

Canadian musicians say they were victims of massive art-forgery ring

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Two well-known Canadian musicians say they are victims of an alleged art-forgery ring that is producing counterfeit works of famous Canadian Aboriginal artist Norval Morrisseau.

Kevin Hearn, the keyboardist for Canadian band the Barenaked Ladies, and John McDermott, a Scottish-Canadian tenor best known for his rendering of the song "Danny Boy," say the Morrisseau paintings they purchased from a gallery in Toronto are forgeries. Both men are suing the dealer who sold them the paintings.

It has been rumoured since the early 2000s that Morrisseau fakes were being sold on the Canadian market. Morrisseau, whose work focused on Aboriginal myths and legends, died in 2007.

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Canadian Aboriginal artist Norval Morrisseau's painting "Androgyny" in the ballroom at Rideau Hall, Sept. 18, 2008 in Ottawa. Two Canadian musicians say they are victims of an art-forgery ring selling fake Morrisseau paintings.

Ritchie Sinclair, a close friend and former apprentice of Morrisseau's, says the artist had been aware forgeries had been circulating on the market before his death. He says Morrisseau even wrote to a gallery saying dealers were selling fakes of his work. Sinclair says most of the forgeries he's seen have come from Thunder Bay, Ont., adding that more than 2,000 fake images have emanated from the northern Ontario city.

"I consider it egregious what they've done to him (Morrisseau)," Sinclair told CTV's Canada AM Friday Morning. "It's similar to someone actually stealing your identity. And the imagery is really not up to par, it's not what one would consider a true forgery."

Sinclair has set up [Morrisseau.com](#), a website set that helps art collectors differentiate between fake Morrisseau's and the real thing.

Sinclair says one telltale sign of a Morrisseau forgery is a signature in black paint on the back of a painting.

"You'll never find anything from the historical records or from the museums that have this," said Sinclair, holding up what he says is a Morrisseau forgery which features the signature. "These all appeared after 1999."

Sinclair says he believes the paintings both Hearn and McDermott are bought fakes. McDermott purchased three paintings for more than \$15,000.

Before his death, Morrisseau tried to clamp down on forgeries by signing affidavits and forming the Norval Morrisseau Heritage Society. The society is the only body that can authenticate his work.

Morrisseau was born in Beardmore, Ontario in 1932. He was a self-taught artist and became known as the "Picasso of the North." He also founded the Woodlands School of Canadian Art.

Morrisseau struggled with substance abuse during his life, and had been known to trade his art pieces for alcohol for places to stay when he lived on Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.

It's estimated he created more around 10,000 paintings during life. He battled Parkinson's disease for many years, dying from cardiac arrest in 2007.

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