

Armand Garnet Ruffo - Presenter

In July 2007, writer Armand Ruffo spent four days in Red Lake, researching Norval Morrisseau's Red Lake years for his upcoming creative biography "Norval Morrisseau: Man Changing Into Thunderbird," which explores the relationship between the man and his art. Accompanied by Heritage Centre staff and Mayor Phil Vinet, Mr. Ruffo toured Cochenour, McKenzie Island, McMarmac, and Red Lake, and interviewed Morrisseau art collectors.



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In a letter to the Heritage Centre following his visit, Mr. Ruffo wrote "Your goal to preserve and promote the history of Woodland art in the community and instill a sense of pride in his heritage is admirable. Considering that the Woodland School was essentially established in Red Lake by Norval Morrisseau, Carl Ray and the Kakegamic brothers, it makes perfect sense that this festival be established here".

The Heritage Centre is pleased to welcome Mr. Ruffo back to Red Lake as a presenter for the Woodland Arts Festival, where he will read excerpts from his biography of the artist, with illustrations from the artist's own paintings.

Ruffo's text combines the facts of Morrisseau's life with the techniques of poetry and storytelling to explore the tumultuous life and work of one of Canada's greatest artists. Drawing on interviews, letters, essays, published texts and archival material, like a detective, the author pieces together the events of Morrisseau life in a collage of episodes and connects them to the artist's own work. Balancing between myth and history, dream and reality, "Man Changing Into Thunderbird" begins with Morrisseau's youth in Sand Point, his time at Residential School, his married years in Red Lake, and plunges him into the hustle of the Toronto art scene of the 1960s, etc., and, in doing so, attempts to "leave out nothing" as Morrisseau insisted to the author prior to his death in 2007.

Armand Garnet Ruffo's work is strongly influenced by his Ojibway heritage. He is the author of two volumes of poetry, *Opening In the Sky* and *At Geronimo's Grave*, winner of the 2002 Archibald Lampman Award for Poetry, as well as the acclaimed creative biography, *Grey Owl: the Mystery of Archie Belaney*. His recent work includes directing a feature film adaptation of his CBC Showcase award winning play, "A Windigo Tale." In addition to lecturing widely on Aboriginal literature, Ruffo's essays, fiction, and poetry have appeared in numerous anthologies, including *Introduction to Literature*, (Nelson, 2000), *Native Canadian Poetry* (Broadview, 2002), *OutCrops: Short Stories from Northeastern Ontario* (Your Scrivener's Press, 2005); *An Anthology of Native Literature in Canada* (Oxford, 2005) and *Making A Difference: Canadian Multicultural Literatures in English* (Oxford, 2007). A selection of his work-in-progress *Norval Morrisseau: Man Changing Into Thunderbird* appeared in the National Gallery's catalogue for the "Shaman Artist" exhibition in 2006. Born in Chapleau, Ontario, he currently lives in Ottawa where he is Associate Professor of Literature at Carleton University.

For more information about the Red Lake Woodland Arts Festival, visit our website at www.redlakemuseum.com, e-mail us at rlhc@goredlake.com, or call us at 727-3006.