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Norval Morrisseau Retrospective Opens in New York

More than 50 works from Canada's renowned Native artist Norval Morrisseau (Anishinaabe) will be presented at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian in New York, the George Gustav Heye Center from Saturday, Oct. 20 to Sunday, Jan. 20, 2008. "Norval Morrisseau: Shaman Artist" is organized chronologically and features early works painted on unusual surfaces and the artist's later vibrant, large-scale canvases.

"Norval Morrisseau: Shaman Artist" chronicles Morrisseau's search for a style of art that would integrate his understanding of ancient spirituality within a contemporary art form. His brightly colored works illustrate Native ideas and traditions through bold images of animals and plants, spiritual creatures, ancestors and humans. Highlights of the exhibition include the six-panel work "Man Changing Into Thunderbird" (1977), the two-panel canvas entitled "The Storyteller: the Artist and his Grandfather" (1978) and "Artist and Shaman Between Two Worlds" (1980), as well as works that address the negative impacts of colonization on Native peoples, such as "The Gift" (1975).

"Norval Morrisseau has had a tremendous influence on the development of indigenous art in Canada and here in the United States," said W. Richard West Jr. (Southern Cheyenne), founding director of the National Museum of the American Indian. "We are honored to present this important retrospective of his work as part of our ongoing commitment to Native contemporary art."

"The groundbreaking works in this exhibition presented contemporary ideas and Native traditions in a revolutionary way," said John Haworth (Cherokee), director of the Heye Center. "Morrisseau's works have influenced generations of Native artists and continue to inspire young Native artists today."

Norval Morrisseau, also known as Copper Thunderbird, was born in 1932 and raised on the Sand Point Reserve near Lake Nipigon in Northern Ontario. He was acknowledged as Grand Shaman

of the Ojibwa in 1986, and in 1995, the Assembly of First Nations bestowed on him their highest honor—the presentation of an eagle feather. In 1989, Morrisseau, whom the French press dubbed “Picasso of the North,” was the only Canadian artist invited to exhibit at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris as part of the French Revolution Bicentennial celebrations.

“Norval Morrisseau: Shaman Artist” has been organized and circulated by the National Gallery of Canada. Greg A. Hill, assistant curator at the National Gallery of Canada, is the curator of the exhibition.

The Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian’s George Gustav Heye Center is located at One Bowling Green in New York City, across from Battery Park. The museum is free and open every day from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and on Thursdays until 8 p.m. Call (212) 514-3700 for general information and (212) 514-3888 for a recording about the museum’s public programs. By subway, the museum may be reached by the 1 to South Ferry, the 4 or 5 to Bowling Green or the R or W to Whitehall Street. The museum’s Web site is www.AmericanIndian.si.edu.

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