel 75.5 x 96 cm, private collection.

THE ARTIST AS SHAMAN

Shamans are considered intermediaries or messengers between the human world and the spirit worlds, and, in a global context, engage in ecstatic experience.¹¹ Norval Morriseau, too, served as an intermediary and used his art as a medium with which to illustrate spiritual pathways. Curator Greg Hill notes that the artist's "practice of shamanism was primarily through his paintings."¹² Even though Morriseau passed up the opportunity to follow his grandfather into the strict protocols of Midewiwin spiritual practice, he set out to bring shamanism into his art, as in *Ojibway Shaman Figure*, 1975. In *Norval Morriseau: Travels to the House of Invention*, published in conjunction with Kinsman Robinson Galleries in 1997, Morriseau describes in detail his identity as a shaman artist, explaining how he was taught to leave his body and "go to other worlds."¹³

Morriseau painted a number of works that visually articulate his conflation of Anishinaabe and Eckankar spiritual cosmology and his new view of shamanism.¹⁴ Anishinaabe iconography such as Midewiwin hoods, sacred snakes, and the spirit-being Thunderbird, along with Eckankar symbolism, including the yellow all-seeing eyes of light, emerge in a number of works after the mid-1970s. Morriseau assuredly paints his syncretic union of Eckankar astral travel and Anishinaabe understandings of spiritual transformation in *Observations of the Astral World*, 1994; the Eckankar yellow all-seeing eye of light in the headdress of the shaman on the right side of the canvas may be a self-representation.

Morriseau's shamanism defined him but also complicated his public identity. Throughout his career, the press often seized on stereotypical tropes found in movies, novels, and advertising to cast Morriseau within the confining role of a "Noble Savage."¹⁵ At times, Morriseau capitalized on this reality, exploiting



Norval Morriseau, *Ojibway Shaman Figure*, 1975, acrylic on card, 101.6 x 81.3 cm, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

the clichés to his own ends. His famous 1978 tea party, in which Morrisseau played the role of shaman for a group of assembled guests, is a good example. While his performance at the event no doubt led to more sales of his art and personally touched many of his guests, his actions were ridiculed in the *Globe and Mail*, which noted that he “bared his loins to the sun goddess” to the “sounds of tom toms.”¹⁶ Morrisseau’s shaman-artist identity is complex: it could be seen to reinforce notions of authenticity promulgated by the “Noble Savage” myth, but it also intersects with his personal spiritual beliefs.



Norval Morrisseau, *Artist and Shaman between Two Worlds*, 1980, acrylic on canvas, 175 x 282 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

A COMPLICATED LEGACY

Norval Morrisseau challenged mainstream views of Indigenous peoples and succeeded in raising awareness and breaking down barriers. At the same time, he pioneered a new style of art that brought more Indigenous artists into mainstream galleries and is still practised today. Still, because of his struggles with substance abuse, his unconventional lifestyle, and his willingness to feed media stereotypes, Morrisseau, explains curator Gerald McMaster, became a “tragicomic artist—a role frequently reinforced by the art world.”¹⁷ The public’s keen interest in his unruly behaviour has tainted the legacy of his artistic achievements.

Morrisseau died in 2007 knowing he had achieved a stature few other Canadian artists have enjoyed. Yet with that success came a growing number of forgeries that have tarnished his reputation and caused wariness among collectors. Nonetheless, in 2004, late in the career of the then well-established artist, the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa purchased its first Morrisseau, *Observations of the Astral World*, c. 1994. In the years that followed, the National Gallery acquired many additional works by Morrisseau,

including *Untitled (Shaman Traveller to Other Worlds for Blessings)*, c. 1990. Finally Morrisseau's legacy appears to be garnering recognition, as evidenced by a growing public awareness of his artistic contributions and the increased sales of his work. His art continues to inspire and, as interest in contemporary Indigenous art grows, more and more scholars and writers like Ruth B. Phillips and Armand Ruffo are studying his life, his work, and its impact on Canadian art. Morrisseau is now taking his rightful place among the pantheon of great Canadian artists—in galleries, in academic circles, and in popular culture.



Norval Morrisseau, *Untitled (Shaman Traveller to Other Worlds for Blessings)*, c. 1990, acrylic on canvas, 124 x 147 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. The gallery acquired this work in 2006.



STYLE & TECHNIQUE

At a time when most Canadian artists were experimenting with the techniques of modern abstraction, Norval Morrisseau rejected those contemporary artistic trends in favour of a visual aesthetic that drew most directly from Anishinaabe cultural sources. In doing so, he created a style that was all his own.

EARLY EXPERIMENTS WITH CULTURAL REFERENCES

When he began to create art in the late 1950s, Norval Morriseau perused books supplied to him by his artist friends Joseph and Esther Weinstein and Selwyn Dewdney (1909–1979) for additional direction. He was enthralled by colour reproductions of work by Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) and Henri Matisse (1869–1954), studied examples of Mayan art, and inspected the forms and themes in Northwest Coast carvings. Primarily, however, Morriseau tapped Anishinaabe spiritual teachings and art as inspiration for his style. Curator David W. Penney sums up the result:

Morriseau's great insight, visible to us without the benefit of esoteric teaching, is the transitive and relational nature of all things. In his monumental paintings, his figures inhabit worlds in which they are inextricably immersed in states of transmission and transformation. He shows us an Anishinaabe vision of place that cannot be separated from the beings, human and nonhuman, material and immaterial, of which it is part, a place that is enacted rather than occupied.¹

It is Morriseau's holistic and interconnected sense of the world that offers an entry point for understanding his artistic style.

Morriseau's early works of the 1960s, including *Ancestors Performing the Ritual of the Shaking Tent*, c. 1958–61, demonstrate his close connection to generations of Anishinaabe elders. Works such as *Ancestors*

Performing the Ritual of the Shaking Tent, which were made on birchbark and in earth tones, deliberately reference stories and imagery from traditional Anishinaabe culture, such as rock art and the sacred Midewiwin medicine scrolls. For example, the pictograph of Micipijiu at the Agawa art site in northwestern Ontario is similar in form to Morriseau's *Water Spirit*, 1972. Yet while these images share a common subject and arrangement, Morriseau used formal elements such as composition, colour, and line to direct his art in fresh, innovative ways.



Norval Morriseau, *Ancestors Performing the Ritual of the Shaking Tent*, c. 1958–61, acrylic on birchbark with wood frame and plywood backing, 94.7 x 73 cm, Canadian Museum of History, Gatineau, QC.

COMPOSITION

Throughout his career, Norval Morrisseau repeatedly used the same classic, balanced compositional forms, as exemplified in *Untitled (Two Bull Moose)*, 1965. As well, he often situated his subjects in a pyramid with a central image or in a symmetrical arrangement with two figures or groupings balanced on the ground of the work. *Untitled (Thunderbird Transformation)*, c. 1958-60, is an early example that demonstrates this proportioned structure. Morrisseau positions the two figures opposite each other to achieve balance and uses three circles—suns or divided circles—to frame their heads. Created more than twenty years later, *Androgyny*, 1983, shows the dominating Thunderbird anchoring a symmetrical arrangement of figures on either side of two central ovoid forms. However, it is Morrisseau's portraits, from all periods, that best show the artist's preference for a stable central composition with a clear focal point. *Indian Jesus Christ*, 1974, and *Artist in Union with Mother Earth*, 1972, illustrate this style.



Norval Morrisseau, *Untitled (Two Bull Moose)*, 1965, acrylic on millboard, 81.3 x 243.9 cm, Thunder Bay Art Gallery, ON.

While he returned to this symmetrical structure many times, Morrisseau was an innovator and was not complacent with regard to style or technique. He often experimented: *Impressionist Thunderbirds*, 1975, for example, maintains the prominent central focal point, but the abstract, painterly background dramatically illustrates Morrisseau's awareness of European modern styles such as Impressionism. This painting clearly shows Morrisseau's willingness to explore more ways to render his Thunderbird imagery.



Norval Morrisseau, *Impressionist Thunderbirds*, 1975, acrylic on card, 51 x 39.5 cm, Richard H. Baker Collection. The loose style of the background was a departure for Morrisseau, who generally painted in flat blocks of colour. Morrisseau experimented with the backgrounds of other works, including *The Storyteller: The Artist and His Grandfather*, 1978.

COLOUR

Many of Norval Morriseau's first works from the mid- to late 1950s were line drawings on birchbark, such as *Untitled (Thunderbird Transformation)*, c. 1958–60. He experimented first with coloured pencils and then with oil paints, but in the early 1960s he began to rely on acrylic paints. Unlike many other artists, he seldom mixed colours, preferring instead to apply pigment directly from the paint tube.² In addition to using a variety of brushes, Morriseau often added liberal daubs of pigment to small sections of a painting using his fingers, which created a thick, uneven impasto, or layer of paint, on the canvas.³

While he is acknowledged as a bold colourist, Morriseau varied his palette, especially in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when he used earth tones to relate some works to tanned hides, birchbark, and other natural elements of his Anishinaabe roots. Yet even when Morriseau was working with a limited palette, as in *Migration*, 1973, he was thinking about the colours' significance to the overall painting. In its use of green and red, *The Gift*, 1975, symbolically communicates a juxtaposition between the beliefs of the

missionary and the shaman;⁴ even without bold colouring, the intense rendering of the eyes in that painting and many others makes them focal points and symbols of varying states of spiritual significance. Morriseau said of the process of painting, "The colours are in my mind somewhere. In fact, I have no preconceived idea where they will go. I can almost see them clearly."⁵



Norval Morriseau, *Migration*, 1973, acrylic on canvas, 90.6 x 126 cm, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto.

The artist's use of colour became bolder and brighter in his later paintings of the 1970s, especially after he discovered Eckankar. Morriseau explained, "We can learn how to heal people with colour.... My art reminds a lot of people of what they are.... Many times people tell me that I've cured them of something, whatever's ailing them.... It was the colour of the painting that did that."⁶ Works including *Shaman and Disciples*, 1979, *Man Changing into Thunderbird*, 1977, *Androgyny*, 1983, and *Observations of the Astral World*, c. 1994, show the copper, yellow, and turquoise pigments that became Morriseau's signature colours and conveyed the clarity of vision, lightness, and spirituality that Eckankar espouses.



Norval Morrisseau, *Shaman and Disciples*, 1979, acrylic on canvas, 180.5 x 211.5 cm, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, ON. Morrisseau identified the central figure in this painting as a self-portrait. It was the final work completed by Morrisseau in the Tom Thomson Shack while he was an artist in residence at the McMichael in 1979.

LINES

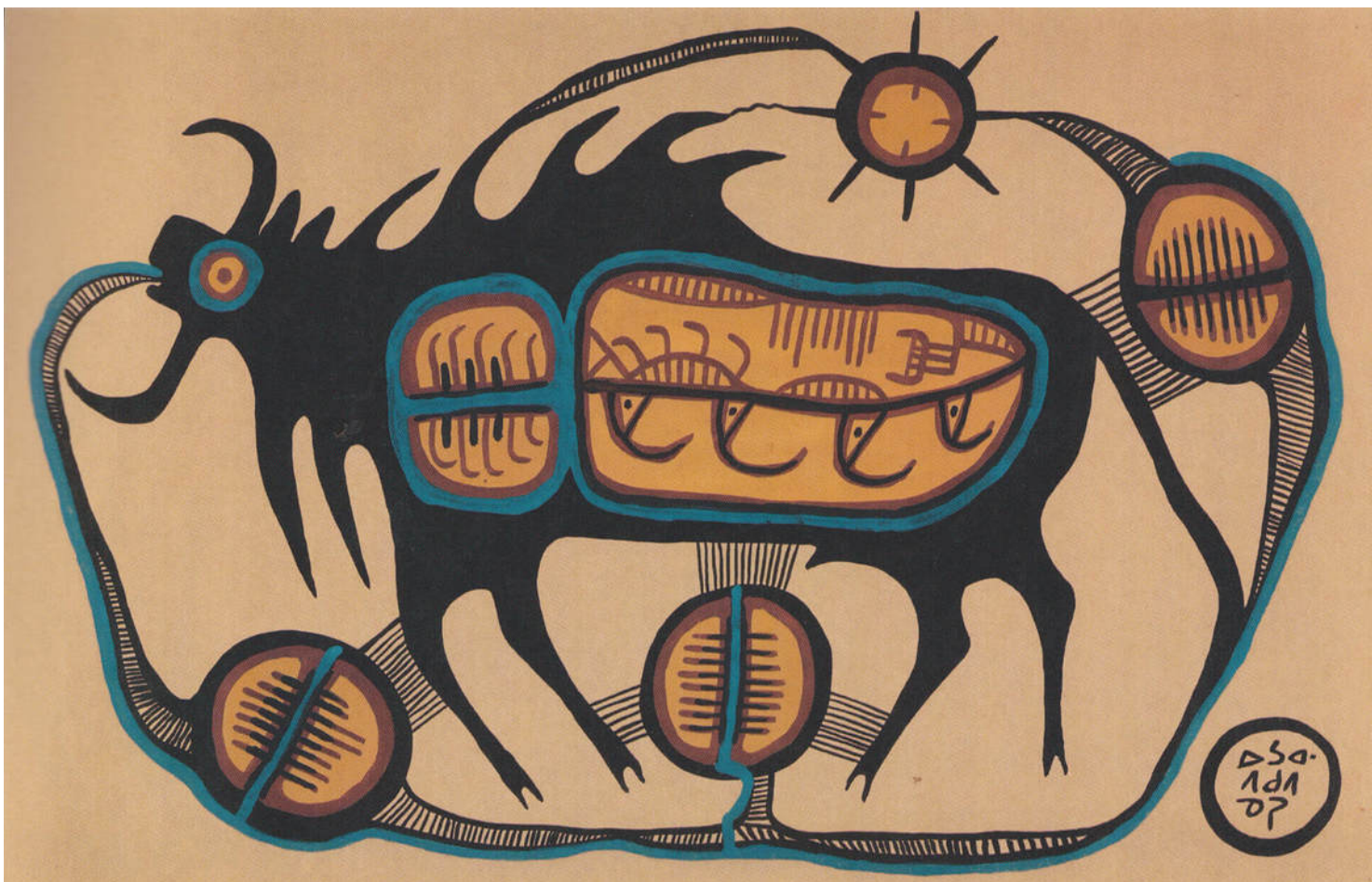
Norval Morrisseau tended to paint quickly and intuitively, and is not known for draftsman-like precision. As is evident in a photograph of the artist painting *Androgyny*, 1983, his expressionistic strokes are uneven and large patches of background colour appear blotchy. Yet Morrisseau's defining black outlines unite all aspects of the work, providing an overall assuredness to his art.

These lines perform a number of functions. In many of Morrisseau's paintings there are "lines of communication" that "join animals and people in structured associations. They mark relationships, often forming closed loops, almost resembling electric circuits. Morrisseau uses them often because the foreground concept, the real subject of his pictures, is usually his own perception of the quality of interdependence."⁷ In other words, these lines, which are sometimes referred to as power lines, connect the figures to one another to create a balanced composition of interrelated figures.



Norval Morrisseau painting *Androgyny*, 1983.

Another common form, created by these black lines, is the divided circle. Morrisseau included this form in his earliest works from the late 1950s, and it exists throughout his oeuvre, as in *Sacred Buffalo*, c. 1963, representing “all the dualities which are present in the artist’s view of the world—good and evil, day and night, heaven and earth, and so on.”⁸ Elizabeth McLuhan explains that Selwyn Dewdney traced this form to the *megis*, or cowrie shell, that is an important part of the Midewiwin medicine bag and a source of power for shamans.⁹ In a letter written to artist Susan Ross, Morrisseau specifically referred to the divided circles as “my favorite art sign” and drew a small diagram with the word “good” on the left and the word “bad” on the right of a bisected circle.¹⁰ Each of the seven circles included in *Water Spirit*, 1972, is rendered in two colours beyond the requisite black outline. Additionally, Morrisseau painted a black dot in each side of each circle to accentuate the notion of symbolic balance. By linking the line and the circles, he visually reinforces a holistic understanding. This clear relationship between the lines of communication and the divided circle has become a convention adopted by other artists who paint in the style of the Woodland School.



Norval Morrisseau, *Sacred Buffalo*, c. 1963, gouache on heavy brown paper with cardboard backing, 85.1 x 130.2 cm, University of Lethbridge Art Collection.

In Morrisseau's work of the 1980s and 1990s, such as *Observations of the Astral World*, c. 1994, the divided circles sometimes give way to other groupings. In this painting, different astral planes (land, water, spirit realm) are pictured within ovals of different colours. However, the realms remain interconnected by a central tree whose branches link the outstretched arms of the child and the shaman.

In addition to the divided circle, Morrisseau used lines to segment the inner structures of many animals and humans. While some of these interior spaces contain well-defined elements such as the womb, the heart, and the backbone, others show more decorative elements, such as the "latticework" design Morrisseau adapted from Midewiwin birchbark scrolls and refined for his own art.¹¹ This use of interior segmentation to convey meaning is visible in *The Gift*, 1975. In *Man Changing into Thunderbird*, 1977, *Thunderbird with Inner Spirit*, c. 1978, and *The Storyteller: The Artist and His Grandfather*, 1978, Morrisseau uses interior space to add layers of rich, complementary colour patterns. The result in *Man Changing into Thunderbird* is almost baroque: the ornate colour patterns pulsate, resulting in a transformative dynamic.

A CALL FOR CHANGE

Norval Morrisseau's art had a strong activist and educative function. Like the Futurists in Italy or the Constructivists in Bolshevik Russia, Morrisseau pioneered a new style as a call for change. He was an Indigenous man living in an oppressive, assimilationist environment that saw Indigenous artistic expressions as souvenirs or crafts rather than as fine arts. Though Morrisseau's style and technique evolved over the course of his career—from early Anishinaabe-inspired works through more Christian themes to canvases that fuse his spiritual study of Eckankar with his Indigenous roots—his works often had a political dimension. Works including *The Gift*, 1975, drew attention to the inequality resulting from Canada's colonial relationship with First Nations and, in their blending of the traditional and the contemporary, they confounded expectations and easy analysis and challenged conventional thinking about Indigenous peoples.

Morrisseau's success on the Canadian art scene has inspired other Indigenous artists to follow. He facilitated educational workshops in remote communities in Ontario, in which he encouraged Indigenous youth to conceptualize themselves as artists and paint their own stories using the formal elements of his visual vocabulary. Daphne Odjig (b. 1912), Jackson Beardy (1944–1984), Blake Debassige (b. 1956), Carl Ray (1943–1978), Joshim Kakegamic (1952–1993), and Benjamin Chee Chee (1944–1977) have all studied Morrisseau's style as they have developed their own approaches to art making. Morrisseau's sustained use of visual narratives and cultural approaches in his painting demonstrates that he was also committed to "addressing the vacuum created by the systemic efforts of successive governments to neutralize any Indigenous cultural expression



Norval Morrisseau, *Man Changing into Thunderbird*, 1977 (one of six panels), acrylic on canvas, 153.5 x 125.7 cm, private collection on loan to the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



Norval Morrisseau, *The Gift*, 1975, acrylic on paper, 196 x 122 cm, Helen E. Band Collection, Thunder Bay Art Gallery, ON. This politically charged painting depicts the contentious relationship between Indigenous people and Christian colonialists.

reminiscent of the old days.”¹² Most importantly, however, Morrisseau continued to use his painting to advocate for change, giving voice and artistic direction to new generations of viewers and artists who encounter this art.



Norval Morrisseau in front of one of his paintings in Red Lake, ON, c. 1968.



Works by Norval Morrisseau are held across the country in public institutions and private collections. Although the works listed below are held by the following institutions, they may not always be on view.



NORVAL MORRISSEAU

Life & Work by Carmen Robertson

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT CANADA

10 Wellington Street
Gatineau, Quebec, Canada
819-994-1262
aadnc-aandc.gc.ca



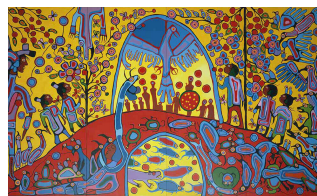
**Norval Morriseau,
Indian Jesus Christ,
1974**

Acrylic on paper
134.6 x 68.5 cm



**Norval Morriseau, *The
Storyteller: The Artist
and His Grandfather*,
1978**

Acrylic on paper
Diptych: each panel
176.3 x 96.6 cm



**Norval Morriseau,
Androgyny, 1983**

Acrylic on canvas
366 x 610 cm

ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO

317 Dundas Street West
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
1-877-225-4246 or 416-979-6648
ago.net



**Norval Morriseau,
Moose Dream Legend,
1962**

Oil on wove paper
54.6 x 75.3 cm



**Norval Morriseau, *Self-
Portrait Devoured by
Demons*, 1964**

Acrylic on paper
209.2 x 78.7 cm



**Norval Morriseau, *Man
Changing into
Thunderbird*, 1977**

Acrylic on canvas
Six panels: each panel
153.5 x 125.7 cm

CANADIAN MUSEUM OF HISTORY

100 Laurier Street
Gatineau, Quebec, Canada
1-800-555-5621
historymuseum.ca



Norval Morriseau,
***Untitled*, c. 1958**
Watercolour and ink on
birchbark
71.3 x 111.3 cm



Norval Morriseau,
***Untitled (Thunderbird Transformation)*,
c. 1958-60**
Watercolour and ink on
birchbark
63 x 101.3 cm



Norval Morriseau,
***Ancestors Performing
the Ritual of the
Shaking Tent*, c. 1958-
61**
Acrylic on birchbark
with wood frame and
plywood backing
94.7 x 73 cm



Norval Morriseau,
***Water Spirit*, 1972**
Acrylic on brown kraft
paper
81 x 183 cm

GLENBOW MUSEUM

130 9 Avenue Southeast
Calgary, Alberta, Canada
403-268-4100
glenbow.org



Norval Morriseau,
***Jo-Go Way
Moose Dream*, c. 1964**
Tempera on brown paper
81.3 x 132 cm



Norval Morriseau,
***Man and
Snake*, c. 1964**
India ink and tempera on
building paper
175.3 x 81.3 cm



NORVAL MORRISSEAU

Life & Work by Carmen Robertson

MCMICHAEL CANADIAN ART COLLECTION

10365 Islington Avenue
Kleinburg, Ontario, Canada
905-893-1121 or 1-888-213-1121
mcmichael.com



Norval Morriseau, *Artist's Wife and Daughter*, c. 1975

Acrylic on hardboard
101.6 x 81.3 cm



Norval Morriseau, *Shaman and Disciples*, 1979

Acrylic on canvas
180.5 x 211.5 cm

MONTREAL MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

1380 Sherbrooke Street West
Montreal, Quebec, Canada
514-285-2000
mbam.qc.ca/en

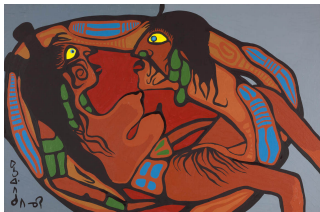


Norval Morriseau, *Ojibway Shaman Figure*, 1975

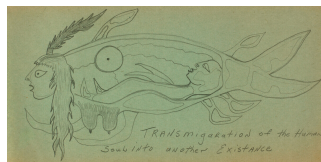
Acrylic on card
101.6 x 81.3 cm

NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA

380 Sussex Drive
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
613-990-1985
gallery.ca



Norval Morrisseau,
*Artist in Union with
Mother Earth, 1972*
Acrylic on canvas
77.5 x 116.8 cm



Norval Morrisseau,
*Transmigration of the
Human Soul into
Another Existence,
1972-73*
Graphite on wove
paper
18 x 36.5 cm irregular



Norval Morrisseau,
*Artist and Shaman
between Two Worlds,
1980*
Acrylic on canvas
175 x 282 cm



Norval Morrisseau,
Susan, 1983
Pen and black ink on
wove paper
58.6 x 73.8 cm



Norval Morrisseau,
*Untitled (Shaman
Traveller to Other
Worlds for Blessings),
c. 1990*
Acrylic on canvas
124 x 147 cm



Norval Morrisseau,
*Observations of the
Astral World, c. 1994*
Acrylic on canvas
236 x 514 cm



ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

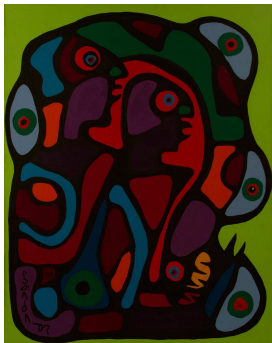
100 Queen’s Park
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
416-586-8000
rom.on.ca



Norval Morriseau, *Migration*,
1973
Acrylic on canvas
90.6 x 126 cm

THUNDER BAY ART GALLERY

1080 Keewatin Street
Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada
807-577-6427
theag.ca



Norval Morriseau,
*Adam and Eve and the
Serpent*, 1974
Acrylic on card
101 x 80 cm



Norval Morriseau, *The
Gift*, 1975
Acrylic on paper
196 x 122 cm



Norval Morriseau,
*Untitled (Two Bull
Moose)*, 1965
Acrylic on millboard
81.3 x 243.9 cm



NOTES

BIOGRAPHY

1. While I use the term "Indigenous" throughout this text, for much of his career Morrisseau was referred to as an "Indian," "Native," or "Aboriginal" artist. The term "Indian," while still acceptable in the United States, is no longer used in Canada except as a legal definition.
2. The date of Morrisseau's birth has been disputed. His baptismal record states he was born in 1933; others have listed his birth as 1932. Most recently, it has been established that he was born in 1931 in Fort William, Ontario.
3. In his retrospective catalogue on Morrisseau, Greg Hill notes that the artist admitted to having been sexually abused during his time at residential school. See Greg Hill, *Norval Morrisseau: Shaman Artist* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2006), 16.
4. Greg Hill, *Norval Morrisseau: Shaman Artist* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2006), 16.
5. Norval Morrisseau, quoted in Lister Sinclair and Jack Pollock, *The Art of Norval Morrisseau* (Toronto: Methuen, 1979), 136.
6. Ruth B. Phillips, "'Morrisseau's Entrance': Negotiating Primitivism, Modernism, and Anishinaabe Tradition," in Greg Hill, *Norval Morrisseau: Shaman Artist* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2006), 56.
7. Greg Hill, *Norval Morrisseau: Shaman Artist* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2006), 56.
8. Ruth B. Phillips, "The Turn of the Primitive: Modernism, the Stranger and the Indigenous Artist," in *Exiles, Diasporas & Strangers*, ed. Kobena Mercer (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 49.
9. See collection of letters between Selwyn Dewdney and Norval Morrisseau, Dewdney Papers, INAC 306065, Aboriginal Art Centre, Aboriginal and Northern Development, Gatineau, QC.
10. Greg Hill, *Norval Morrisseau: Shaman Artist* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2006), 66.
11. Norval Morrisseau, *Legends of My People: The Great Ojibway*, ed. Selwyn Dewdney (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1965).
12. Norval Morrisseau to Susan Ross, a series of donated letters dated 1963–66, Thunder Bay Art Gallery archives, Thunder Bay, ON.
13. Lister Sinclair and Jack Pollock, *The Art of Norval Morrisseau* (Toronto: Methuen, 1979), 17.



14. Lister Sinclair and Jack Pollock, *The Art of Norval Morrisseau* (Toronto: Methuen, 1979), 17.
15. Lister Sinclair and Jack Pollock, *The Art of Norval Morrisseau* (Toronto: Methuen, 1979), 18.
16. Carmen Robertson, "Thunderbirds and Concepts of Transformation in the Art of Norval Morrisseau," *Journal of Canadian Art History* 33, no. 2 (2012): 60-61.
17. I borrow the term "Imaginary Indian" from Daniel Francis, who identifies the stereotypical attributes found in popular cultural constructions of Indigenous peoples from Hollywood film to advertisements. Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1992).
18. Gary Michael Dault, "Ojibway Artist May Soon Find He's Turned into a Living Legend," *Toronto Star*, August 28, 1975.
19. Norval Morrisseau to Selwyn Dewdney, January 6, 1964, Red Lake, ON, Dewdney Papers, 306065-63-A-5, Indian Art Archives, Department of Indian Affairs, Gatineau, QC.
20. The Picasso reference remains key to Morrisseau's mythology, and rumours about whether the artists met and who gave Morrisseau the moniker have long circulated. Morrisseau was first compared to Picasso by Bill Brown in November 1962: "Picasso quality is apparent in Thunderbird's idea of how an Indian will look and dress in Heaven." Bill Brown, "Copper Thunderbird: An Ojibway Who Paints His People's Past," *Weekend Magazine*, November 24, 1962, 51-53.
21. The 2013 art exhibition *7: Professional Native Indian Artists Inc.*, curated by Michelle Lavallee, explored and showcased the achievements of the group and the seven individual artists involved in the initiative. See Michelle Lavallee, ed., *7: Professional Native Indian Artists Inc.* (Regina: MacKenzie Art Gallery, 2014).
22. "ROM Acquires 11 Works by Ojibway," *Globe and Mail*, May 29, 1972, 15.
23. Henning Jacobsen Productions Limited, *The Colours of Pride*, directed by Henning Jacobsen (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1973), documentary film, 27 min.; Henning Jacobsen Productions Limited, *The Paradox of Norval Morrisseau*, directed by Henning Jacobsen and Duke Redbird (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1974), documentary film, 28 min.
24. Greg Hill, *Norval Morrisseau: Shaman Artist* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2006), 26.



25. An Anishinaabe smudging ceremony is a purification ceremony in which the smoke from any of four sacred medicines can be used to purify the mind, body, and spirit. Lister Sinclair and Jack Pollock, *The Art of Norval Morrisseau* (Toronto: Methuen, 1979), 37. See also Greg Hill, *Norval Morrisseau: Shaman Artist* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2006), 38–39.

26. Several of Morrisseau's works were included in the controversial exhibition, including *Sacred Bear*, 1972; *The Gift*, 1975; and *Artist with Thunderbird Vision*, 1977. Inuit artist Paulosee Kuniliusee's work was included in the exhibition, as were photographs by contemporary Vancouver artist Jeff Wall.

KEY WORKS: SELF-PORTRAIT DEVoured BY DEMONS

1. Frances Densmore, *Chippewa Customs* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1929; repr., 1979), 181–82.

2. Edward Benton-Banai, *The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minneapolis Press, 2010).

KEY WORKS: ARTIST IN UNION WITH MOTHER EARTH

1. Lee-Ann Martin and Morgan Wood, *Exposed: Aesthetics of Aboriginal Erotic Art* (Regina, SK: MacKenzie Art Gallery, 1999), 34.

2. Michelle McGeough, "When Two Worlds Collide," (MA thesis, Ottawa: Carleton University, 2006).

KEY WORKS: WATER SPIRIT

1. Victoria Brehm, "The Metamorphosis of an Ojibwe Manido," *American Literature* 68, no. 4 (December 1996): 692.

2. For information and photos of the Agawa rock-art site, see <http://www.lakesuperiorpark.com/agawa.html>.

3. Basil Johnston, *Anishinaubae Thesaurus* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2007), 19. Additionally, Selwyn Dewdney explains that the *megis*, or cowrie shell, was carried in the mide pouch to signify that a person had achieved a particular degree of spiritual development. See Selwyn Dewdney, *The Sacred Scrolls of the Southern Ojibway* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), 88.

KEY WORKS: INDIAN JESUS CHRIST

1. Henning Jacobsen Productions Limited, *The Paradox of Norval Morrisseau*, directed by Henning Jacobsen and Duke Redbird (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1974), documentary film, 28 min.

2. Wayne Edmonstone, "Indian Artist Clings To Legend," *Toronto Star*, November 3, 1972, D3.



3. These works are *Portrait of the Artist as Jesus Christ*, 1966, acrylic on paper, 166.3 x 76.2 cm, private collection; *Joseph with Christ Child and St. John the Baptist*, 1973, acrylic on canvas, 101.6 x 81.3 cm, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada Aboriginal Art Collection, Gatineau, QC; *Virgin Mary with Christ Child and St. John the Baptist*, 1973, acrylic on canvas, 101.6 x 81.3 cm, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada Aboriginal Art Collection, Gatineau, QC.

KEY WORKS: THE GIFT

1. For a deeper discussion of colour symbolism in this painting, see Carmen Robertson, "Body Politics: The Art of Norval Morrisseau," *Revue d'art canadienne/Canadian Art Review* 32, nos. 1-2 (2007), 70-78.

KEY WORKS: MAN CHANGING INTO THUNDERBIRD

1. Elizabeth McLuhan and Tom Hill, *Norval Morrisseau and the Emergence of the Image Makers* (Toronto: Methuen, 1984), 32.

2. Gary Michael Dault, "Painter Gives Canadians a Masterpiece," *Toronto Star*, August 29, 1977, D5.

KEY WORKS: THE STORYTELLER: THE ARTIST AND HIS GRANDFATHER

1. Greg Hill, *Norval Morrisseau: Shaman Artist* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2006), 24.

KEY WORKS: ANDROGYNY

1. See Jill Doerfler, Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair, and Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark, *Centering Anishinaabeg Studies: Understanding the World through Stories* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2013), xv.

2. Gerald McMaster, "The Anishinaabe Artistic Consciousness," in *Before and After the Horizon: Anishinaabe Artists of the Great Lakes*, ed. David Penney and Gerald McMaster, 71-105 (Washington, DC: National Museum of the American Indian, 2013), 75.

3. James P. Richards on behalf of Norval Morrisseau to Tom Axworthy, March 11, 1983, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada Aboriginal Art Collection Archives, Gatineau, QC.

4. "Harper Shuffles Cabinet to Create 'Right Team for These Times,'" *Globe and Mail*, October 31, 2008, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/harper-shuffles-cabinet-to-create-right-team-for-these-times-1.706956>; and "Morrisseau's Androgyny Makes Splash at GGs," *Hill Times*, November 3, 2008, n.p.

KEY WORKS: OBSERVATIONS OF THE ASTRAL WORLD

1. Norval Morrisseau, excerpts from a taped conversation with Elizabeth McLuhan, transcribed in Elizabeth McLuhan, *Norval Morrisseau: Recent Work* (Thunder Bay: Thunder Bay National Exhibition Centre and Centre for Indian Art, 1983), 4.



2. See Don Robinson, "Tales of Copper Thunderbird," in Norval Morrisseau and Don Robinson, *Norval Morrisseau, Travels to the House of Invention* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1997), 88.

SIGNIFICANCE & CRITICAL ISSUES

1. Gerald McMaster, "The Anishinaabe Artistic Consciousness," in *Before and After the Horizon: Anishinaabe Artists of the Great Lakes*, ed. David Penney and Gerald McMaster, 71-105 (Washington, DC: National Museum of the American Indian, 2013), 73.

2. See Peter McFarlane, *From Brotherhood to Nationhood* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1993); and Sally Weaver, *Making Canadian Indian Policy, 1968-1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983).

3. See Michelle Lavallee, ed., *7: Professional Native Indian Artists Inc.* (Regina: MacKenzie Art Gallery, 2014).

4. The recent art exhibition *7: Professional Native Indian Artists Inc.*, curated by Michelle Lavallee, showcases the achievements of the group and the seven individual artists involved in the initiative. See Michelle Lavallee, ed., *7: Professional Native Indian Artists Inc.* (Regina: MacKenzie Art Gallery, 2014).

5. Greg Hill, *Norval Morrisseau: Shaman Artist* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2006), 68.

6. For a deeper discussion of this issue, see Ruth B. Phillips, *Museum Pieces: Toward the Indigenization of Canadian Museums* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2011), 259-68.

7. The history of contemporary Inuit art differs from that of Indigenous peoples in southern Canada. The establishment of the Inuit cooperative system for carving and printmaking in the North in the 1950s supported contemporary Inuit artists as they moved into the gallery system. The West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative (now Kinngait Studios), established in Cape Dorset (now referred to as Kinngait) in 1961, launched prints and drawings by numerous Inuit artists, such as, Pitseolak Ashoona, Kenojuak Ashevak, and Pudlo Pudlat. In 1990 the National Gallery of Canada organized a retrospective exhibition of Pudlo Pudlat's drawings, *Pudlo: Thirty Years of Drawing*, and in 1993 it mounted another major exhibition, *Pudlo: A Celebration*.

8. Paul Gessel, "An Art Pioneer Makes His Final Breakthrough," *Ottawa Citizen*, January 29, 2006, A1.

9. For information about Christian Chapman and his art, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eoF5UYZFDw8>.

10. See the Assembly of First Nations logo at <http://www.afn.ca/en/about-afn>.

11. Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964).



12. Greg Hill, *Norval Morrisseau: Shaman Artist* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2006), 38.

13. Norval Morrisseau, *Norval Morrisseau: Travels to the House of Invention* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1997).

14. Gerald McMaster, "The Anishinaabe Artistic Consciousness," in *Before and After the Horizon: Anishinaabe Artists of the Great Lakes*, ed. David Penney and Gerald McMaster, 71-105 (Washington, DC: National Museum of the American Indian, 2013), 74.

15. The myth of the Noble Savage was first invented by Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the mid-eighteenth century and was popularized in literature, art, and other forms of popular culture. Ter Ellingson, *The Myth of the Noble Savage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

16. Robin Green, "FYI: This Party Would Put a Dream to Shame," *Globe and Mail*, June 29, 1978, 8.

17. Gerald McMaster, "The Anishinaabe Artistic Consciousness," in *Before and After the Horizon: Anishinaabe Artists of the Great Lakes*, ed. David Penney and Gerald McMaster, 71-105 (Washington, DC: National Museum of the American Indian, 2013), 72.

STYLE & TECHNIQUE

1. David W. Penney, "Water, Earth, Sky," in *Before and After the Horizon: Anishinaabe Artists of the Great Lakes*, ed. David Penney and Gerald McMaster, 9-36 (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2013), 18.

2. Lister Sinclair and Jack Pollock, *The Art of Norval Morrisseau* (Toronto: Methuen, 1979), 58.

3. *The Paradox of Norval Morrisseau* clearly demonstrates his unorthodox painting techniques. For a thorough analysis of this film, see Carmen Robertson, "The Reel Norval Morrisseau: An Analysis of The National Film Board of Canada's *Paradox of Norval Morrisseau*," *International Journal of Learning* 11 (Fall 2005): 315-21.

4. For a deeper discussion of colour symbolism in this painting, see Carmen Robertson, "Body Politics: The Art of Norval Morrisseau," *Revue d'art canadienne/Canadian Art Review* 32, nos. 1-2 (2007), 70-78.

5. Lister Sinclair and Jack Pollock, *The Art of Norval Morrisseau* (Toronto: Methuen, 1979), 58.

6. Norval Morrisseau, *Travels to the House of Invention* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1997), 16-17.

7. Lister Sinclair and Jack Pollock, *The Art of Norval Morrisseau* (Toronto: Methuen, 1979), 53.



8. Lister Sinclair and Jack Pollock, *The Art of Norval Morrisseau* (Toronto: Methuen, 1979), 56.
9. Elizabeth McLuhan and Tom Hill, *Norval Morrisseau and the Emergence of the Image Makers* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1984), 54.
10. Norval Morrisseau to Susan Ross, September 22, 1964, Thunder Bay Art Gallery Archives, Thunder Bay, ON.
11. Elizabeth McLuhan and Tom Hill, *Norval Morrisseau and the Emergence of the Image Makers* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1984), 50.
12. Gerald McMaster, "The Anishinaabe Artistic Consciousness," in *Before and After the Horizon: Anishinaabe Artists of the Great Lakes*, ed. David Penney and Gerald McMaster, 71-105 (Washington, DC: National Museum of the American Indian, 2013), 72.



GLOSSARY

abstract art

Visual art that uses form, colour, line, and gestural marks in compositions that do not attempt to represent images of real things. Abstract art may interpret reality in an altered form, or depart from it entirely. Also called nonfigurative or nonrepresentational art.

Anishinaabe

A collective term that means “the people” or “original people” and refers to a number of interconnected communities such as the Ojibway, Odawa, Chippewa, Saukteaux, Mississauga, Potawatomi, and others. In Canada, the Anishinaabe region includes areas of Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec.

astral plane/astral world

Terms used in certain mystical traditions to refer to subtle, spiritual realms that correspond to yet are more refined than the physical realm.

astral travel

Also referred to as astral projection, this is a mystic concept of shifting one’s consciousness to ever-higher planes of existence.

Beardy, Jackson (Oji-Cree, Wasagamack First Nation, 1944–1984)

A painter known for employing a graphic style that incorporates flat areas of warm colour and for depicting Indigenous legends and spiritual and cosmological concepts in his work. A founding member of the Professional Native Indian Artists Inc., Jackson spent most of the latter part of his career as an Aboriginal arts advisor and educator.

birchbark scroll

Sacred scrolls made of birchbark, on which the Anishinaabe draw geometrical shapes and patterns to depict songs and other details of rituals. The scrolls are used in religious ceremonies and as a means of cultural transmission.

Canadian Guild of Crafts

Established in 1906, this Montreal-based organization preserves, promotes, and distributes Inuit and First Nations art and fine crafts in Canada. It also houses a permanent collection of Inuit art.

Carr, Emily (Canadian, 1871–1945)

A pre-eminent B.C.-based artist and writer, Carr is renowned today for her bold and vibrant images of both the Northwest Coast landscape and its Native peoples. Educated in California, England, and France, she was influenced by a variety of modern art movements but ultimately developed a unique aesthetic style. She was one of the first West Coast artists to achieve national recognition. (See *Emily Carr: Life & Work* by Lisa Baldissera.)

Chagall, Marc (Russian/French, 1887–1985)

A painter and graphic artist, Chagall’s work is characterized by colourful, dreamlike images and a defiance of the rules of pictorial logic. Although he employed

elements of Cubism, Fauvism, and Symbolism, Chagall did not formally align with any avant-garde movement.

Chapman, Christian (Anishinaabe, Fort William First Nation, b. 1975)

A Northern Ontario-based mixed-media artist who fuses computer-manipulated images, painting, drawing, and printmaking, Chapman conjures images from storytelling to explore culture and identity in his work.

Chee Chee, Benjamin (Ojibway, 1944–1977)

A painter and prominent member of the Woodland School. Influenced by modern abstract movements and known for his spare representations of birds and animals, Chee Chee painted in a style more abstract and graphic than that of his Woodland School contemporaries.

Cobiness, Eddy (Ojibway, 1933–1996)

An original member of the Professional Native Indian Artists Inc., Cobiness was associated with the Woodland School and is noted for having signed his paintings with his nation's treaty number (47). Early in his career he painted realistic scenes of outdoor life and nature. His later work tended toward the abstract.

Constructivism

Emerging in Russia in the early 1920s, Constructivism was an artistic trend that championed a materialist, non-emotional, utilitarian approach to art and linked art to design, industry, and social usefulness. The term continues to be used generally to describe abstract art that employs lines, planes, and other visual elements in composing abstract geometric images of a precise and impersonal nature.

cowrie shell

A small shell, called the *megis* in the Anishinaabe tradition. The cowrie shell is an important symbol in Anishinaabe legends and is thought of as a source of strength and healing.

Dalí, Salvador (Spanish, 1904–1989)

The star of the Surrealists and one of his era's most exuberant personalities, Dalí is best known for his naturalistically rendered dreamscapes. *The Persistence of Memory*, 1931, with its melting clock faces, remains one of the twentieth century's most parodied artworks.

Debassige, Blake (Ojibway, b. 1956)

A painter associated with the second generation of Woodland School artists, Debassige uses a graphic style to explore the intersection of Anishinaabe cosmology and teachings with contemporary social and environmental concerns.

Dewdney, Selwyn (Canadian, 1909–1979)

An artist, teacher, and writer based in London, Ontario, active in the development of the local arts scene at mid-century. One the first Canadians to



produce abstract paintings, he was also a scholar of Indigenous art and the co-developer of the country's first psychiatric art therapy program.

Eckankar

Founded by American Paul Twitchell in 1965, this religious movement was influenced by *surat shabd* yoga. Followers of Eckankar adopt various practices that facilitate soul transcendence by allowing a connection with the Divine Light and Sound. *Eckankar* translates as "coworker with God."

Houston, James (Canadian, 1921–2005)

An artist, writer, filmmaker, and civil administrator who with his wife, Alma Houston, was instrumental in the popularization of Inuit art. After studying art in Toronto and Paris, Houston spent fourteen years in the Canadian Arctic. In 1949, working with the Canadian Handicrafts Guild, he organized the first exhibition of Inuit art in southern Canada, held in Montreal.

Impressionism

A highly influential art movement that originated in France in the 1860s and is associated with the emergence of modern urban European society. Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and other Impressionists rejected the subjects and formal rigours of academic art in favour of scenes of nature and daily life and the careful rendering of atmospheric effects. They often painted outdoors.

Indian Group of Seven

A colloquial name that refers to the Professional Native Indian Artists Inc., coined in the early 1970s by the *Winnipeg Free Press* and subsequently adopted more widely. Members included Jackson Beardy, Eddy Cobiness, Alex Janvier, Norval Morrisseau, Daphne Odjig, Carl Ray, and Joseph Sanchez.

Janvier, Alex (Dene Suline/Saulteaux, b. 1935)

Influenced by Expressionism and strongly by his First Nations heritage, Janvier was a founding member of the Professional Native Indian Artists Inc. and is a pioneering figure in Indigenous art in Canada. Often composed with bright, symbolic colours and curvilinear lines, his non-representational paintings address themes of land, spirit, and the struggles and triumphs of Indigenous culture.

Kakegamic, Joshim (Cree, 1952–1993)

Associated with the Woodland School, Kakegamic received early training from Norval Morrisseau and Carl Ray. He is known for championing Indigenous print production by co-founding the Triple K Cooperative. Kakegamic's work is held at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection in Kleinburg, Ontario, and the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto.

manitous

Manitous or *manidoogs* are common to many Native groups in North America, including the Anishnaabe. The sacred spirit-beings are tied to organisms, the environment, and events that help connect cultural narratives and their ways of being.



Matisse, Henri (French, 1869–1954)

A painter, sculptor, printmaker, draftsman, and designer, aligned at different times with the Impressionists, Post-Impressionists, and Fauvists. By the 1920s he was, with Pablo Picasso, one of the most famous painters of his generation, known for his remarkable use of colour and line.

Mayan art

Art derived from the Maya civilization, which emerged in the region of what is today Mexico and Central America. Mayans had advanced artistic practices, producing stone sculptures, painted ceramics, delicate figurines, jade jewellery, and masks. These art objects featured remarkable detail and colour.

Medicine Art

Developed by Norval Morrisseau and also called “Legend Art,” this is art created by the painters of the Woodland School. The term alludes to secret legends and healing power contained within the works’ images.

medicine bag

Usually carried by shamans in North American Indigenous cultures, a medicine bag contains sacred items personal to its carrier and used in various rituals. Contents might include feathers, healing plants, stone pipes, or animal skins.

Mexican mural painting

Commissioned by the Mexican government following the Mexican Revolution of 1910–20, Mexican mural paintings are highly visible public-art pieces that often depict common labourers and scenes of revolution. Prominent Mexican mural painters include José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, and David Alfaro Siqueiros.

Micipijiu (Michupichu)

In Anishinaabe legend, this powerful water creature, “The Great Lynx,” lives in the Great Lakes and waters of the surrounding areas and can be a force of protection or destruction. Many images of Micipijiu can be found on rocks in the region, the most renowned on Lake Superior’s Agawa rock.

midé rites

The formal, ceremonial rituals marking various passages of life for the Midewiwin, including birth, naming, first kill, puberty, marriage, and death.

Midewiwin

A closed, ritual society mostly of Anishinaabe men, based in the upper Great Lakes region, the northern prairies, and some areas of the subarctic. Also called the Grand Medicine Society. The Midewiwin are responsible for their communities’ spiritual and physical health and healing.

Miskwaabik Animiiki (Copper Thunderbird)

The Anishinaabe name given to Norval Morrisseau when he was gravely ill as a young man. In Anishinaabe cosmology, copper holds sacred strength and the Thunderbird is a powerful *manitou*, or spirit, of the sky world.



modernism

A movement extending from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century in all the arts, modernism rejected academic traditions in favour of innovative styles developed in response to contemporary industrialized society.

Beginning in painting with the Realist movement led by Gustave Courbet, it progressed through Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Fauvism, and Cubism and on to abstraction. By the 1960s, anti-authoritarian postmodernist styles such as Pop art, Conceptual art, and Neo-Expressionism blurred the distinction between high art and mass culture.

Northwest Coast carvings

Carvings made in wood, stone, and bone by Haida, Tlingit, Kwakiutl, and other First Nations of North America's Northwest Coast region. Highly formalized, curvilinear lines, internal design elements, and abstract compositions are characteristic motifs in these carvings that depict animal and human forms.

Odjig, Daphne (Odawa/Potawatomi/English, Wikwemikong First Nation, 1919–2016)

A founding member of the Professional Native Indian Artists Inc. and a prominent Indigenous painter in Canada. Odjig's work blends traditional First Nations styles with Cubist and Surrealist aesthetics. Soft contours, bold colours, and black outlines are characteristic of her work, which thematically focuses on issues of Indigenous politics in art.

Picasso, Pablo (Spanish, 1881–1973)

One of the most famous and influential artists of his time, Picasso was a prominent member of the Parisian avant-garde circle that included Henri Matisse and Georges Braque. His painting *Les demoiselles d'Avignon*, 1906–7, is considered by many to be the most important of the twentieth century.

Picasso of the North

The moniker refers to Ojibway artist Norval Morrisseau, who was called this by the French media when his work was exhibited in *Magicians of the Earth* at Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris in 1989.

pictographs

An ancient art form, pictographs constitute a category of rock art in which images were created by applying, with a finger or brushes, paints or dyes (commonly red ochre, black, white, and yellow) to rock surfaces.

Post-Impressionism

A term coined by the British art critic Roger Fry in 1910 to describe painting produced originally in France between about 1880 and 1905 in response to Impressionism's artistic advances and limitations. Central figures include Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, and Vincent van Gogh.

primitivism

A sensibility in various aspects of early European modern art in which non-Western and European folk-art forms and tribal objects were idealized, as was a simple way of life associated with Indigenous cultures. Pablo Picasso, Paul



Gauguin, and the Expressionist group Die Brücke (The Bridge) embraced elements of primitivism.

Professional Native Indian Artists Inc.

Informally founded in the early 1970s and incorporated in 1975, this avant-garde association of Woodland School artists championed the inclusion of Indigenous art in mainstream Canadian art circles and aimed to foster revisionist thinking about Indigenous art and culture. Members included Jackson Beardy, Eddy Cobiness, Alex Janvier, Norval Morrisseau, Daphne Odjig, Carl Ray, and Joseph Sanchez.

Pudlat, Pudlo (Ilupirulik/Kinngait, 1916–1992)

A prolific first-generation Inuit artist who began his career in the 1950s, drawing with a lead pencil. As his career progressed, he adopted other media, including felt-tip pen and coloured pencil, and his iconography included imagined scenes, animals, and airplanes. His work is known to be imbued with the artist's unique sense of humour.

Ray, Carl (Cree, 1943–1978)

A member of the Professional Native Indian Artists Inc. and the Woodland School who was mentored by Norval Morrisseau, Ray was an influential painter of wildlife, northern landscapes, and Medicine art. Held by the Winnipeg Art Gallery in Manitoba; the McMichael Canadian Art Collection in Kleinberg, Ontario; and the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, his work is known for its three-dimensional quality, flowing lines, and original composition.

Rivera, Diego (Mexican, 1886–1957)

A painter, draftsman, and celebrated muralist. Rivera was deeply committed to the idea of art's transformative power and to socialist ideals; his large-scale works typically exalt workers, revolutionaries, and indigenous and folk culture through a style and iconography that combines traditional and avant-garde techniques. He was famously married to Frida Kahlo from 1929 until her death in 1954.

rock art

A worldwide prehistoric art form that involved either painting pictographs onto or carving petroglyphs into immovable rock surfaces, such as cave walls and cliff faces. In what is now Canada, rock art was associated with healing and prophesy.

Sanchez, Joseph (Pueblo/American, b. 1948)

A founding member of the Professional Native Indian Artists Inc. and the only non-Canadian artist of the group, Sanchez takes nature and spirituality as a primary concern in his paintings. After spending several years in Canada, he returned to the United States in the mid-1970s, helping to form various artists' groups.



shamanism

Religion that centres around a shaman, practised in various forms by Indigenous peoples worldwide. Shamans are commonly believed to have special powers, including the ability to heal individuals and communities and escort souls of the dead to the spirit world.

smudging ceremony

In North American Indigenous traditions, the smudging ceremony is one of purification. It commonly involves the use of smoke of sage, sweetgrass, cedar, or other herbs to cleanse the body, mind, and spirit of negative emotions.

spiritual light

In the Eckankar religion, spiritual light refers to one of the primary channels through which practitioners may come to know God within themselves. The other channel is sound.

steatite (soapstone) carving

One of the first forms of Inuit art available in the South, these were traditional Inuit carvings. Steatite (also known as soapstone) is a soft stone made mostly of talc, though objects often thought of as steatite carvings may also be made of serpentinite or pyrophyllite.

Surrealism

An early twentieth-century literary and artistic movement that began in Paris. Surrealism aimed to express the workings of the unconscious, free of convention and reason, and was characterized by fantastic images and incongruous juxtapositions. The movement spread globally, influencing film, theatre, and music.

Thomas, Roy (Ojibway, 1949–2004)

Associated with the Woodland School, Thomas painted representations of the teachings he inherited from his ancestors and that he saw in visions. His work is known for its strong design and bold use of colour and lines. The Art Gallery of Ontario and the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, and the McMichael Canadian Art Collection in Kleinburg, Ontario, house his work.

Thomson, Tom (Canadian, 1877–1917)

A seminal figure in the creation of a national school of painting, whose bold vision of Algonquin Park—aligned stylistically with Post-Impressionism and Art Nouveau—has come to symbolize both the Canadian landscape and Canadian landscape painting. Thomson and the members of what would in 1920 become the Group of Seven profoundly influenced one another's work. (See *Tom Thomson: Life & Work* by David P. Silcox.)

Thunderbird

Considered one of the highest spirits (*manitous*) in Ojibway culture, and taken as a symbol for the culture itself, this supernatural bird is said to produce thunder and lightning and tend to the health and well-being of the Earth.



Triple K Cooperative

The Triple K Cooperative Inc. was a Canadian Indigenous-run silkscreen company in Red Lake, Ontario, that produced quality limited editions of work by several artists within the Woodland School of art from 1973 until the early 1980s. The name Triple K relates to the surname of its three founders, brothers Joshim Kakegamic, Henry Kakegamic, and Goyce Kakegamic. They made editions for their brother-in-law Norval Morrisseau.

West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative (Kinngait Studios)

Established in 1960 as a formalized organization for the Inuit co-operatives that had been operating in the eastern Arctic since the 1950s, the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative is an artists' co-operative that houses a print shop. It markets and sells Inuit carvings and prints, in particular through its affiliate in the South, Dorset Fine Arts. Since approximately 2006 the arts and crafts sector of the co-op has been referred to as Kinngait Studios.

Williams, Saul (Anishinaabe, b. 1954)

Associated with the Woodland School and the Triple K Cooperative, Williams is a painter and graphic artist whose subjects include Indigenous myths and legends, spirits, and animals, which he portrays in the X-ray style.

Woodland School (of art)

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Norval Morrisseau pioneered this school of artistic practice. Key characteristics of Woodland School art include the fusion of traditional Ojibway imagery and symbols with sensibilities of modernism and Pop art, as well as the fusion of X-ray-style motifs with bold colours and interconnected, curvilinear lines. Alex Janvier, Daphne Odjig, and Carl Ray are other prominent artists associated with the Woodland School.

X-ray style

Developed by Norval Morrisseau as both a painting style and shamanistic device, the X-ray style of painting reveals the souls of humans and animals by using black "spirit" lines that emanate from the spines of figures, surrounding and linking them. Often, internal organs are shown within bold, bright colour segments.



SOURCES & RESOURCES

Following a career punctuated by groundbreaking Canadian and international art shows, Norval Morrisseau secured his significance within the history of Canadian art with a retrospective exhibition of his paintings at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa in 2006. Since that time, Morrisseau and his work have inspired theatrical plays, prose poetry, and contemporary dance performances. These have further entrenched his importance within Canada's wider cultural imagination, and his visual vocabulary continues to influence Indigenous artists, suggesting that Morrisseau will have an enduring legacy in Canadian art.

KEY GROUP EXHIBITIONS



Installation view of Norval Morrisseau's *Life Regenerating*, 1977, and *The Great Flood*, 1975, in the *Magiciens de la Terre* exhibition at Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France, 1989.

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| 1967 | <i>Expo 67</i> , Indians of Canada Pavilion, Montreal, QC. |
| | <i>Three Hundred Years of Canadian Art</i> , National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, ON. |
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| 1974 | <i>Canadian Indian Art '74</i> , Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, ON. |
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| 1975 | <i>Indian Art '75</i> , Woodland Indian Cultural Educational Centre, Brantford, ON. |
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| 1978 | <i>Art of the Woodland Indian</i> , McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinberg, ON. Travelled to Surrey, BC; St. Thomas, ON; North Bay, ON. |
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| 1984 | <i>Norval Morrisseau and the Emergence of the Image Makers</i> , Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. |
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| 1985 | <i>Two Worlds</i> , Norman MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina, SK. |
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| 1987 | <i>A Celebration of Contemporary Canadian Native Art</i> , Southwest Museum, Los Angeles, CA, USA. |
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NORVAL MORRISSEAU

Life & Work by Carmen Robertson

1989 *In the Shadow of the Sun: Contemporary Canadian Indian and Inuit Art*, Canadian Museum of Civilization (now Canadian Museum of History), Gatineau, QC. Travelled to Museum Ostwall, Dortmund, Germany; Museum für Kunst und Kulturegeschichte, Dortmund, Germany; Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde, Leiden, the Netherlands; Museon, The Hague, the Netherlands.

Magiciens de la Terre/Magicians of the Earth, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France.

1996 *The Helen E. Band Collection*, Thunder Bay Art Gallery, ON.

2000 *Exposed: Aesthetics of Aboriginal Erotic Art*, MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina, SK. Travelled to Ottawa Art Gallery, ON.

2005 *About Face: Self-Portraits by Native American, First Nations, and Inuit Artists*, Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian, Santa Fe, NM, USA.

2013 *7: Professional Native Indian Artists Inc.*, MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina, SK. Travelled to Winnipeg Art Gallery, MB; Kelowna Art Museum, BC; McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinberg, ON.

Before and After the Horizon: Anishinaabe Artists of the Great Lakes, National Museum of the American Indian, Washington, DC, USA. Travelled to Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

KEY SOLO EXHIBITIONS

1962 Pollock Gallery, Toronto, ON.

1966 Musée du Québec, Quebec City.

1967 La Galerie Cartier, Montreal, QC.

1968 Art Gallery of Newport, Newport, RI, USA.

1969 Saint Paul Galerie, Saint-Paul de Vence, France.

1976 Pollock Gallery, Toronto, ON.

1983 *Norval Morrisseau: Recent Work*, Thunder Bay National Exhibition Centre, ON.

1987 *O.M. Show*, La Casa de la Raza, Santa Barbara, CA, USA.

1990 *Norval Morrisseau: Paintings from the Glenbow Museum*, Glenbow Art Gallery, Calgary, AB.

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- 1994** *Norval Morriseau: Honouring First Nations*, Kinsman Robinson Galleries, Toronto, ON.
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- 2000** *Norval Morriseau: The Red Lake Years*, Red Lake Museum, Red Lake, ON. Travelled to Thunder Bay Art Gallery, ON; Kinsman Robinson Galleries, Toronto, ON.
-
- 2001** *Draw and Tell: Lines of Transformation by Norval Morriseau/Copper Thunderbird*, The Drawing Centre, New York, NY, USA.
-
- 2006** *Norval Morriseau—Shaman Artist: Retrospective Exhibition*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, ON. Travelled to Thunder Bay Art Gallery, ON; McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinberg, ON; National Museum of the American Indian, New York, NY, USA.
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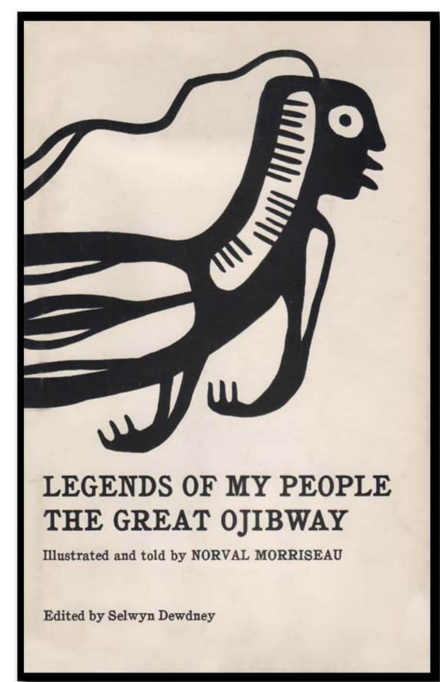
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Cover of *Legends of My People: The Great Ojibway*, illustrated and told by Norval Morriseau and edited by Selwyn Dewdney.



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———. "Body Politics: The Art of Norval Morriseau." *Revue d'art canadienne/Canadian Art Review* 32, nos. 1-2 (2007): 70-78.

———. "Thunderbirds and Concepts of Transformation in the Art of Norval Morriseau." *Journal of Canadian Art History* 33, no. 2 (2012): 53-70.

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<http://www.cbc.ca/player/News/Arts+and+Entertainment/Audio/ID/2233107390/?page=14&sort=MostRecent>.

Carvalho, Paul. *A Separate Reality: The Life and Times of Norval Morriseau*. Montreal: Perception Films, 2004. Documentary, 53 min. An eight-minute video is available at <http://vimeo.com/23935563>. Three excerpts from the video are available at:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qNls2Fi_iYg;
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pcznBdkZMEs>;
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RxOXXEI2jGE>.

Henning Jacobsen Productions Limited. *The Colours of Pride*. Directed by Henning Jacobsen. Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1973. Documentary film, 27 min.

———. *The Paradox of Norval Morriseau*. Directed by Henning Jacobsen and Duke Redbird. Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1974. Documentary film, 28 min.



Still image of Norval Morriseau from *The Paradox of Norval Morriseau*, produced by the National Film Board of Canada in 1974.

PLAYS, ANIMATION, AND POETRY

Drama

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Animation

Coyes, Gregory, and Tantoo Cardinal. *Stories from the Seventh Fire: Four Stories Told for Four Seasons*. Kelowna, BC: Storytellers Production Inc., 2002. Animated film, 112 min.

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Poetry

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Ruffo, Armand Garnet. *Norval Morrisseau: Man Changing into Thunderbird*.

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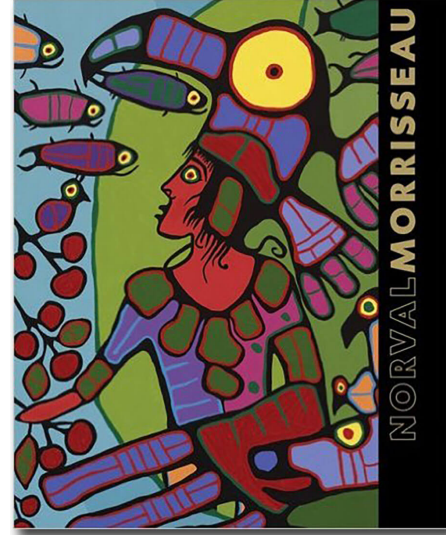
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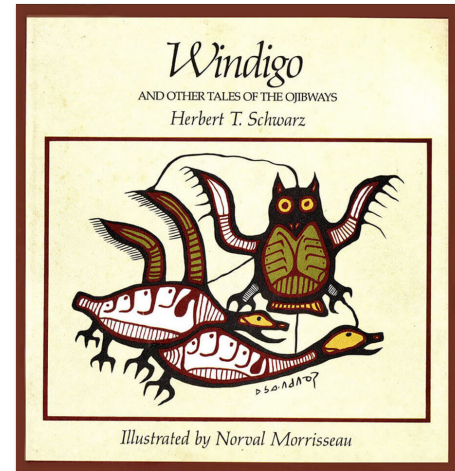
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

CARMEN ROBERTSON

Carmen Robertson is professor of art history at Carleton University, Ottawa, and held the position of associate professor of contemporary Indigenous art history at the University of Regina. A Lakota-Scottish scholar, she has long pursued and promoted the study of Indigenous arts and culture. Her current research involves a critical investigation of the work of Anishinaabe artist Norval Morrisseau, and her book *Mythologizing Norval Morrisseau: Art and the Colonial Narrative in the Canadian Media* was published in 2016 by University of Manitoba Press.

In addition to having published essays on Morrisseau's work in scholarly journals and edited collections, Robertson co-authored the award-winning book *Seeing Red: A History of Natives in Canadian Newspapers* (2011) and has published a number of essays related to the constructed representations of Indigenous peoples in the Canadian press. As an independent curator she has curated and co-curated such exhibitions as *Dana Claxton: The Sioux Project—Tatanka Oyate* (MacKenzie Art Gallery 2017), *Real Estate: Ceremonies of Possession* (Art Gallery of Regina, 2007), and *Clearing a Path: Traditional Indigenous Arts* (2005) for the Saskatchewan Arts Board. She has also contributed curatorial essays to such exhibition catalogues as *Bob Boyer: His Life's Work* (2008) and *7: Professional Native Indian Artists Inc.* (2013).

When Robertson is not researching and writing, she spends long summer days canoeing and hiking with her husband and two daughters at their cabin in the Yukon.



"I first became interested in Norval Morrisseau's art when I stumbled upon an exhibition of his work in the Imperial Oil tower in downtown Calgary in the early 1980s. Having never seen anything like it, and drawn to his use of colour, line, and subject matter, I was, from then on, hooked on Morrisseau!"



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From the Author

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Norval Morrisseau, *Observations of the Astral World*, c. 1994. (See below for details.)

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Biography: Norval Morrisseau, 1975. (See below for details.)



Key Works: Norval Morrisseau, *Observations of the Astral World*, c. 1994. (See below for details.)



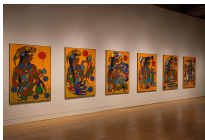
Significance & Critical Issues: Norval Morrisseau, *Artist and Shaman between Two Worlds*, 1983. (See below for details.)



Style & Technique: Norval Morrisseau, *The Gift*, 1975. (See below for details.)



Sources & Resources: Norval Morrisseau, *Jo-Go Way Moose Dream*, c. 1964. (See below for details.)



Where to See: Installation view of Norval Morrisseau's *Man Changing into Thunderbird*, 1977, at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, 2015.

Credits for Works by Norval Morrisseau



Adam and Eve and the Serpent, 1974. Thunder Bay Art Gallery, Helen E. Band Collection.



Ancestors Performing the Ritual of the Shaking Tent, c. 1958-61. Canadian Museum of History, Gatineau. This acquisition was made possible by a contribution from the government of Canada under the terms of the Emergency Purchase Fund (III-G-1045).



Androgyny, 1983. Collection of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, Gatineau (306400 A-D). Photograph by Lawrence Cook.



Artist and Shaman between Two Worlds, 1980. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (no. 41869).



Artist in Union with Mother Earth, 1972. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (no. 42476).



Artist's Wife and Daughter, c. 1975. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario (1981.87.1).



The Gift, 1975. Thunder Bay Art Gallery, Helen E. Band Collection.



Impressionist Thunderbirds, 1975. Richard H. Baker Collection.



Indian Erotic Fantasy, n.d. Private collection.



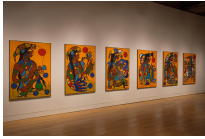
Indian Jesus Christ, 1974. Collection of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, Gatineau (151957). Photograph by Lawrence Cook.



Jo-Go Way Moose Dream, c. 1964. Collection of the Glenbow Museum, Calgary (64.37.6).



Man and Snake, c. 1964. Collection of the Glenbow Museum, Calgary.



Man Changing into Thunderbird, 1977. Private collection. Photograph courtesy of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



Man Changing into Thunderbird (detail), 1977. Private collection. Photograph courtesy of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



Man Changing into Thunderbird (detail), 1977. Private collection. Photograph courtesy of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



Migration, 1973. Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto. Gift from the Estate of Dr. Bernhard Cinader (2001.168.340).



Mishupishu, n.d. Collection of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, Gatineau, Selwyn Dewdney Fonds (A-306079). Photograph by Lawrence Cook.



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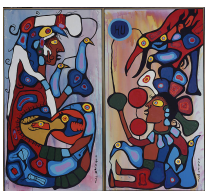
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The Storyteller: The Artist and His Grandfather, 1978. Collection of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, Gatineau (151805 A-B). Photograph by Lawrence Cook.



Susan, 1983. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (no. 41930).



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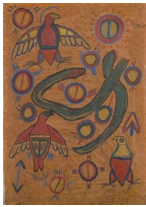
Untitled (Shaman Traveller to Other Worlds for Blessings), c. 1990. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (no. 41852).



Untitled (Thunderbird Transformation), c. 1958-60. Weinstein Collection, Canadian Museum of History, Gatineau (III-G-1099).



Untitled (Two Bull Moose), 1965. Thunder Bay Art Gallery. Gift of Carl Bogglid.



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Water Spirit, 1972. Canadian Museum of History, Gatineau (III-G-1102).

Credits for Photographs and Works by Other Artists



Agawa rock art. Photograph by D. Gordon E. Robertson, © 2011.



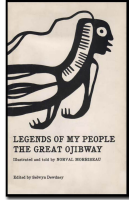
Birchbark basket, Anishnaabe/Ojibwa. Canadian Museum of History, Gatineau (III-G-250 a-b).



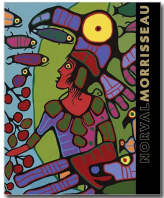
Birchbark basket made by Patricia Kakegamic and painted by Norval Morrisseau. Collection of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, Gatineau (A-306081). Photograph by Lawrence Cook.



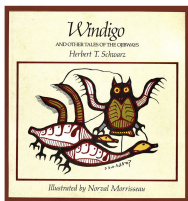
Conflict of Good and Evil, 1966, by Daphne Odjig. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Gift of Jennifer and Gary Scherbain, Winnipeg, 2011 (no. 43465).



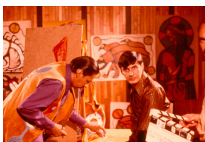
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Film still of Jack Pollock and Norval Morrisseau from the National Film Board documentary *The Paradox of Norval Morrisseau*, 1973.



Expo 67 Mural. Courtesy of Kinsman Robinson Gallery.



The Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, twenty-seventh Governor General of Canada (2005–10), with Morrisseau's daughters Lisa and Victoria. Photograph by Sgt Serge Gouin, Rideau Hall © OSGG, 2008. Reproduced with permission of the OSGG, 2016.



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Harriet, Norval, Victoria, and Pierre Morriseau, 1964. Photograph courtesy of the *Globe and Mail*.



Honour the Sun, c. 1970s, by Joshim Kakegamic. McMaster Museum of Art, Hamilton. Gift of Dr. Paul R. MacPherson (2012.004.0009).



Installation view of two works by Morriseau in *Magiciens de la Terre*, 1989. © Centre Pompidou, Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Paris.



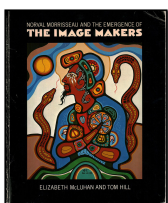
Installation view of two works by Morriseau in *Magiciens de la Terre*, 1989. © Centre Pompidou, Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Paris.



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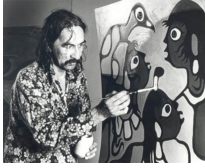
Norval Morriseau, 1975, National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives, Dominion Gallery Fonds.



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Norval Morriseau at home in White Rock, B.C., 1996. Collection of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, Gatineau. Photograph by Fred Cattrol.



Norval Morrisseau at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, 1979. Photograph by Ian Samson, courtesy of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario.



Norval Morrisseau in front of *Androgyny*, 2006. *Ottawa Citizen* photo archives.



Norval Morrisseau in front of Red Lake Mural. Courtesy of Red Lake Museum.



Norval Morrisseau in Red Lake. Courtesy of Red Lake Museum.



Norval Morrisseau painting *Androgyny*, 1983.



Norval Morrisseau painting outdoors in Red Lake, August 1966. Courtesy of Kinsman Robinson Gallery.



Past, Present and Future of the Anishinabe People, by Christian Chapman.



Pollock Gallery Invitation, 1962. Courtesy of Kinsman Robinson Gallery.



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So Great Was Their Love, 1975, by Daphne Odjig. Private collection.



Tea Party at Beardmore, 1979. Photographs courtesy of Barbara Stimpson.



Thunderbird Rock Painting at Cliff Lake. Courtesy of <http://albinger.me/>.

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