

Media Release

Red Lake Woodland Arts Festival: A Tribute to Norval Morrisseau and the Woodland Artists

Red Lake, ON – June 6, 2008. On June 7, 1960, Ontario Provincial Police Constable Robert Sheppard wrote to Selwyn Dewdney, an archeologist and ethnologist working for the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, inviting him to Mckenzie Island, a remote community located near Red Lake in Northwestern Ontario. The letter, written on OPP letterhead, read in part, "Enclosed are some crayon drawings of a young Indian I have met from around Beardmore way. His name is Norval Morrisseau... and he can draw and paint, grew up with the people and knows the stories by heart... Too bad the Museum couldn't use a series of Indian paintings, or could they?????"

It would take until 1972 before the ROM would acquire some of Morrisseau's paintings, but by then the artist, who was still living in the Red Lake area, had exhibited his work in many prestigious private and public art galleries, and received international recognition as the founder of the Woodland art movement. He had also influenced and inspired hundreds of Aboriginal artists to preserve and interpret their culture through their art.

In recognition of Norval Morrisseau's achievements, from July 4th- 6th, 2008, Red Lake will host the **Red Lake Woodland Arts Festival: A Tribute to Norval Morrisseau and the Woodland artists.** The Festival will feature art talks and presentations by guest artists, special exhibitions, an original play about Morrisseau's life in Red Lake, an art fair of original Woodland art from the Red Lake area, children's traditional arts and crafts, storytelling, delicious food, film screenings, traditional dancing, and more. In addition, there will be guided walking tours of where the artist lived for the first thirteen years of his artistic career and painted many of his early works.

Another special event planned during the festival is the launch of a new book published by the Heritage Centre about Norval Morrisseau's Red Lake years and about the Triple K Gallery, a highly successful Aboriginal print shop that operated in Red Lake in the 1970s. Researched and written by local writer Christine Penner Polle, the book includes many stories and photos that have never been published before.

The festival will also bring together art historians, curators, writers and art dealers with extensive expertise with the work of Norval Morrisseau and Aboriginal art. For most of these distinguished guests, it will be their first visit to Red Lake. "The festival will provide our visitors with a chance to meet many of the people who supported the artist's development and with family members who grew up with the illustrious artist", says Michele Alderton, Director/Curator of the Red Lake Regional Heritage Centre, the organization coordinating the event.

Some of the academics that have confirmed their attendance include Dr. Ruth Phillips, Canada Research Chair and Professor of Art History at Carleton University in Ottawa and member of the Norval Morrisseau Heritage Society; Dr. Trudy Nicks, Curator of Ethno History, North America, Royal Ontario Museum; Shelley Falconer, Senior Curator at the McMichael Canadian Collection in Kleinburg, Ontario; and Armand Ruffo, Norval Morrisseau's biographer and Assistant Professor of Literature at Carleton University. Also coming are John Newman, Associate Director of Kinsman Robinson Galleries in Toronto; Jackie Bugara, Director of Bearclaw Gallery in Edmonton; and Joseph McLeod, Director of Maslak McLeod Gallery in Toronto.

"The Woodland Arts Festival is shaping up to be a historic event that Morrisseau followers will not want to miss", says Alderton.

For more information about the Woodland Arts Festival, including a schedule of events, presenter and artist bios, accommodations and travel information to Red Lake, please visit www.redlakemuseum.com. You can also call (807) 727-3006 or e-mail rlhc@goredlake.com.