

Igniting the Spirit Within

Morrisseau's Art Helps Us to Bridge the Infinite in the Here and Now

BY RITCHIE "STARDREAMER" SINCLAIR



When I first apprenticed with Norval Morrisseau in 1979, his art was known as "Indian Art" and First Nations people were still being called "Indians." Today, we use terms such as "medicine art" or "legend painting" to describe his work. I personally prefer the media-created term "woodland art," though I never lose sight of the fact that ground zero is all "Indian."

To me, as it was to Morrisseau, to be Indian is to know Spirit. Everything else including religion and skin colour is superfluous. He often said that his goal was simply to "bring out the Indian-ness" that he believed was already present within each of us.

When it comes to Spirit the word "present" is especially significant. To be wholly present; attuned, aligned, and trusting Spirit is to experience true freedom. Life lived sacredly in the here and now is an adventure that unfolds magically within a protective aura of love and support that only Spirit affords. Spirit is the only present we really need. Spirit is an all-pervading presence.

Those who know Spirit become grounded in authenticity. They enjoy life, such as it is, in their Garden of

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Sounding by Norval Morrisseau and Ritchie Sinclair (1979, 36" x 48", acrylic on canvas)

Eden. To wander off into yesterday or tomorrow without present cause is to leave the garden. To leave behind communing with Spirit to contemplate bipolarities like good and evil, or heaven and hell, is to leave paradise for spiritual poverty. One soon learns that there's no place like home.

Morrisseau taught me that a truly sacred life will always supercede guilt which cuts the connection. He also taught that elitism undermines genuine empowerment and that only by "standing under" issues do we discover real understanding.

His ancestors understood Spirit, and through Spirit they knew the natural universe. When compelled, Shaman artists would evoke nature's forces to assist with aligning energies. Their rock painting evocations have endured many centuries of weathering and survived the cruel purging of the North American Indian culture. Their petroglyphs are graphic indicators of Spirit's intent; in the moment and for the moment. Whether they depict demigods, animals, human-made objects, or hieroglyphs – petroglyphs are all channels to empower

one in Spirit.

In his early years as an artist, Morrisseau stood under many petroglyphs. Exploring the Great Lakes region with his friend, Selwyn Dewdney, he studied them in the purity of their natural environment. The glyphs provided him with the seeds of a symbolic language whose lost meaning he was destined to intuit, develop, and reveal. The result is that Morrisseau's magnificent art reignites the spirit within, inspiring us to bridge the infinite and eternal in the here and now.

Our once immense world has become a fragile, ever-so-tiny crucible in the throes of profound change. Now is a good time to lift our heads to the clouds and dig our feet into the earth. Spirit is not an Indian legend. It is you, dynamically reconnected to the natural and intuitive. You are the butterfly. It is your free spirit, your human spirit, your community spirit, your team spirit, and your creative spirit aligned with the universe that changes everything.

Morrisseau liked to ask people if they knew where the centre of the universe was. The usual response was a blank stare to which he would humorously respond, "It's right here. Wherever I go I'm always at the centre!" To some it may have seemed like ego or idiocy but to Morrisseau it was, ironically, reality. In a 1981 CBC film he remarked, "So if I am here in this world to deliver any messages I wouldn't want to be a preacher! I would want to be a painter!" He was a nomad who started out with less than nothing, yet his inspirational sojourn demonstrates what a spirit-driven human being can create out of nothing to lift all of humanity.

Is your world spinning? Take a moment to meditate on Morrisseau's medicine art. Relax, reassess, reinvent, rejuvenate, and remember, "it's your universe."

Explore Norval Morrisseau and his artwork at www.NorvalMorrisseauBlog.com

Ritchie "Stardreamer" Sinclair has been exploring the arts, primarily painting, all his life. His artistic effort is both a personal approach to Spirit and ideally a source of inspiration to others. The theme of his art is love. As a founding member of Norval Morrisseau's Thunderbird School, Ritchie is also an authorized teacher and proponent of the Shamanistic Arts. Learn more about Ritchie at www.RitchieSinclair.com.

