

## Carl Ray - Honoured Woodland Artist

One of the artists to be honoured at this year's Woodland Arts festival is Carl Ray. Carl preceded the Triple K and is considered a trail-blazer in the Woodland art movement.

Carl was born in 1943 on Sandy Lake Reserve into a family of acknowledged medicine men, his grandfather and his brother among them. As a youth he attended McIntosh Indian Residential School near Vermillion Bay. When he was thirteen years old his father passed away and he returned to Sandy Lake to help support his family.

In the early 1960s Carl left the reserve to work at the Cochenour-Willans Gold Mine. When the mine officials learned that he had contracted tuberculosis, he was immediately rushed by taxi to Fort William (Thunder Bay) Sanatorium. He spent a year recovering from his illness and then returned to Sandy Lake where a Catholic priest encouraged him to start painting.



*Despair* by Carl Ray 1972  
Indian ink on white art paper 18"x24"  
Image courtesy of Redkettle Art

Carl Ray's life and work paralleled Morrisseau's career. Carl depicted Cree ceremonies that continued to be practised, and Anishinaabe beliefs that continued, through legend and story-telling, to maintain a strong hold on his community. In his art he confronted his own painful struggle to heal the personal and cultural dualities that tore him apart.

Carl Ray was a friend and apprentice to Norval Morrisseau, Ojibway Shaman Artist. Together they painted the large mural for the Canadian Government representing the Native People of Canada Pavilion at Expo '67 in Montreal. Carl Ray had a unique x-ray style of painting, often showing the inner organs and energy lines inside an animal or figure. His subjects were often shown in turmoil with the elements. To Carl life was full of conflict and redemption. Towards the end of his life his focus grew more personal and reflected his own inner turmoil. Carl Ray died at 35 years of age, in Sioux Lookout in October 1978.

Carl became the first person in the history of his band to paint professionally.

In his short career his works were exhibited in prestigious venues such as, the McMichael Art Gallery in Kleinberg, the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Ottawa, the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, the Canada House Art Gallery in London England and Aula Luisen Schule, Lahr in West Germany.

*Special thanks to Mayor Phil Vinet for providing historical information about Carl Ray.*

To learn more about Carl Ray and other aspects of the festival, visit our website at [www.redlakemuseum.com](http://www.redlakemuseum.com)