

NORVAL MORRISSEAU AND THE EMERGENCE OF  
**THE IMAGE MAKERS**



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# Indian Art in Canada: An Historical Perspective

## Tom Hill

It may seem surprising that Indian art in Canada has had such a long struggle for recognition. There are a number of reasons for this neglect. First and foremost, the term "Indian art" has been carelessly defined to include those many and varied arts and crafts that have been created by Indians to reflect their traditional cultures. It is important for the understanding of Indian art that the period of time be specified when discussing any work, because since the time of European contact there has been no "pristine" Indian art that has never been modified or influenced by the dominant Euro-Canadian culture.

This essay explores three areas of Indian art – ceremonial art, the crafted arts, and the new art, examining some of the forces that eventually led to the recognition and recent acceptance of Indian art. It is intended to provide an historical perspective to the development of Indian art generally in Canada, and more specifically to provide the historical context for the acceptance of the style of painting originated by Norval Morrisseau.

### 1 Ceremonial Art: Form and Function

There is little recorded evidence to indicate when the North American Indian artist actually began manipulating European materials to produce fine art as "art for art's sake." There were few aboriginal art forms that were without an established function in cultural life. To the North American Indian, everything he made served a purpose. The idea of hanging a painting on a wall or mounting a sculpture on a pedestal just to admire it was completely foreign to him. That is not to say that the Indian did not enjoy having beautiful things about him. In fact, almost everything he made was decorated in some way; religious articles were often characterized by more inventive artistic interpretations than the secular objects were. Where the environment afforded more leisure time, as in the case of the northwest coast and the eastern woodland, the secular art objects became highly developed artistically and well integrated into the society.

One of the earliest accounts of an Indian painting a picture by using European materials to produce fine art, in the sense of "art for art's sake," comes from about 1840. Zacharie Vincent, a Huron Indian from the village of Lorette near Quebec, became so fascinated by his portrait being painted by Antoine Plamondon, a noted portrait painter of the time, that he promptly rendered several copies of the portrait for his own gratification. According to J. Russell Harper in *Painting in Canada*:

Plamondon is said to have given him advice, but throughout he remained a primitive, adding detail to detail with little regard for the final artistic effect.

The Huron Indian went on to paint some highly coloured landscapes of Lorette, now in the Quebec Museum, one of which is a free copy of a Krieghoff canvas.

"Art for art's sake," as interpreted by Zacharie Vincent in his paintings, was an unusual instance of one culture observing another and adapting. For whatever reason Zacharie Vincent chose to render the paintings, his interest was short-lived and his accumulated knowledge as a painter apparently influenced no one.

Since the time of European contact, the Indians living in British North America have adapted to the predominant taste of the Western world. Usually, the adaptation of one form of artistic expression to another is relatively simple, as in the case of Zacharie Vincent or in the applied arts. But when the expression is an integral part of the total cultural environment, as with ceremonial or ritual art, the adaptation is sometimes difficult.

Near the end of the nineteenth century, such eminent scholars as Claude Lévi-Strauss and Franz Boas sought to clarify the meaning of ceremonial art within a traditional culture through their research with the Indian bands on the northwest coast of British Columbia. Their analysis of the art forms stressed the interplay of the Indian's religious world with their art. Claude Lévi-Strauss states in *The Savage Mind* that:

A vase, a box, a wall are not independent, pre-existing objects which are subsequently decorated. They acquire their definitive existence only through the integration of the decoration with the utilitarian function. Thus, the chests of the Northwest Coast art are not merely containers embellished with a painted or carved animal. They are the animal itself, keeping an active watch over the ceremonial ornaments which have been entrusted to its care. Structure modifies decoration, but decoration is the final cause of structure, which must also adapt itself to the requirements of the former. The final product is a whole: utensil-ornament, object-animal, box that speaks.

The Indian artist strove to integrate the relevant traditional elements of his culture into the material at hand, in an attempt to create a form that gave concrete expression to these elements. The artist, in seeking to create a functioning whole structure, was also aware, as is any artist, of the subtleties of form and style. The successful creation combined both the cultural association common to all community members with the successful rendering of the material with which the artist worked.

One need only examine the Iroquois false face mask (fig. 1) to view the integration of form and function in art. The false face mask is carved directly from the trunk of a living softwood tree and depicts a supernatural being common to the whole community. Once the image is completed in relief on the side of the tree, it is carefully removed and finished with pigments and animal hair. Medicine bags may be added and attached to the false face to increase its powers. The face is created for a healing ceremony, and the person who wears the mask does so to focus the attention of the viewers on the power of the supernatural forces, rather than the mask image itself. The wearer, through dance and sounds, imitates the supernatural being that it depicts, thus integrating the false face into a functioning drama or healing ritual. Claude Lévi-Strauss was to define this principle as "metonymy," wherein a part symbolizes the whole.

The understanding of Iroquoian mythology does not readily lead to the total appreciation of Iroquoian aesthetic expression. The importance inherent in the artist's representation of his mythological consciousness lies primarily in the



fig. 1 Contemporary false face mask from the Collection of the Woodland Indian Cultural Educational Centre, Brantford.

sacred essence of the myth, rather than the literal rendering of it. Through the realization of the false face, the artist and the viewer are able to transcend both time and space as the artist brings his mythological past into the realistic present in the form of a false face, which acts as both utensil and supernatural being.

The ceremonial arts such as the false faces from southern Ontario, the masks and regalia from the northwest coast of British Columbia, the medicine bundle charms from the Prairies, and the birch bark Midewiwin Society scrolls from northwestern Ontario served a necessary function in religious ceremonies within Indian communities. All drew their power from the shared belief in the image, and from the quality and interpretive skill of the artist. These ceremonial arts, which manifested the traditional religion and culture, were the least compatible with European concepts. Consequently, they were to receive the most destructive blows from the impact of the European colonizers.

By the nineteenth century in British North America, the Christian missionaries were firmly established, each sect having staked out its specific territory, complete with its own particular set of Indians. As a result, by Confederation the ceremonial arts were in rapid decline. What remained of the Indian cultural tradition after the missionaries' thorough scouring of paganism was then subjected to the Canadian government's continuing and official policy of assimilation. This assimilationist policy was manifested through enactment of the Indian Act of 1874, the federal legislation designed to regulate every element of Indian life on "reserves," including those remnants of land that remained under Indian control. On April 19, 1884, assent was given to amend the act to prohibit the potlatch. The original statement in Section III reads as follows:

Every Indian or other person who engages in or assists in celebrating the Indian festival known as the Potlach [sic] or in the Indian dance known as the Tamanawas is guilty of a misdemeanour, and shall be liable to an imprisonment for a term of not more than 6 nor less than 2 months in any gaol or other place of confinement; and any Indian or other person who encourages, either directly or indirectly, an Indian or Indians to get up such a festival or dance or to celebrate the same or who shall assist in the celebration of same is guilty of a like offense, and shall be liable to the same punishment.

In the statutes of Canada of 1926-27, a new provision to the act outlawed the sundance, a ritual practised by those bands living on the Prairies. While there were no specific references to the Midewiwin and longhouse rituals in Ontario, the law did, however, give the missionaries and the civil servants a mandate to pursue an aggressive acculturation program. No other revisions were made to this section until it was completely removed from the Indian Act in 1951.

The Potlatch Law, as it came to be called, had a profound effect on the artistic expression of Indian artists. In most cases the artists' creations were an integral part of such forbidden ceremonies. Not only was the artist the producer of the objects used in these now-forbidden rites, but often he was also the philosopher who initiated the change that kept the ceremonial traditions viable and evolving. The condemnation of the Indians' traditional spiritual life forced the artist either to find other ways to express his creativeness or to conform to the prescribed artistic forms established by the Euro-Canadians. Consequently, the long and sacred traditions that were the roots of ceremonial art ebbed to an unforgivable low as the artists passively accepted the Euro-Canadians' aesthetic tastes, their culture, and their established order.

## 2 The Crafted Arts: Towards Commercialization

"Acculturation" is a term often used to suggest debasement when referring to the style of art produced by North American Indians. For the applied arts or crafts, acculturation began from the time of the first European contact, with the introduction of new materials and technology. As Nelson Graburn has shown, two societies that are in contact with each other over a long period of time and are at greatly different technological and economic levels will eventually exchange materials, items, and ideas. Very little is known of the acculturation process that occurred among the various Indian nations in prehistoric times. Archaeologists, of course, have given some indication, gained from material culture recovered from various prehistoric sites, that trade did occur. Unfortunately, the only materials retrieved from these sites are usually non-perishable items such as shells, bones, stones, or ceramics. We can only speculate that if trade was taking place, techniques and artistic styles in Indian arts would have also been modified.

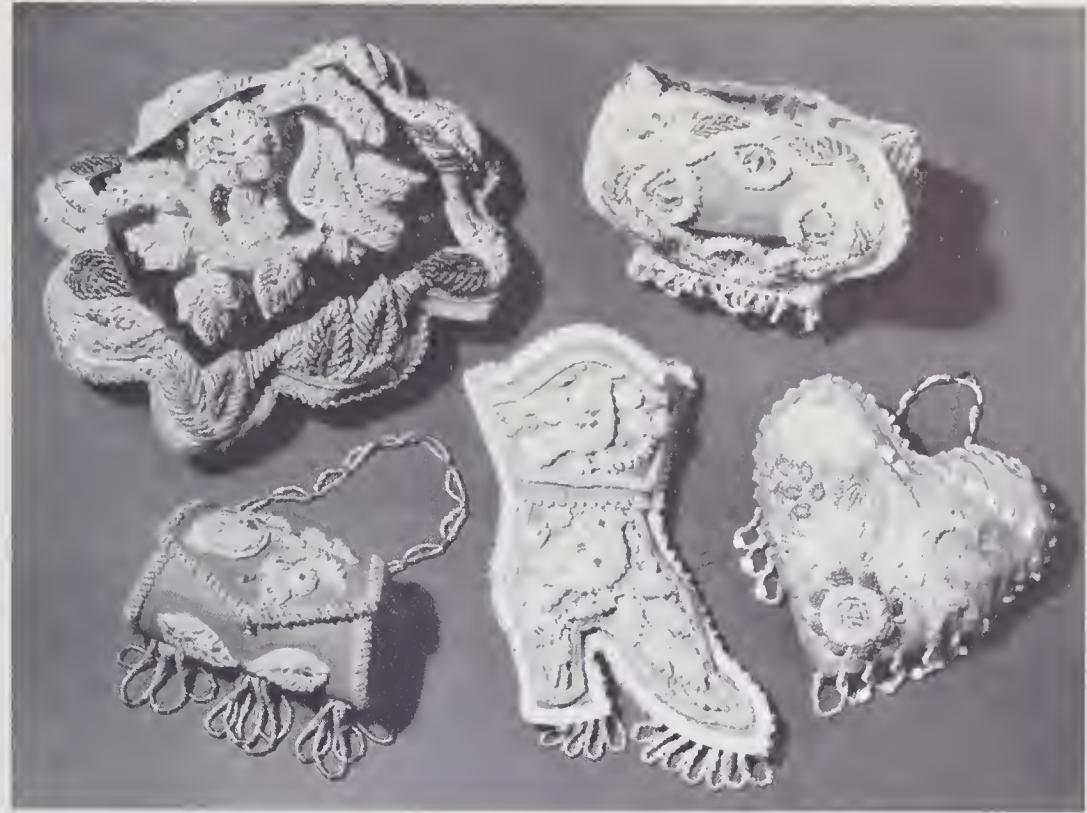
The technology and the new materials introduced by the colonizers were readily accepted by the Indians as more functional. The colonial powers gave these new materials as tokens to win the friendship and alliance of the Indian nations, and in some instances to buy their lands. To the European encountering Indian arts, they presented a colourful and exotic display that impressed but did not involve him. There is no doubt that the aesthetic concepts involved in this work were too foreign and far-removed from his own; also, the European did not consider the Indian to be his intellectual equal. After they overcame their initial revulsion towards the culture, Europeans collected arts and crafts as souvenirs. A survey of North American artifacts in Europe can attest to these early souvenir collectors, from the Russian sea captains sailing between Russian America and their homeland in the early eighteenth century to the British military in the service of the empire. Norman Feder notes in *Two Hundred Years of North American Indian Art*:

Almost from the time of first European contact, it was the habit of travellers visiting Indian groups to collect souvenirs as mementoes of their trips. The Indians were quick to realize the commercial potentialities of this tourist trade and very soon started making articles specifically for this purpose. Initially there was little difference in the quality of materials of these pieces, since they were following old traditions. Most Indians, however, soon realized that the travellers were willing to accept inferior materials, and they often preferred novelties which could be simply and inexpensively produced.

This realization of the commercial aspect of arts and crafts was never more evident than in the development of argillite carving by the Haidas of the Queen Charlotte Islands. Conceived and developed during the mid-nineteenth century totally for the white market, the carvings are made from slate-like stone that can be carved and polished to a highly glossy finish. They had no function in traditional Haida society, primarily since once the stone hardens, it is brittle and shatters easily; it could not be used in any capacity that required strength and durability. The flourishing of the art form depended totally on its success in the marketplace, which was created completely outside Haida society. Ironically, while argillite carving was gaining success, the Canadian government was outlawing by statute the very essence of Haida society, the potlatch.

The popularity of argillite carving in Victorian Canada is a good indication of the general attitude of Canadians towards the country's diminishing Indian populations. They viewed the carvings simply as curios, remnants of a dying

fig. 2 Beaded Indian souvenirs from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Collection of the Woodland Indian Cultural Educational Centre, Brantford, and Ms. Sadie Buck.



people. Little interest was shown in the culture and mythology that was often vividly expressed. Carol Sheehan has noted in *Pipes That Won't Smoke, Coal That Won't Burn*:

The subject matter of the carvings and the meanings they represented were apparently not part of the purchase price; indeed they probably were not even taken into consideration. The fact that the subject matter went through several drastic changes with little or no change in its acceptance by the market would seem to indicate this. Furthermore, the scarceness of museum documentation for argillite sculptures might be another indication that the buyer was more interested in the fact that it was carved by an Indian than in the meaning of its images.

Little attention was given to these argillite images by the consumer; ironically, this art form reflected the paganism that the Victorian consumers, along with their missionaries, adamantly opposed and worked ceaselessly to eradicate. A reflection of the prevalent attitude appeared in 1900 in an article written by Marshall Scott in *The Canadian Magazine*. In his piece of sensational journalism, the writer described "the ghoulish pagan practices," and implied that there was both a sense of duty and repulsion among whites concerning primitive people. As Ronald Haycock records in *The Image of the Indian* (1971), Marshall indicated that pagans made up 30 per cent of Canadian aborigines, but civilization was winning its way, and old pagans of inferior blood were dying out faster than men of good race who wished to improve themselves.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the proliferation of other Indian curios developed solely for the souvenir market (fig. 2). Sometimes called "whimsies," the beaded velvet pin cushions shaped like high-button shoes, hearts, flowers, ladies' hats, and parasols, the elaborate beaded picture frames and the multi-shaped forms that did not identify one thing or another but simply announced the place and date of purchase can still be found throughout antique stores in Canada. These souvenirs reflected the elaborate and ornate style preferred by Victorians; they had no style or tradition that identified them

as Indian except for the technique of beading, which in the minds of many Canadians was now synonymous with Indians. Like argillite carvings, these newly crafted forms depended on the development of new audiences at about the time their own craft products were becoming obsolete in Indian communities across Canada. Functions and forms were redefined and economic production motives replaced the utilitarian ones of the past. New marketing systems evolved from the demands of travelling medicine shows, which employed Indian people; from the railroad tourist trade, which brought the tourist in direct contact with the romanticized version of an Indian; and from the popular interest of Canadians in exhibitions and agricultural fairs, which provided the main outlet for the selling of these objects. The interest of the white consumer played a major role in the creative moulding of these souvenir products, merely by the acceptance of them. To the Indian, the admiration of the white consumer was an important factor because it gave approval to their "Indianness," which in all other areas was condemned.

The condemnation of the Indians' cultural traditions was centred in the Indian Affairs Department in Ottawa, with its well-intentioned goal of raising the Indian to levels of civilization fashioned on the Christian ethic. Having common objectives with the Anglican, Methodist, and Roman Catholic churches, the Indian Affairs department established education programs that would eventually "civilize" their "wards." These programs were planned with the objective of breaking up Indian societal relationships by removing their traditional patterns, values, and habits, and replacing them with those of the European. One method was the establishment of residential schools far away from Indian communities, in order to isolate at an early age the children from their parents, with their traditional habits and customs. The speaking of any Native language was forbidden; visits home were discouraged.

Support and encouragement for this acculturation policy was never more clearly delineated than in Marshall Scott's 1900 article in *The Canadian Magazine*, which stated:

The Queen's representatives in Canada have known how to keep faith with and earn the confidence of the red man, and the servants of the Most High have shrunk from no sacrifice to perform their imposed duty of winning the pagans.

Understandably, then, the interest in developing the Indian arts-and-crafts market received no attention from Indian Affairs. It wasn't until a group of concerned Montreal women formed the Women's Art Association of Montreal in 1900, which six years later became the Canadian Handicraft Guild, that ardent support for the commercialization of Indian arts and crafts took shape. After organizing exhibitions (fig. 3), travelling shows, and competitions for Indian people the guild eventually, through their "Indian Committee," became a lobbying organization on behalf of Indian craftsmen for craft programs established by the government.

The ultimate objective of this philanthropic organization was "to encourage, retain, revise, and develop Canadian Handicrafts and Art Industries throughout the Dominion," according to Virginia Watt in her essay in *Canadian Guild of Crafts, Quebec*. Among the first members of the Canadian Handicraft Guild were people who had collections of Indian and Eskimo crafts; so it was not surprising that one of the guild's interests was to encourage the Native people of Canada to create good traditional crafts. To the guild the preservation of Indian culture was of prime importance. The arts and crafts were, in their viewpoint, inseparable from the culture; if the arts and crafts were permitted to die, so part of the culture would die also. Little did they realize that their efforts to create a

fig. 3 Indian art exhibition sponsored by the Women's Art Association of Montreal, 1905.



viable commercial market would also encourage the evolution of a style far removed from any traditional trait of Indian societies.

The Canadian Handicraft Guild was not the only organization involved in the promotion of Indian arts and crafts through exhibitions and competitions. A similar organization, the Society for the Furtherance of B.C. Indian Arts and Crafts, spearheaded by Alice Ravenhill, was founded in Victoria in 1940. Miss Ravenhill states in *Memoirs of an Educational Pioneer* that:

The organization objects were summarized as constructive, cultural, and economic; these being based upon adequate evidence of the inherited artistic gifts and mechanical and manual dexterities latent in young Indians, shown in painting, carving, modelling, in drama, dancing, singing, and also in mechanical abilities of a high order.

Miss Ravenhill's efforts to promote Indian arts on the west coast did not receive the same positive responses that the Canadian Handicraft Guild had in the east. Miss Ravenhill remarked that the "attendance was the smallest on record" at speeches she made on west-coast art at the Victoria Arts and Crafts Society, the Women's University Club in Victoria, and the Businessmen's Lunch Club. However, all her efforts did not go unnoticed. In September 1945 an article in *Saturday Night* paid tribute to her work. The writer claimed that the exhibition of modern Indian arts and crafts, organized with the help of Ravenhill at the Provincial Museum in Victoria, "had preserved much that was beautiful in Indian Culture and, indeed had encouraged a revival in art that might have succumbed had it not been for her efforts."

In 1935 the Canadian Handicraft Guild, in promoting Indian arts and crafts, circulated a questionnaire to Indian agents across Canada to determine the state of the arts-and-crafts industry. According to Eleanor Verbicky in *The Creative Tradition* (1982), results of the survey, reported in 1936, "indicated the rapid decline of good work with the advance of 'civilization,' but agreed that with discerning encouragement much could still be saved, especially if increased markets could be found." As a result of the survey and the lobbying

efforts of the guild, the Indian Affairs department in Ottawa established the Medical Welfare and Training Division in 1936, with the mandate to provide programs for the encouragement of arts and crafts and the sale of handicrafts, along with its other responsibilities for schools, employment, health care, and agricultural projects. Very few changes were made in program objectives over the years, until 1969, when the department went through a major reorganization. Personnel were reassigned from the Northern Affairs Program to Indian Affairs, creating the Indian Eskimo Economic Development Branch.

During the forties and fifties, these philanthropic organizations directly or indirectly influenced the artistic development of Indian and Eskimo communities across Canada. The evolution of the crafted arts towards commercialization in Canada was a direct outcome of the programs initiated by these organizations. On the west coast, the Society for the Furtherance of B.C. Indian Arts and Crafts paternalistically continued its Indian art exhibition program. In the *Victoria Colonist*, Dr. Clifford Carl, representative of the society and the Director of the Provincial Museum, stated in 1944:

We must first encourage these arts and crafts in the Indians and then bring them to the attention of the public. One of the chief characteristics of the Indian is his urge to create and ornament. The old ceremonies have gone too but the ability is still there, and only needs stimulus.

Both the Canadian Handicraft Guild and the Society for the Furtherance of B.C. Indian Arts and Crafts had a direct line through their membership to the political establishment in Ottawa, and as a result were able to effect a number of major policy changes. The guild, because of its geographic proximity to Ottawa, was more successful as a lobbying organization for federal programs. One must remember that in the fifties, status Indians still did not have the right to vote federally, and many Indian communities were just beginning to become conscious of their ability to influence the Canadian political system through lobbying.

Where Indian communities had direct access to southern markets and a surviving traditional culture, some artistic development took place. For example, at Ohsweken near Brantford the Six Nations Arts Council was formed in 1957. This community organization sponsored oil painting classes, an annual spring exhibition, and an arts-and-crafts sale, and served as a lobbying organization for an art gallery and cultural centre. Its realm of influence was really centred in its own community, although in the early sixties the council did acquire a few works from Indian artists outside the Six Nations for its permanent collection. It had little impact on national cultural programs, however. In fact, the organization was labelled "too nationalistic" by the local Indian agent, who had the authority at Six Nations to redirect a cultural grant designated to the council to another organization on the reserve involved in sports – which he did.

The Canadian Handicraft Guild's greatest contribution in the commercialization of the crafted arts was its role in the development of the Eskimo Arts Program. In March 1939 the Indian Committee of the guild was changed to the Indian and Eskimo Committee so that the scope of the guild could be extended to encourage Eskimo crafts. As Virginia Watt reports in *Canadian Guild of Crafts, Quebec*, in the same year David McKeand, of the Northwest Territories Administration Office, who also was a committee member, reported to the guild that "poor hunting years in the North caused acute suffering and deprivation among the people and that this condition might be alleviated by developing a market for Eskimo crafts in the south."

Perhaps hindered by the outbreak of World War II, only a small number of



fig. 4 Inuit soapstone sculpture of Elvis Presley, c. 1963.

craft-collection programs in the north were initiated. It wasn't until the arrival of James Houston, an artist and teacher from Grandmère, Quebec, in 1948 that the developmental program actually got off the ground. Sponsored by the guild, James Houston travelled to Port Harrison and Povungnituk in an effort to promote the production of crafts. It was the enthusiastic efforts of Miss Alice Lighthall, Chairman of the Indian and Eskimo Committee, that finally encouraged the government to take on the responsibility of an Eskimo arts program. By the end of the fifties, the Eskimo arts co-operative movement was well established, with a dynamic national and international promotion program geared to convincing buyers that these works produced in the north were in fact not souvenirs of a dying culture, but art.

The promotion campaign developed by the Northern Program was extensive and was carefully synchronized with the market's expansion. Aleksandrs Sprudzs, the co-operative development officer for the Northern Program, described in a 1975 report the scope of the promotion, which consisted of:

Exhibitions and Art Shows in Canada and across the globe, sponsored publicity trips by artists and craft producers, establishment and protection of trademarks, symbols, and copyrights, exposure of the Arctic products at official government functions, setting up of advisory bodies and ad-hoc committees, even for a while being a distributor of arts and crafts, the final result of which was a creation and support of a special marketing organization.

If items did not reflect the required "primitiveness" that was being promoted in the marketplace, they were destroyed. According to Sprudzs, in the initial stages of the co-operative movement a government-employed arts-and-crafts specialist edited the objects out if they did not meet the workmanship, quality, and market standards. One such item that did not meet the market standards was a soapstone sculpture of Elvis Presley (fig. 4); it was rescued from the sledgehammer by a public servant who felt the piece reflected the reality of the Sugluk community with which he was so familiar. Since these production centres were conceived as co-operatives, with the passing of time, Sprudzs reported, "more and more of such responsibilities were handed over to the local people who had shown interest and leadership qualities."

Jacqueline Fry described in an *artscanada* article the fact that Eskimo art is usually analyzed in European terms as "primitive art," and as a result it is generally treated as "an annex to the European cultural tradition." She continues:

Occidentals seem to seek in the primitive arts a set of qualities that correspond to their idea of traditional primitive life. The objects are considered valid or authentic only if they have served in religious, magic, or even political functions, but the very notions of these functions lack roots in reality. Any object that does not fit the standard notions is rejected as inauthentic.

Using her analysis of the general attitude or the preconceptions that the Euro-Canadian had of the emerging art forms, it is easy to understand in economic terms the government's decision to maintain such unusual art-market standards, which negated individualism and encouraged a collective ethnicity.

The passage of time has seen the Eskimo art co-operatives recognizing and publicizing individual artists. For those concerned with the aesthetics of the art form, this recognition has been undoubtedly beneficial; for those concerned with the dynamics of an economic co-operative it could only have been detrimental, since such emphasis on the individual would have been bound to create tensions within a precariously evolving group.

### 3 The New Art: Politics and Pictographs

In 1960 Canada gave Indian people the right to vote, and began to regard them as equal within the Canadian political system. It was the beginning of the socially conscious sixties, and Indian communities across the nation began speaking out against their tragic social conditions. Improved communications made the Indians aware of the political activities of other minorities, such as the Quiet Revolution in Quebec and the civil rights movement in the United States. Harold Cardinal wrote of these groups in *The Unjust Society*:

We have measured their success and their failure. . . . These things too are our classrooms now and our textbooks. And we are learning our lessons well.

While the Indian communities raced towards gaining more political control over the economic, educational, and social aspects of their lives, the Indian artists, perhaps because they did not want to alienate buyers, appeared to be satisfied with minority status as Indians and as artists. They saw no reason to take any political action to find a role for themselves in the new order, and consequently much of their art did not reflect social or political comment. The new art fostered individualism but favoured a highly identifiable Indian content. From a national perspective, Indian artists expressed themselves in a variety of styles, from northwest-coast graphics and traditional sculpture to the pictorial themes of artists of the Prairies and the image makers of northwestern Ontario. The image-making movement was given birth by the imaginative genius of Norval Morrisseau, with his first exhibition at the Pollock Gallery in 1962. These startling, vivid new images enshrined the traditional Cree-Ojibwa\* culture and became a pioneering force for a whole host of Cree-Ojibwa painters who imitated Morrisseau's style. By the end of the sixties "the Morrisseau school" was firmly established, and epitomized Indian nationalism well into the seventies.

Although willing to accept Indian art as an expression of its identity, the Indian community during the sixties did not provide the market, primarily because neither individuals nor institutions in the community enjoyed an economic base sufficient to enable them to become collectors of their own people's art. At the same time, once an Indian artist began to achieve some degree of economic success, he was often accused of selling his culture to the white man. The Indian artist found this kind of paradox bewildering and somewhat agonizing, since they had no control over it. In Canada, the Indian art market was ideal. Canada as a nation during the sixties was going through its own identity crisis, and the art-buying public was eager to purchase anything that reflected a Canadian consciousness. As Margaret Atwood aptly asks in her book *Survival*: "The problem is what do you do for a past if you are white, relatively new to a continent, and rootless?" In the true Canadian literary tradition, you identify with the victim; you become concerned with Canada's own survival against the cultural domination of the United States.

The need for a Canadian identity most likely influenced the art-buying public to recognize the value of traditional imagery. Certainly on the national scene "Eskimo art," now changed to "Inuit art," had already conditioned the public by establishing its market popularity for the past ten years. The Indian-art market may have also been encouraged by several events and exhibitions, such as the 1967 *Arts of the Raven* exhibition in Vancouver, the 1969 *Masterpieces of Indian and Eskimo Art* exhibition in Ottawa, and the Indians of Canada Pavilion at Expo '67 in Montreal. These geographically separated exhibitions of material culture and contemporary art further enhanced and popularized the ethnic identity for the consumer. Whether out of genuine appreciation, guilt

\*Note: The spelling "Ojibwa" has been used throughout, except in the case of proper names that use the spellings "Ojibway" or "Ojibwe."

over past sins, or a need to acquire something Canadian, the art-buying public chose to look at the new art emerging from Indian communities as a significant statement from a fellow Canadian. For Norval Morrisseau, with prehistoric roots in the country and an inherent Cree-Ojibwa cosmology, his acceptance was a matter of course.

"The monolithic structure of Western industrial society . . . is itself cracking and in the ferment of change hope is springing up so that Indians too can find a place for themselves in the new order," wrote Marlene Castellano in 1972 in *The Only Good Indian*. In the sixties "the ferment of change" was never more evident in the Indian Affairs department, as the government made an effort to respond to cries of social injustice from the Indian people. On March 17, 1964, a submission was made to the Cabinet for the creation within the Department of Indian Affairs of a new division to be called "Social Programs." The submission proposed that the new Social Programs Division be responsible for developing policies and plans for welfare services, community services, and cultural affairs. The Cultural Affairs section was defined in the following manner in the Cabinet submission:

The cultural dimension in a community development program has to be recognized, along with the social and economic dimensions. It would be desirable, therefore, to create a cultural affairs section in the division which would employ selected persons of Indian origin. The task of this staff would be to promote and facilitate the development of various forms of Indian cultural expression in the arts including painting, sculpture, music, sports, special radio and TV series and special publications. This section would also arrange scholarships in the arts, would assist in the organization of local exhibitions and other displays and provide consultation services as required on these matters. An important function of this section would be to provide leadership and encouragement to organizations active in the field of Indian arts and to maintain liaison with other voluntary agencies interested in this work.

The submission received Cabinet approval in 1964, and Walter Rudnicki was appointed the first chief of the division, with an obligation to implement the cultural program as quickly as possible. By 1966 Mr. Rudnicki departed, leaving a few public servants sincerely trying to give the Cultural Affairs section the form that had originally been intended. Unfortunately, the lack of support of senior management and the hiring of non-Indian bureaucrats unfamiliar with the traditional culture of the Indian people weakened the organization considerably. It wasn't until the Minister of Indian Affairs, Arthur Laing, decided that an Indians of Canada Pavilion should be created at Expo '67, and that the Cultural Affairs section should co-ordinate these efforts, that the division had a sense of purpose.

Expo '67 in Montreal provided the first opportunity to bring together Indian artists, Indian politicians, and federal bureaucrats in a common forum. These initial planning meetings were organized by Yves Theriault, then head of the Cultural Affairs section. It was at one of these early meetings that George Manuel, then an Indian political leader from British Columbia, attacked the department for manoeuvring Indian artists into approving the design and the theme of the pavilion. Manuel dominated these early meetings to such an extent that future planning meetings were elevated to the status of "symposia" on Indian art – thereby restricting the participation of any Indian politicians.

The majority of the Indian politicians had little or no interest in the

participation of artists at Expo. In fact, some of the artists' work was considered to be *avant-garde* by the Indian communities. Indeed, to expect the politicians to give it consideration above the other pressing social and political problems of the day would have been inconsistent with the *raison d'être* of the Indian organizations.

The series of Expo consultation meetings, which were restricted to appointed Indian artists only, were also surrounded by controversy. The appropriateness of including the poetry of a non-status Indian, the appointment of a non-Indian sculptor to assist some artists with exterior murals, and the selection of more dramatic visuals that would further expose the tragic social conditions of Indian communities were some of the issues argued.

Morrisseau was selected as one of ten artists to complete one of the exterior murals on the pavilion. Unwilling to get involved in any of the political issues, he did, however – along with George Clutesi, a B.C. artist – take issue with the Cultural Affairs section, which they felt was telling them what to paint. Morrisseau and his apprentice, Carl Ray, completed one of the large murals, a sensuous earth mother with her children (fig. 5). When Expo was over, the controversial Indians of Canada Pavilion fell into disrepair and the mural passed into oblivion.

After Expo '67, the development of Indian art was overseen by the Cultural Affairs section, which became a separate division of the Department of Indian Affairs. Due to pressure from Indian politicians for an Indian person to be appointed Division Head, Yves Theriault resigned and Dr. Ahab Spence, a Cree, took over. Under Spence's direction, a study collection of Indian art was established. This included major works from Norval Morrisseau, Gerald Tailfeathers, Alex Janvier, Arthur Shilling, and Daphne Odjig. He also initiated the publication of *Tawow*, a magazine whose objective was to produce serious criticism on Indian art. The mood of the department's program for the development of Indian art may best be summed up in the words of Arthur Laing, the Minister of Indian Affairs in 1968, who said in a speech to the Vancouver Institute that year:

We must seek out and encourage the artistic talents of young Indian people and help them express the aims and aspirations of today, not of yesterday or antiquity. We need to find more Clutesi's, more Morrisseau's, more painters, writers, and sculptors – more men like Arthur Shilling.

What the Department of Indian Affairs did not envision was that the Cultural Affairs Division would eventually take on a role comparable to a mini-Canada Council for status Indians. As limited as its expertise and financial resources were, the division was able to effect some changes in the development of Indian art. Besides publishing articles, producing exhibitions, and establishing a permanent collection, one such development program undertook a series of market evaluations on the work of Indian artists. Harry Malcolmson, one of the contractors who completed the task, states in the conclusion of *Report by Harry Malcolmson Re: Oil Paintings by Alex Janvier*:

May I commend your vision in attempting to assist this artist and thereby enrich the art resources of this country. It seems to me you are proceeding in an intelligent and a constructive manner. I am sure your program will succeed.

Cultural Affairs' major drawback was that it was a program centred in the Department of Indian Affairs, which made it susceptible to the constantly changing political environment. For Indian artists, it encouraged the isolation of their work to such a degree that other cultural institutions that had a mandate



fig. 5 The Morrisseau mural on the Indians of Canada Pavilion at Expo '67.

for developing and encouraging Canadian art did not include Indian artists in their programs. This isolation had the effect of inhibiting the integration of Indian art into the Canadian artistic mainstream. Native art was viewed by the Canadian public as an adjunct to the arts-and-crafts marketing program, which was being revitalized down the hall in the Economic Development Branch.

As mentioned earlier, in 1969, while Cultural Affairs was struggling with its program initiatives, a major reorganization in the department reassigned personnel from the Northern Affairs program to Indian Affairs, thus creating the Indian Eskimo Economic Development Branch. The new arrivals brought with them their expertise in the marketing of Inuit art, and this expertise was a major factor in the revitalization of the Indian arts-and-crafts marketing program. In order to provide a rationale and a process for the implementation of new production and marketing programs over a five-year period, a Montreal consulting firm, Sorres Incorporated, was hired. The Sorres Report was responsible for the creation of two advisory boards, one composed of provincial Indian craftspeople and another composed of both Indian and non-Indian entrepreneurs; for the establishment of a central wholesale marketing warehouse; and for the creation of sub-programs in product development and promotion. It was the promotion sub-program that was to try to penetrate the art market on behalf of Indian artists and craftsmen. The program was based entirely on the Inuit art-marketing experience, which had proven so successful during the fifties. Its objective was to promote the distinctiveness of Indian arts and crafts, a “one-of-a-kind” sales pitch, in order to give the products the snob appeal or status requisite in the art market. Television commercials, film documentaries, exhibitions, and publications made up the program.

Not everyone was convinced that the department should be moving in this direction. The Laurentian Institute, a consulting firm for social and economic development, wrote a critical analysis of the Sorres Report. John Dockstader, an employee of the Institute, wrote in *The Indian Arts and Crafts Business*:

The Sorres report imposes a fine mechanical structure on the arts and crafts program – but all too often, the Indian craftsman has been offered or given just such a plan for the production and marketing of his wares, and all too often he has been left with a handful of hollow hopes and bankrupt promises. He has known financial failure and he has seen his reputation as a craftsman suffer. The Indian advisory committee looks good on paper – but it will be made up primarily of retailers interested in the souvenir market and the possibilities for quick turnovers and quick profits. I am convinced it will not begin to take into account the possibilities for arts and crafts development which I think exist. I would also point out that the Sorres group is composed neither of artists, nor craftsmen, nor designers, nor do they understand the Indian mind or the Indian past.

Robert Fulford, writing in the *Toronto Star* on June 2, 1973, also detected the propagandist element in the promotion program, with its release of a book designed to popularize Indian art. Fulford stated:

It is right and just that the federal Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development should do what it can to explore and publicize the art of Canadian Indians. But of course a wary taxpayer who examines a lush art book like *Indian Arts in Canada* – a book heavily subsidized, so that it sells at a price much lower than any private publisher could manage, even with a Canada Council grant – can be forgiven if he sniffs the air for the scent of propaganda. After all, propaganda is one of the main functions of modern government, and it is only natural that we approach a book from Ottawa by asking: What are they trying to prove?

The book was intended to convince the public that contemporary Indian art, or the new art, existed. The consumer image was a distorted one that viewed crafts and art in the same category, an attitude encouraged by the federal marketing program. Very little effort was made to promote the art as the work of a particular individual, a necessary requirement in the understanding of the new art.

From 1970 to 1975 the marketing wholesale operation continued to grow. Handmade products arrived daily in the warehouses from Indian communities across Canada. There employees categorized them as art or craft. A whole new labelling program was introduced, utilizing the stretched beaver pelt logo, which was introduced by the department in the sixties. It was believed that the designation of a superior crafted item as art would invariably increase the monetary value of the item and bring a better return to the warehouse and the craftsmen.

Dissatisfied with the marketing directions of the government-run program, a group of Indian artists came together in Winnipeg in the early seventies under the title "The Group of Seven." Recognizing the problem their title might present, no effort was made to change it; they felt it made a political statement in itself. The period was one of considerable camaraderie among the artists, perhaps because of their isolation from the Ottawa-Toronto Indian-art scene, or perhaps because of their common battle against the department's programs. Since most of the meetings were held either in Daphne Odjig's house or print shop, she was made the unofficial head; other members included Jackson Beardy, Carl Ray, Joseph Sanchez, Eddy Cobiness, Roy Thomas, and Alex Janvier. At a later date Norval Morrisseau exhibited with the group. Besides providing a forum for criticism, the group pursued the following objectives: to organize exhibitions, to develop proposals for the establishment of an art scholarship program, and to develop a strategy that would educate the public about the individual merits of their work. The latter objective was mounted in order to oppose the marketing and promotion program, which they felt inhibited their development with its emphasis on the "Indianness" of Indian art. By 1975, the group had disbanded and the members went their separate ways; the administration of their organization had impinged on their time as artists.

One of the most important developments the federal marketing program encouraged was the public's interest in art prints. Their popularity resulted in the proliferation of silkscreen shops devoted to the reproduction of Indian works. Carolyn Hawley, in an unpublished essay on "The Marketing of Contemporary Indian Art," states:

The painting of West Coast and Woodland art lends itself to serigraph printing since the images are characterized by a linearity and flat colour areas. A restricted palette of a few brilliant colours lowers printing costs and results in the marketing of limited-edition signed prints at affordable prices.... Commercially silkscreened prints have a potential for success similar to that of Inuit graphics.

One of the first silkscreen operations was organized by Daphne Odjig, the Odawa painter who began producing her own and fellow artists' work through her own shop, Odjig Indian Prints of Canada. Carl Ray and Roy Thomas joined her organization and produced a series of unnumbered prints, which were primarily directed to the souvenir market. As Odjig's product evolved from a mass-produced item to a more sophisticated signed and numbered print to suit changing market demands, she approached Bill Lobchuk of The Screen Shop in

Winnipeg to produce her work. Great Grassland Graphics, also a Winnipeg-based company, started marketing Woodland Indian silkscreen prints in limited editions.

In Ontario, with start-up grants from the Ontario and federal governments, Josh, Goyce, and Henry Kakegamic started a silkscreen shop, Triple K Co-operative, primarily to produce their own work. Located in Red Lake, Ontario, a hundred air miles north of Kenora, they began producing their own unlimited editions on cloth and paper, as well as works by Saul Williams, Paddy and Barry Peters, and Norval Morrisseau. Similar to Odjig's experience, they were soon producing limited-edition prints to meet a growing sophisticated market. Art Loft in Peterborough, Woodland Studios in Cutler, and People's Art in Ottawa, which had a wholesaling relationship with Canadian Native Prints of Vancouver, also produced silkscreen and lithographic prints.

In the mid-seventies the federal government established a wholesale operation, Canadian Indian Marketing Service, which created a fine art division to publish and market limited-edition prints for the burgeoning market. There is no doubt that this rapid growth in print shops was the direct result of Indian artists trying to respond to the market demand created by the promotional program of Indian Affairs.

In July 1975 the Arts and Crafts section, with its Central Marketing Service in the Indian Eskimo Economic Development Branch, had become the Canadian Indian Marketing Service. The same year the National Indian Advisory Committee became the National Indian Arts and Crafts Corporation (NIACC), with the objective of taking control and ownership of the Marketing Service and its programs. Carolyn Hawley summarized this period in her 1982 paper:

The Canadian Indian Marketing Service seems to have taken up where the Central Marketing Service left off. Handled by Imanco, a management firm named by contract, the Canadian Indian Marketing Service inherited the same types of financial problems as its predecessor. The Central Marketing Service had, over a ten-year period, accumulated about \$400,000 worth of inventory which had depreciated in value. The Finance and Administration Agency of the federal government would not allow the Central Indian Marketing Service to mark down these goods. Thus the company was stuck with a lot of stock, half of which was not in good condition. In 1978, the Canadian Indian Marketing Service (CIMS) was dissolved and its inventory sold by the federal government to Crown Assets Disposal Corporation.

The National Indian Arts and Crafts Corporation continued; however, its objectives changed with the government's termination of the wholesale marketing operation. NIACC is now a non-profit Indian-run organization that acts as a holding company, allocating funds from the department to provincial arts and crafts organizations. The corporation inherited the remains of the department's promotion program and now sponsors trade shows, acts as wholesaler and retailer, and sponsors Native artists and craftspeople. One of NIACC's efforts to develop a closer working relationship with Indian artists was its attempt to establish a National Indian Arts Council similar to the Canadian Eskimo Arts Council. Existing on paper only, the National Indian Arts Council never materialized, primarily because of the difference between economic and cultural objectives.

During the same period that the federal government was establishing its programs, the Ontario provincial government was mounting similar programs to provide financial and consultative services to Indians who entered the arts-and-crafts industry. The province decided to create its own wholesale and retail marketing program. The wholesale program, Indian Crafts of Ontario, was in

direct competition with the already established federal marketing service. The results were disastrous when federal and provincial wholesale buyers raced for the same product, increasing the demand and the price. Realizing their mistake, Indian Crafts of Ontario sold its stock to Ottawa and closed its doors.

In 1969 the White Paper officially titled “Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy” was released, in an effort to initiate changes to promote “full and equal [Indian] participation in the cultural, social, economic, and political life of Canada.” The Indian political leaders found themselves actively engaged in opposing the implementation of this new policy, fearing the possible loss of lands, rights, and their special relationship with the British Crown through the Canadian government.

The first proposal in response to the White Paper came from the Indian Association of Alberta. It was known as the Red Paper and, among other issues, it stressed the importance and uniqueness of the culture of Indian nations. As a result, the early efforts of the association in the area of Indian cultural education later blossomed into a national program of cultural educational centres, in an attempt to safeguard and enhance the development of all forms of Indian cultural expression.

In 1971 a federal cultural educational centres program was implemented, and was placed under a special secretariat and co-managed by the Department of the Secretary of State and the Department of Indian Affairs. By April 1973 the secretariat appeared to be having trouble with the program, as the gap between the philosophies and approaches of Indian Affairs and the Secretary of State widened. In 1974 the program came under the exclusive mandate of the Department of Indian Affairs, where it has remained to this day.

Unlike other cultural centres across Canada, the cultural educational centres in Ontario became a focal point for a number of thrusts in art programming. The Woodland Indian Cultural Educational Centre at Brantford and the North American Indian Travelling College at Cornwall provided art programs to Indian communities in the south. The Woodland Centre, with a focus on interpretive, educational exhibitions, continues to sponsor an annual art exhibition to showcase new artists and survey any emerging artistic trends. For the north, the Ojibway and Cree Cultural Centre at Timmins and the Ojibwe Cultural Foundation on Manitoulin Island provide a variety of programs specifically designed for artists’ development. The latter, under the direction of Mary Lou Fox Radulovich, has become a major centre for artists in a “revitalization” program of traditional Indian culture.

Roz Vanderburgh, an anthropologist with the University of Toronto, noted in her research that this revitalization of the traditional culture by Manitoulin artists was a direct result of combining elders’ conferences with summer programs for young artists. Here, in a common forum, elders were able to tell the young artists legends from the past; the artists in turn translated the information into their paintings. Similar experiences had been documented by Morrisseau, Carl Ray, and Daphne Odjig; however, their information sources were in most cases their grandfathers.

This theory of revitalization was also supported by Ruth Phillips and Valda Blundell in a paper they presented in 1982 to the Canadian Ethnology Society. Utilizing art-historical methods, they concluded: “Legend paintings can be regarded as a revival of traditional art forms as well as a redefinition of ‘Indianness’ in the context of contemporary and multi-cultural Canadian society.”

Over the years, support for the visual arts in Ontario also came from a variety of friendship centres. The Native Canadian Centre of Toronto is in the forefront, with its National Indian Art Auction. Others, such as the Nishnawbe Institute in Toronto and Manitoulin, the Association for Native Development in the Visual and Performing Arts in Toronto, and the Manitou Arts Foundation on Schreiber Island have been instrumental in the evolutionary process towards the new art. Dr. Bernhard Cinader, an immunologist and an avid collector, asserts that the activities of the Manitou Arts Foundation were an influential factor in establishing the direction of the art program at the Ojibwe Cultural Foundation.

From 1969 through to the end of the seventies, the White Paper influenced any negotiations between the Indian political associations and government. It was a period of strained relationships. Indian politicians generally maintained a hands-off approach to specific Indian Affairs cultural programs, such as the marketing and promotion of Indian arts and crafts, the cultural education centres, and the cultural affairs program, with its curatorial responsibility for the departmental collection. Much of their attention was focussed on social and political issues – land claims, Indian Act revisions, Indian control of Indian education, and economic development. Indian artists generally had to fend for themselves.

In October 1978 the first Native Artist Conference was held on Manitoulin Island. The conference provided an opportunity for Indian artists to take a retrospective look at the past two decades of programs and influences that had affected them. A number of representatives from cultural institutions and government agencies were also in attendance. Some of the discussion groups exploded into confrontations between the officials and the artists, when conceptions and misconceptions that institutions had harboured towards Indian art were challenged. It became apparent that Indian art had still not attained the status of genuine art among the Canadian art establishment. Alex Janvier, one of the more vocal Indian artists at the conference, commented:

It is obvious from my view that these organizations we have come across are of little value or are of no use to us. It seems that they have their priorities and are engaged in something a little different than what we are. I think we have a commitment to ourselves as artists, to our tribes and to Indian people in general.

What is clear is that some Indian artists will continue to produce work reflecting the realities of their human condition, which happens to be Indian. Is it this sense of “Indian consciousness,” which permeates even the most modern canvases, that inhibits Indian art’s credibility for an art gallery, relegating the work to an anthropological museum? If so, the Indian artist is not going to give up his perception of his community just to gain entrance to the art establishment.

The battle still rages. At the third Native Artist Conference at Hazelton, B.C., in August 1983, most of the same issues were addressed. One of the artists stated that he “felt like a pawn in someone else’s game. One day there is a marketing program for you and the next day it closes. One year you’re worshipped, the next year you’re ignored.”

Over the past twenty years, the Indian artists of the new art have encountered myriad Indian and non-Indian institutions, each desiring to give economic and intellectual credibility to Native art. For Morrisseau and the image makers, market credibility has been proven; intellectual credibility is forthcoming, but the politics have been awesome.