

NORVAL MORRISSEAU

A Retrospective

November 6 – 29, 2008

“All is well. May the blessings be.”

-Norval Morrisseau



Foreword

Paul C. H. Robinson

Morrisseau was arguably the greatest Aboriginal artist ever to have lived. He was Grand Shaman, painter, carver, draughtsman, storyteller, teacher, father, grandfather and great-grandfather—dubbed *Picasso of the North* by the French press. Having achieved world renown, most notably, he will be remembered for his instrumental role in the creation of North America's most colorful style of art—one of the most recognizable styles among First Nations art forms—the Woodland Art movement or *Woodland School* (rivalled only by Haida imagery.) Morrisseau's subject matter addressed the protection of the environment long before global warming entered our mainstream consciousness. In *Nature Interdependence*, Morrisseau portrayed the universal theme that we are all one with the environment—a theme that he would revisit time and again over the course of his illustrious career. In the three paintings, *All Creatures*, *Blue Loons* and *Great Lake Male Moose With Woodlands X-Ray Design*, Morrisseau joined his sacred animals by a single, continuous line reinforcing his lifelong themes of connection and interconnectedness. In *Eagle Fishing*, Morrisseau painted the birds directly atop the fish. The eagle overlaps the fish, giving the painting interconnectivity, linking the animals to one another in the perpetual struggle for life, the cycle of life and the food chain. Powerful demi-gods and mighty beings figured prominently in the artist's murals. In two museum pieces, both intimate family portraits,



Onaman Legend, 1964



Shaman Dreams of the Great Horned Medicine Snake, 1964

Norval, Gabe & Robyne: Apprenticeship With Thunderbird God and Artist Norval With Family Passing On Legends, Morrisseau portrayed the age-old oral tradition of passing knowledge from one generation to the next. *Shaman Dreams of the Great Horned Medicine Snake* and *Onaman Legend*, both ink drawings on birchbark, harken to the visual imagery found within ancient petroglyphs and Midewewin scrolls. Through painting, Morrisseau gave new life to Anishnaabe myths and legends and he helped to instill pride in his people. Morrisseau died in Toronto, on December 4th 2007, having lived to receive the highest accolades for lifetime achievement. He was a member of the Order of Canada, recipient of Doctor of Laws, recipient of Doctor of Letters, a member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Art, a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, recipient of the Lifetime Aboriginal Achievement Award, holder of the Eagle Feather (the highest honour awarded by the Assembly of First Nations) and Grand Shaman. Morrisseau lived life on his own terms, exactly as he wanted. He once said that given the chance to do it all over again, he wouldn't change a thing. At times, his controversial life didn't conform to society's rules. Yet, through all of its ups and downs, he managed to find inner peace. The National Gallery of Canada's solo exhibition in 2006, *Norval Morrisseau — Shaman Artist*, reaffirmed Morrisseau as Canada's modern-day master yet the artist's real life would make Van Gogh sound like your average suburbanite. Morrisseau's paintings continue to challenge viewers to look beyond themselves and their immediate surroundings into the realm of spiritual or astral worlds. His colors dazzle the senses with their brilliant splendor and kaleidoscopic range. Morrisseau truly was Canada's national treasure. This retrospective exhibition—our first in over a decade—presents the finest selection of Morrisseau paintings now available. Thank you, Norval, for enriching the world with your art. Your spirit shall shine brightly through your artistic legacy.



Birds in the Nest, 1965



Untitled (Thunderbird), 1966



Sacred Trout, 1968



Peter with Birds, 1970



Quail Family, 1973



Fish, 1973



Blue Loons, 1973

Image pgs 14, 15: *Grand Shaman and His Apprentice The Blond Person Tala, Sunshine for the Group*, 1980





Artist Norval With Family Passing On Legends, 1989





Shaman Protection, 1990



Sacred Bear with Life Cycles, 1989



Great Lake Male Moose with Woodlands X-Ray Design, 1993



Eagle Fishing, 1994

List of Works in Exhibition

***Onaman Legend, 1964**

Ink on birchbark
5 x 17.5 in, 12.7 x 44.45 cm
Acquired directly from the artist;
Private collection, Thunder Bay

***Shaman Dreams of the Great Horned Medicine Snake, 1964**

Ink on birchbark
5 x 17.5 in, 12.7 x 44.45 cm
Acquired directly from the artist;
Private collection, Thunder Bay

Dreaming of the Source: Transforming Into One, 1964

Ink on birchbark
8.25 x 18 in, 20.95 x 45.72 cm
Acquired directly from the artist;
Private collection, Thunder Bay

***Birds in the Nest, 1965**

Acrylic on millboard
31 x 41 in, 78.75 x 104.15 cm
Acquired directly from the artist;
Private collection, Fort Frances

***Untitled (Thunderbird), 1966**

Acrylic on kraft board
63.5 x 23 in, 161.3 x 58.42 cm
Acquired directly from the artist;
Private collection

***Sacred Trout, 1968**

Acrylic on paper laid on masonite
21.5 x 30.5 in, 54.61 x 77.47 cm
Acquired directly from the artist;
Private collection, Fort Frances

Self-Portrait: The Artist As Spiritual Leader, 1969

Acrylic on canvas
60.75 x 48.5 inches, 154.31 x 123.20 cm
Reproduced pg. 147 Return To The House of Invention (Key Porter Books, 2005)
Reproduced pg. 99 Travels To The House of Invention (Key Porter Books, 1997)

***Peter With Birds, 1970**

Acrylic on kraft board
47.5 x 35 in, 120.65 x 88.9 cm
Acquired directly from the artist;
Private collection, Kenora

***Blue Loons, 1973**

Acrylic on matboard
33.25 x 32.25 in, 84.45 x 81.92 cm
Acquired directly from the artist,
Purchased from artist's agent by
Dr. R. Falk, Private collection, Montreal

***Fish, 1973**

Acrylic on matboard
33.25 x 32.25 in, 84.45 x 81.92 cm
Acquired directly from the artist;
Purchased from artist's agent by
Dr. R. Falk; Private collection, Montreal

***Quail Family, 1973**

Acrylic on matboard
33.25 x 32.25 in, 84.45 x 81.92 cm
Acquired directly from the artist,
Purchased from artist's agent by
Dr. R. Falk, Private collection, Montreal

Sacred Beaver With Life Cycles, 1973

Acrylic on matboard
31 x 39 in, 78.75 x 99.06 cm
Private Collection, Toronto;
Reproduced NAAF 2008 Gala Program

***Grand Shaman And His Apprentice The Blond Person Tala, Sunshine For The Group, 1980**

Acrylic on canvas
70 x 114 in, 177.8 x 289.56 cm
Acquired directly from the artist;
Private collection

Untitled (Riding The Thunderbird), 1988

Red and black ink on paper
22 x 30 in, 55.88 x 76.2 cm
Acquired directly from the artist;
Marion Scott Ltd. Gallery of the Arts

Sacred Beaver, 1988

Graphite and colored pencil on illustration board
10 x 15 in, 25.4 x 38.1 cm
Acquired directly from the artist;
Private collection, Victoria

Shaman Being Healed of Earthly Values, 1989

Red and black ink on paper
22 x 30 in, 55.88 x 76.2 cm
Acquired directly from the artist;
Marion Scott Ltd. Gallery of the Arts

***Artist Norval With Family Passing On Legends, 1989**

Acrylic on canvas
100 x 92 in, 254 x 233.68 cm
Acquired directly from the artist

***Norval, Gabe & Robyne: Apprenticeship With Thunderbird God, 1989**

Acrylic on canvas
92 x 102 in, 233.68 x 259.08 cm
Acquired directly from the artist

***Sacred Bear With Life Cycles, 1989**

Acrylic on canvas
24 x 48 in, 60.96 x 121.92 cm
Acquired directly from the artist;
Private collection, Germany

Grandfather With Son And Grandson, 1990

Acrylic on canvas, (diptych)
48 x 96 in, 121.92 x 243.84 cm
Acquired directly from the artist,
Kinsman Robinson Galleries,
by descent to present owner

***Shaman Protection, 1990**

Acrylic on canvas
80 x 36 in, 203.2 x 91.44 cm
Acquired directly from the artist,
Kinsman Robinson Galleries
Reproduced NAAF 2008 Gala Program

Shaman Appears Before All Creatures, 1992

Acrylic on canvas
59.5 x 186.5 in, 151.13 x 473.71 cm
Acquired directly from the artist

***Great Lake Male Moose With Woodlands X-ray Design, 1993**

Acrylic on canvas
36 x 48 in, 91.44 x 121.92 cm
Estate of the artist

Sacred Trout, 1993

Acrylic on masonite
22 x 28 in, 22.88 x 71.12 cm
Estate of the artist

Bear, Fish, Bird 1994

Acrylic on canvas
22 x 28 in, 55.88 x 71.12 cm
Estate of the artist

***Boy With Thunderbird Headdress, 1994**

Acrylic on canvas
24 x 30 in, 60.96 x 76.2 cm
Estate of the artist

***Eagle Fishing, 1994**

Acrylic on canvas
30 x 48 in, 76.2 x 121.92 cm
Estate of the artist

Grandson, 1994

Acrylic on canvas
24 x 30 in, 60.96 x 76.2 cm
Estate of the artist

All Creatures, 1995

Acrylic on canvas
24 x 48 in, 60.96 x 121.92 cm
Estate of the artist

In The Dream World, 1995

Acrylic on canvas
40 x 30 in, 101.6 x 76.2 cm
Estate of the artist

List of Works in Exhibition (cont')

***Nature Interdependence*, 1995**

Acrylic on canvas

24 x 36 in, 60.96 x 91.44 cm

Estate of the artist

Grandson With Birds At

***The Ojibway Story Tree*, 1995**

Acrylic on canvas

48 x 24 in, 121.92 x 60.96 cm

Estate of the artist

***Thunderbird Shaman*, 1996**

Acrylic on masonite

36 X 14 in, 91.44 x 35.56 cm

Estate of the artist

Sacred Bear, Food Chain

***Within The Life Cycle*, 1996**

Acrylic on masonite

16 x 20 in, 40.64 x 50.8 cm

Acquired directly from the artist

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