



NORVAL MORRISSEAU (1932-2007)

BIOGRAPHY

An Anishinaabe, Norval Morrisseau (b. 1932 d. 2007) was born in 1932 on Sand Point reserve near Beardmore, Ontario. Some sources quote him as saying he was born in Fort William, now part of Thunder Bay, on the same day a year previous. He signed his work using Cree syllabics writing for Miskwaabik Animiiki (Copper Thunderhead), his Anishinaabe name.

According to Anishinaabe tradition, Norval Morrisseau was raised by his maternal grandparents. His grandfather, a shaman, taught him the traditions and myths of his people and his grandmother was a devout Catholic from whom he learned the tenets of Christianity. The contrast between these two religious traditions became an important factor in his intellectual and artistic development.

Morrisseau was a self-taught artist. The subjects of his art in his early period were the myths and traditions of the Anishinaabe people. His later style changed; he used more standard materials and the colours became progressively brighter, eventually obtaining a neon-like brilliance.

Over the years Morrisseau received many awards in recognition of his achievements. He was a recipient of the Canada Centennial Medal in 1968, was appointed a member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Art in 1973, and the Order of Canada in 1978. He was acknowledged as Grand Shaman of the Ojibwa in 1986, and honoured by the Assembly of First Nations in 1995. He received several honorary doctorates and in 2006 was one of the first artists to be inducted into the Royal Society of Canada: The Academies of Arts, Humanities and Sciences of Canada. His work is displayed at Koyman Galleries and Terence Robert Gallery in Ottawa, Ontario.

His most significant and enduring achievement will be measured over generations as the lasting impact of his greatest ambition—to instil pride—makes itself felt in the art of new artists compelled to create by his masterful paintings. Morrisseau passed away in December of 2007 at the Toronto General Hospital after years of suffering from advanced Parkinson's disease. He was 75.