

## TEACHER'S RESOURCE GUIDE

7: PROFESSIONAL NATIVE INDIAN ARTISTS INC. OFFERS DIVERSE AUDIENCES FROM THE MANY NATIONS ACROSS CANADA AN UNPARALLELED OPPORTUNITY TO APPRECIATE AND ENGAGE WITH THE WORK BY ONE OF CANADA'S MOST IMPORTANT EARLY ARTIST ALLIANCES.



Image: Daphne Odjig, *Thunderbird of Courage*, 1977, acrylic on canvas, 61 x 50.8 cm, Private collection.

THE EXHIBITION WILL BE ON DISPLAY AT THE MACKENZIE ART GALLERY FROM:  
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## Contents

Introduction	3
An Indigenous Worldview	6
Teaching Methodology Incorporating an Indigenous Worldview	6
Activity: Talking Circle	6
Activity: Five Circles	7
Jackson Beardy (1944-1984)	8
Activity: Symbolism	10
Activity: Looking Closely	10
Activity: Symbolic Family Portrait	10
Eddy Cobiness (1933-1996)	11
Activity: Animal Alphabet	12
Activity: Simplify It	12
Alex Janvier (b. 1935)	13
Activity: Dynamic Flowing Lines	14
Norval Morrisseau (1932-2007)	15
Activity: X-Ray Painting	16
Daphne Odjig (b. 1919)	17
Activity: The Spirit Tree	19
Carl Ray (1943-1978)	20
Activity: What is there but cannot be seen?	21
Joseph Sanchez (b. 1948)	22
Activity: Tribal Painting	23
Activity: Make a Community Painting	23

# Introduction

## About the Exhibition

*If our work as artists has somehow helped to open doors between our people and non-Native people, then I am glad. I am even more deeply pleased if it has helped to encourage the young people that have followed our generation to express their pride in our heritage more openly, more joyfully, than I would have ever dared to think possible.'*

- Daphne Odjig

One of Canada's most important artist alliances, the Professional Native Indian Artists Inc. (PNIAI) was the first self-organized, legally incorporated First Nations artists' organization in Canada. As a group, they pushed for the recognition of contemporary First Nations art at a time when Indigenous artists were under the constant threat of invalidation, marginalization and exclusion. Gathering informally in the early 1970s and officially incorporating in February of 1974, Jackson Beardy (1944-1984), Eddy Cobiness (1933-1996), Alex Janvier (b. 1935), Norval Morrisseau (1932-2007), Daphne Odjig (b. 1919), Carl Ray (1942-1978) and Joseph Sanchez (b. 1948) formed this influential and historical group.

The PNIAI was a ground-breaking cultural and political entity that demanded recognition for its members as professional, contemporary artists. They challenged old constructs and stimulated a new way of thinking about contemporary First Nations people, their lives, and art. Their efforts have influenced individual practices and collective strategies nationally. Theirs is one of the key histories that signaled a new course for the exhibition and reception of contemporary Indigenous art.

It takes courage to make work that differs from those before you and not assimilate into the mainstream art world. The visual impact of the works will hopefully reacquaint viewers with the excitement and newness of the images and styles which these seven artists produced—an excitement shared by the many artists who built on their artistic innovations. Focusing exclusively on that crucial decade during which the seven artists were active as a group, the 120 works included in this exhibition exemplify the range and diversity of work being produced in the 1970s. The exhibition considers their collective artistic impact as well as the distinctive styles and experimentation of the individual artists.

7 provides a glimpse at a vision that flourished despite the struggles these artists faced within the context of mainstream Canadian society. Given their far ranging impact, it is important to honour and recognize the efforts and contributions of these seven artists to the development of First Nations aesthetic production and to the history of Canadian art.

**Michelle LaVallee**  
**Associate Curator**

Find out more about the exhibition including images of the artworks, short biographies and photographs of the artists on our website at: [www.mackenzieartgallery.ca/engage/exhibitions/7](http://www.mackenzieartgallery.ca/engage/exhibitions/7)

## Professional Native Indian Artists Inc.

The seven artists of the PNIAI came together in order to collectively fight for the inclusion of their work within the Canadian mainstream and the contemporary art canon. Situated within a contentious political context, including the Liberal government's controversial Indian policy of 1969, the PNIAI were resistant to colonial discourses and broke with identity definitions and boundaries imposed on First Nations. Disenchanted with the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development's marketing and promotion strategies, they fought against exclusionary practices which treated their work as a type of handicraft, a categorization which prevented it from being shown in mainstream galleries and museums. These artists were among the first to fight to establish a long-overdue forum for the voices and perspectives of Indigenous artists. In many ways, the forward thinking of these pivotal artists led to the development and acceptance of an Indigenous art discourse and the recognition of Indigenous artists as a vital part of Canada's past, present and future identity. By fearlessly portraying the reality of Canada from a First Nations perspective, they expanded the vocabulary of contemporary visual art practice and set a new standard for the artists who followed in their wake. Reaching across cultural boundaries, their lasting artistic merit continues to be a source of inspiration for generations to come.

### Breaking Barriers

*The last time there was a ceremony in our band was when I was about six years old. It was a berry festival that was being held in a birch bark lodge. The whole village was there and the priest came and told us to stop the berry festival. The priest understands now, but it is too late. The ceremony is gone.<sup>2</sup>*  
- Carl Ray

While the Group developed primarily in response to the lack of opportunities for contemporary Aboriginal artists, an awareness of the pervasive attitudes and oppressive regimes that controlled the lives of First Nation individuals is key to understanding the barriers they faced. PNIAI members experienced many of the cultural and political policies that conditioned the daily experience of First Nations people, relegating them to secondary status. At the same time, there was an unyielding desire among Indigenous people to have their voices heard and to ensure a continuation of their cultural practices. The repressive social, political, and cultural contexts in Canada at the time provoked a strong resistance among artists and activists alike. The impact of this growing social and cultural movement is evident in the work of the PNIAI.

*It has become my deep, personal life goal to create an awareness of our culture within the public at large - thereby cementing stronger ties of mutual understanding for one country, one Canada.<sup>3</sup>*  
- Jackson Beardy

Though their personal aspirations were diverse, as frontrunners in the early developments of contemporary First Nations art history, the collective vision of the PNIAI made contemporary Aboriginal art possible. Constantly belittled, Indigenous people were faced with two options—to accept an inferior position, or rebel against oppressive conditions. Self-determination and self-definition were at the heart of PNIAI motivations. Their works provide a window upon this vision, encouraging us to think about the forces that shape our lives and how we want to shape our future together.

## Creation of the Group of Seven

*We had no one to show our work so we had to do it ourselves. We acknowledged and supported each other as artists when the world of fine art refused us entry...Together we broke down barriers that would have been so much more difficult faced alone.<sup>4</sup>*

- Daphne Odjig

In 1971, Daphne Odjig and her husband Chester Beavon opened a small craft store, Odjig Indian Prints of Canada Ltd. located at 331 Donald Street in Winnipeg, Manitoba. As a gathering place, the store brought together artists who had previously worked in isolation from each other as well as the Indian art scenes in Ottawa and Toronto. "Odjig's" as it was commonly referred to, offered a friendly place for artists to receive support and to discuss their challenges and aspirations.

In 1972, a group of artists formed and began to call themselves the "Group of Seven." They usually met in Jackson Beardy's studio, at the North Star Inn, or at Odjig's where they shared their frustrations with the Canadian art establishment, grappled with prejudice, discussed aesthetics, and critiqued one another's art. In November 1973, a series of informal meetings led to a proposal to form the Professional Native Indian Artists Incorporated. On February 13, 1974 the PNIAI was legally incorporated. Soon afterwards Odjig expanded her Winnipeg shop, establishing the New Warehouse Gallery.

The struggle for mainstream acceptance seemed a constant battle which pitted the artists against government programs, a non-Native public's expectations, and government supported institutions that wanted art that reflected "Indianness" in style and content. More often than not, their work was relegated to commercial and ethno-galleries, cultural centres and museums, and hallways and offices, rather than contemporary fine art galleries where they felt they belonged. Members of the Group wanted to create space for contemporary artists of Native ancestry to receive support. Odjig's provided opportunities to exhibit work and became the place to engage with other artists.

In addition to providing support to one another in their artistic endeavours, the Group's early aims included a plan to develop a scholarship program to assist emerging artists. The PNIAI were also concerned with exclusionary practices in the art world, copyright issues, marketing strategies, and control over production of their work. Members were interested in expanding their horizons as artists rather than succumbing to a pre-packaged narrow definition of Indian art and double standards around authenticity.

Interacting with others who shared similar experiences and culture was both stimulating and advantageous for the PNIAI members. The camaraderie and friendship that developed helped them to navigate territory that had been difficult to traverse on their own. Whereas one voice had limits to what it could say, several artists' voices combined created a richly diverse and powerful statement. Working together gave them a strength and unity that caught the attention of media and brought a contemporary image of First Nations art to the forefront.

**Michelle LaVallee**  
Associate Curator

## An Indigenous Worldview

This exhibition provides opportunities to gain perspective and understanding of an Indigenous worldview as demonstrated in the works of the seven featured artists.

### What is a worldview?

A worldview can be interpreted as the overall perspective from which one sees and interprets the world. It is also a collection of beliefs about life and the universe.

Investigation into the art and lives of the featured artists can help students gain understanding of ways that Indigenous people have traditionally viewed the universe and how this worldview still has value and influence today.

### What is an Indigenous Worldview?

An Indigenous worldview is based on principles of harmony and balance, as traditional ways of knowing originate from close observation and experience of the cyclical nature of the universe.

The Indigenous worldview postulates that all things (human and non-human) possess a life force and are equal, interrelated, and interdependent. Furthermore, a primacy is placed on the spiritual source of all creation.

In an Indigenous worldview the natural environment is the traditional teacher of a natural order of things. Nature represents all that is sacred, the very basis of life, and it is ideally central to our thoughts and actions, or should be.

## Teaching Methodology Incorporating an Indigenous Worldview

Each lesson begins with an exercise to try to identify the learner's prior knowledge of the content. They then proceed through some means of social interaction to establish investigations and analysis of the content based on particular situations. Successful learning will involve a number of strategies to consolidate the construction of personal meaning from the information available in the teaching. The integration of the content with what the student already knows will form the basis of the creation of new knowledge.

*Adapted from Four directions Teacher Resource kit [www.fourdirectionsteachings.com](http://www.fourdirectionsteachings.com)*

### Circles

In an Indigenous worldview, the circle is a significant and meaningful symbol. A circle divided into four parts can represent a wide variety of teachings and meanings that relate, or counterbalance one another to form a whole - as with the four cardinal directions, the seasons, times of day, or stages of life.

### Talking Circles

A Talking Circle promotes group participation in a discussion. In a Talking Circle, each person is equal and everyone belongs. We take turns and learn to listen and respect the views of others.

### Activity: Talking Circle

*All Ages (can use a rock or a stick)*

Gather the children into a circle and have them seated on the floor. The facilitator starts off the talking circle. (Tell them your name, your favorite food, favorite color, favorite activity, number of siblings, likes, dislikes, etc.) Pass the rock on in a clockwise motion to the child sitting on your left and have the children introduce themselves and say a little bit about themselves. The talking circle is complete when you again have the rock in your hands. Then ask the students to name something that they love about nature. For example, trees, animals, flowers, birds, water. Now ask the students to name something that is naturally round or circular in nature or in the universe. You can mention other naturally occurring circular shapes in nature and the universe (tree trunk, sun, moon, stars, planets, earth).

## Activity: Five Circles

Grades Pre-K to 4

### Objective:

Students will understand that a simple shape (circle) can be creatively imagined as many different things.

### Discussion:

What are the common things we think of when we see a circle? Draw a circle on paper on the clipboard with a large felt pen. Ask, "What shape is this?" "If this circle could be anything besides a shape, what could it be?" "If this circle was on the ground, what could it be?" "If this shape was in the sky, what could it be?" "What circles do we see in the summer? Fall? Winter? Spring?"

### Procedure:

- Give each student a paper with 5 circles.
- Demonstrate how each circle can become something different.
- Give students time limit and allow them to create something out of each circle.

*The following information was prepared by Katherine Boyer and was developed for an activity offered by the First Nations University of Canada. Additional information, links to online information and suggested activities have been added by MacKenzie staff.*

## Jackson Beardy (1944-1984)

Born on the Garden Hill Reserve (Island Lake, Manitoba) and was of Cree ancestry.



Image: Jackson Beardy, *Flock*, 1973, acrylic on canvas, 119.2 x 167.3 cm. Collection of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada.

### Quotes:

*If an elder tells me something, I cannot visualize exactly what he says because I am not him. I can only interpret what he says, incorporating my own life and philosophies. At one time, I tried to hide behind an Indian image of the fact that my paintings were based strictly on legends. Now that I am myself, free to express the feelings that I have, I can accept the responsibility of the people I represent. I add to the basic legends their integrity, their dignity. In that sense, I translate their oral art in a meaningful visual way.*<sup>5</sup> (1993)

*I can't paint anything if I don't have the background and the cultural knowledge to make it right. It wouldn't be fair to my people and it wouldn't be fair to the rest of Canada.*<sup>6</sup> (1977)

*I paint what I believe. What is secret I don't paint.*<sup>7</sup> (1972)

### Influences:

- Traditional Cree legends and traditions as relayed to him by his Grandmother
- A mix of Protestant religious education and Cree traditions
- Nature and the Elements
- Dreams and the Subconscious

### Major Themes:

*Jackson Beardy's work can be grouped into five major themes: psychic crisis, creation, world view, relationships with the orders of the universe, and spiritual transformation. His brilliant application of colour is drawn from his dreams. The geography of his paintings is a blend of the visible universe and the invisible powers that animate the visible, and give it life and meaning. The time in which the works are set is mythological time, before history. The paintings are not separate from the major themes of Jackson's life and in fact parallel his own growth and spiritual development. He can be compared to the alchemists who sought a purification of self through the purification of metals. They dealt not only with the mysteries of matter but also with those of creation and life; they sought to harmonize the human individual with the universe, Jackson's alchemy is performed between two socio-political worlds. He struggled to be effective and to balance his own life between two powerful unseen Manitou forces.*<sup>8</sup>

- Colleen Cutshall

## Style:

- Empty backgrounds
- Bright colours, and flat space
- Outlined figures
- Aerial point-of-view

## Frequent forms that appear in the work:

- The Circle
- The Sun
- Four interconnected domes of varying size

*The Orders of creation appear most frequently as an abbreviated symbol of four inverted U shapes side by side. They refer first of all to the specific order in which the world was created: mineral, plant, animal and human. Next, they refer to the powers that reside in the quartered universe and control the seasons. Jackson makes use of this latter symbolism as his own mnemonic chart, enlarging one of the symbols to designate the season in which he completed the painting.<sup>9</sup>*

- Colleen Cutshall

- Mother Nature
- Curved lines: used to show natural energy and attitudes.
- Harmonious qualities: used to create edges and limitations to the work.
- Jagged lines: used for formal tension against the curved lines.
- Two-dimensionality: Many teachings do not conceive of space or time as “things”.
- Mature Work: Fewer human figures
- Divided Sun: represents religio-philosophical view of Cree legends, or opposites that exist in the natural world.
- Squiggly lines: Short lines indicate four parts of the universe. Longer lines show the power of the sun.
- “X-ray” Style: Seeing inside figures, a shamanistic device.
- Beaver, Otter, Muskrat: Important thematic animals to do with creation myths and stories.

## Materials used by the artist:

- Pencil
- Inks
- Oils
- Poster paints
- Watercolour
- Acrylics
- Paper
- Board
- Canvas
- Birchbark
- Beaver Skins
- Silkscreen

## Suggested Activities

### Introduction to Symbolism in Art

Symbolism is the representation of something abstract using something that is concrete. For example, we are unable to draw a picture of bravery, but a picture of a lion may represent bravery. Look at some common, easily recognizable symbols and invite students to interpret their probable meaning. Have students brainstorm some other common symbols.

A **personal symbol** has specific meaning for you. It is not necessary for others to understand or identify the significance of the symbol. The significance is personal.

A **cultural symbol** can be related to one’s cultural heritage. It can also represent association with any group to which you identify, such as a sports group, arts group or even a social group. Rider Pride could be a cultural group with which many people identify.

A **universal symbol** is a symbol that is easily recognized by many people, in many places around the world.

### Activity: Symbolism

Grades 6 - 12

Take a long piece of paper (approximately 15 cm x 38 cm) and fold into three equal sections. The first section is for your personal symbol, the second will be a cultural symbol, and the third - a universal symbol. Using any mark maker and the long, divided sheet of paper, design and draw an example of each of the three types of symbols.

### Activity: Looking Closely

Grades 6 - 12

Look at the image of the painting, *Flock* by Jackson Beardsley on page [8](#) of this resource. Make a list of everything you see. In your opinion, how many items on your list might be symbolic? Write down what each item might symbolize. Which of the three types of symbol; personal, cultural, universal, would you consider each item to be?

#### Context:

This painting is thought to be biographical in nature, the three birds representing the artist's three children.

#### Discussion:

Did anyone interpret the symbolism of the birds to be the artist's three children? What other interpretations or associations did you come up with?

### Activity: Symbolic Family Portrait

Grades 4 - 12

Draw a biographical picture of your own family using animals of your choice to symbolize family members. Add a few simple symbolic images to represent things that are meaningful and special to you and your family.

## Eddy Cobiness (1933-1996)

Born in Warroad, Minnesota, raised on Buffalo Point Reserve, Manitoba and was of Ojibwa descent.

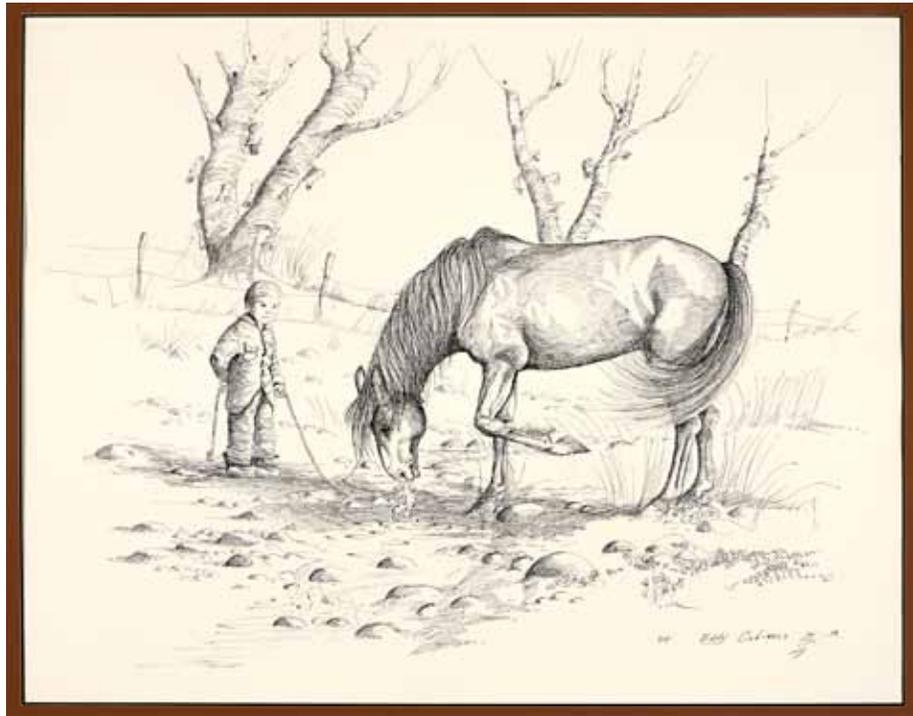


Image: Eddy Cobiness, *Watering the Horse*, 1974, pen and ink, 57 x 72.1 cm. Courtesy of the Woodland Cultural Centre.

### Quote:

*A gift such as this is not to be wasted; it constitutes the greatest part of my life and I consider it my bounden duty to pass it on to the children of the future; maybe they will have a chance to live what I now paint, taking the magic out of the canvas as an example for their life and others so that beauty and dignity will enter our lives again as it was in the time of the ancients and perhaps my visions and dreams are messages for the young to think about and to strive to live by.*<sup>10</sup> (ca. 1978)

### Influences:

- Traditional stories from the Elders on his reserve
- Wildlife and Nature
- His subconscious

### Major Themes:

Self-taught painter and graphic designer Eddy Cobiness was known for appending his treaty number '47' to most of his works. He began by illustrating realistic village scenes, then initiated a more abstract phase of work, continuing with depictions of provincial wildlife influenced by celebrated Woodland artist Benjamin Chee Chee.

- Wildlife and Nature
- Landscape
- Indigenous legends

### Style:

- Eddy Cobiness frequently painted stylized images of animals, and was known for being able to capture the essence of the various creatures or warriors with just a few deft strokes, a style that came to be known as "the flowing art of Eddy Cobiness."<sup>11</sup>
- Gentle, calm and graceful
- Abstracted

### Frequent forms that appear in the work:

- Woodland creatures of the Lake of the Woods Region

### Materials used by the artist:

- Oil
- Pencil
- Ink
- Charcoal
- Watercolour
- Pastel
- Acrylic

### Suggested Activities

#### Activity: Animal Alphabet

*Grades K - 6*

Write the letters of the alphabet on small pieces of paper (or cardboard) and place them in a box. Each student will pick one letter and another student will think of an animal that starts with that letter. The student who drew the letter will then draw the animal. If the student doesn't know, or remember what the animal looks like, encourage them to use their imaginations. Likewise, if no one can think of an animal starting with the letter picked, encourage the student to create an imaginary animal and to give it an imaginary name starting with the letter.

#### Activity: Simplify It

*Grades 6 - 12*

Refer to the works by Eddy Cobiness at: [www.seventhgenerationgallery.com](http://www.seventhgenerationgallery.com)

Choose an animal for your own simplified drawing. Look very closely at the simplified drawings by Eddy Cobiness. Can you imitate his style while making your own animal drawing?

## Alex Janvier (b. 1935)

Born at Cold Lake First Nations, Alberta, and is of Dene Suline and Saulteaux heritage.

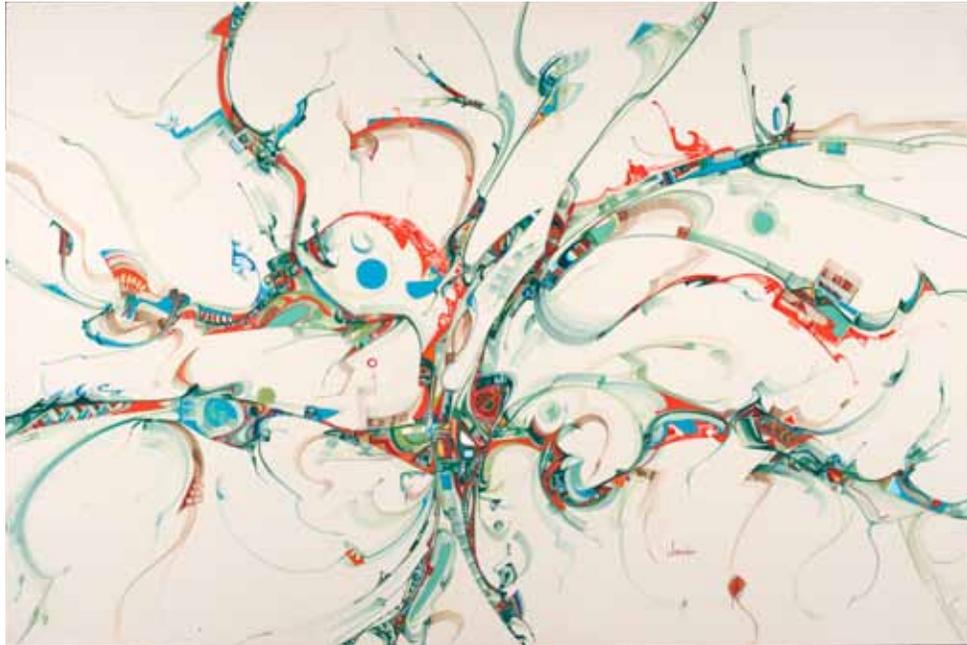


Image: Alex Janvier, *Exodus from the Soil*, 1978, acrylic on linen, 121.9 x 182.9 cm. Courtesy of Dr. Luigi Rossi.

For more information about Alex Janvier, visit: [www.lieutenantgovernor.ab.ca/aoe/arts/alex-janvier/](http://www.lieutenantgovernor.ab.ca/aoe/arts/alex-janvier/)

### Where Does Alex Draw His Inspiration From?

- From everywhere, from the land, sky, stars, moon, sun, the universe.
- From earth, land, water, woodland, prairie, mountains, and people, some animals.
- From memory of ancient stories, from music, to include the voice of God and His created nature.
- From the sound of the birds chirping, from native drum songs, pow-wow.
- From the heart, rather than the intellect.
- From my parents.
- From my tribe, Denesuline of Cold lake, and of parts of Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, British Columbia, and the Northwest Territories.
- From my Creator, The Chief of all Creators of the finest art.
- From the angels who have consistently have watched my life, and the development of art, that I do.
- From my own inspiration acceptance of who I have become.
- From love, to be who I am, and who I became.

As written by the artist, 2006.

### Influences

- Traditional abstracted beadwork and quillwork
- European Modernist Painters including Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee and Joan Miro
- Aerial surveys

### Major Themes

- Medicine wheels
- History of colonization
- Residential schools
- Respect for the lands and traditions of his people, concern for the environment

## Style

- Elegant
- Abstract
- Floral patterning
- Symbolic colour arrangements in complex, abstract compositions

## Activity: Dynamic Flowing Lines

Grades 4 - 12

Alex Janvier employs a dynamic flow between abstraction and representation that can be read as a metaphor for connection between people, plants, animals and the land.

### Objective:

Students will experience the concept of a dynamic flow between abstract and representation.

### You will need:

- Large sheets of drawing paper
- Pencils
- Markers
- Pencil crayons

### Procedure:

- Make a pencil mark close to the centre of the paper.
- On each side of the paper make 3-5 pencil marks on the edge.
- Place your pencil on the centre mark then join the centre mark to some of the outside edge markings using a "dynamic, flowing line" (do not go to every mark).
- Enhance the dynamic flowing line you have just drawn by adding realistic, symbolic and/or abstracted images that follow the "flow" of the line.
- Connect these lines to the marks that are not already connected to the centre mark.

## Norval Morrisseau (1932-2007)

Raised on the Sand Point Reserve near Lake Nipigon and was of Ojibwa descent.

View images of the artist's work and read more about Norval Morrisseau here:  
[www.gallery.ca/en/see/collections/artist.php?iartistid=3864](http://www.gallery.ca/en/see/collections/artist.php?iartistid=3864)

### Quotes:

*My art speaks and will continue to speak transcending barriers of nationality, of language and of other forces that may be divisive, fortifying the greatness of the spirit which has always been the foundation of the Great Ojibway.*<sup>12</sup> (1979)

*There's lots of stories that are told in Ojibwa but that wasn't enough for me. I wanted to draw them - that's from my own self - my own idea what they look like.*<sup>13</sup> (2005)

*The spirit comes through you. It is a very creative force, you see. You could be a singer, you could be a writer, you could be a painter, you could be anything if you allow that spirit to flow.*<sup>14</sup> (2005)

### Anishinaabeg Painters

*Perhaps one of the most significant breakthroughs of the early 1960s was Norval Morrisseau's distinct Anishinaabe painting style. His spiritually charged line-work and holistic figure-to-ground relationships were strongly influenced by sacred Midewiwin mnemonic iconography and visual narratives recorded on incised birchbark scrolls. Morrisseau's transformation and reinterpretation was so fresh and liberating that it inspired numerous artists to adopt this Anishinaabeg style of painting, particularly in northeastern Ontario and Manitoulin Island.*<sup>15</sup>

- Barry Ace

### Influences

- Midewiwin scrolls
- Traditional stories
- Catholicism

### Major Themes

- Shamanism
- Duality of Soul and Body

### Style

- Semi Abstract
- Pictorial
- Figurative
- Intense colours

### Frequent forms that appear in the work

- X-Ray style
- Mythical creatures
- No Background
- Black form lines

## Activity: X-Ray Painting

Grades 2 - 12

X-ray painting is a style attributed to Norval Morrisseau. The X-ray technique shows the interior as well as the exterior of a figure.

### You will need:

- Paper suitable for drawing and painting
- Inks, crayon or pastels to apply bright colours
- Black Acrylic or Tempera Paint
- Thin brushes.

### Procedure:

- Have the students each select a subject for their painting - a fish, bird, animal or imaginary creature.
- Students then sketch the outline of their subject on their paper. Ask the students to imagine the energy that exists inside the depicted subject.
- With the thin brushes and black paint the students can outline the subject and draw lines and shapes inside to depict internal energy.
- Add colour by filling in shapes with the inks, crayons or pastels.

## Daphne Odjig (b. 1919)

Born on Wikwemikong (Manitoulin Island) and is of Potawatomi and Odawa heritage.



Image: Daphne Odjig, *Medicine Man in the Shaking Tent*, 1974, drybrush acrylic on paper, 86 x 114.3 cm. Ermi Tano Collection.

The following link will take you to a video where Daphne Odjig speaks about her wide range of work and history as an artist, and curator Bonnie Devine speaks about the importance of Odjig's work: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=kHIWvKDW7x8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kHIWvKDW7x8)

### Quotes:

*We come from a strong people. We had to be strong to survive.*<sup>16</sup> (2007)

*One of the most important lessons that life should teach us is to accept and be proud of our identity.*<sup>17</sup> (1985)

*I am Potawatomi from Wikwemikong of the Three Fires Confederacy.*<sup>18</sup> (2009)

*It is not so long ago that the work of artists of Native ancestry was dismissed as ethnographic. Many people did not believe that our art was worthy of exhibition in fine art galleries because it was not rooted in European tradition.*<sup>19</sup> (2009)

*I am proud of my Potawatomi ancestry but I have worked hard to earn respect simply as an artist. I want the work of artists of Native ancestry to stand on an equal footing with the work of artists of other heritages.*<sup>20</sup> (2009)

*I remember having my paintings refused by a private gallery because it was "too Indian." I also remember being told that my work was "not Indian enough." My commitment is to painting in my own voice. I believe that the work of artists of Native ancestry can be as fine as the work of any tradition.*<sup>21</sup> (2009)

*There was a need to form the Professional Native Indian Artists Inc. - the Indian Group of Seven. We acknowledged and supported each other as artists when the world of fine art refused us entry. There was a need for transformation in how the work of artists of Native ancestry was understood and valued. Together we gradually broke down barriers that probably would have been so much more difficult faced alone. Who would have believed back in the seventies that three of us - Norval Morrisseau, Alex Janvier and myself - would become Governor General's Laureates.*<sup>22</sup> (2009)

**Influences:**

- Her family: Grandfather, Mother and Father
- Cubism
- Abstract Expressionism
- French Impressionism
- Studied Picasso in great detail
- Emily Carr
- Visiting Wikwemikong Reserve

**Major Themes:**

- Barriers between the living and the dead
- Anishinaabe stories and legends
- Nanabush (the Trickster)
- Human Identity
- Interpersonal relationships
- Spirituality
- Values from childhood
- The awakening of Canada's First Nations People in the 1960's
- Political and social beliefs

**Style:**

- Bold Curving lines
- Weaving parallel lines
- Singular colour fields
- Flat colour
- Figures depicted in both frontal and side profile

**Frequent forms that appear in the work:**

- Formlines
- "X-ray" style: Seeing inside figures, a shamanistic device
- Figures only have 4 digits on hands and feet
- Zig-zags and dots
- Gothic Arches of the Thunderbirds wings, often found at the top of her work. (The imagery of these arches originate from the doorway to her grandfathers room in Wikwemikong)
- Figures wearing headbands
- Chieftain Symbol

**Materials used by the artist:**

- Oil Pastels
- Acrylics
- India Ink

## A Potawatomi Story by Fotopoulou Sophia

Daphne Odjig is Potawatami from Wikwemikong. Learn about the Potawatomi Nation by following this link: [www.bigorin.org/potawatomi\\_kids.htm](http://www.bigorin.org/potawatomi_kids.htm)

The following story refers to three Anishinaabe nations: the Potawatomi, [Odawa] and the Ojibwe. *The red people became many tribes, and they spread across the land. Among these tribes were the Ojibwe, the [Odawa], and the Potawatomi. These three tribes were enemies and fought many battles. One Potawatomi man had ten sons, all of whom were killed in battle. Unbeknownst to him, there was an Ojibwe man who had lost ten sons in these battles, and there was an [Odawa] man who had likewise lost ten sons. Each man mourned so much that they wandered away from their tribes, each looking for a place to die in the woods.*

*The Ojibwe man walked and walked, and eventually he came to a huge tree. The tree had four long roots stretching to the north, east, south, and west, and four huge branches that extended in the same directions. The tree also had one huge root that ran straight toward the center of the earth, and its center limb ran straight up into the sky. The tree was so beautiful, and the view from under it was so tranquil, that the man forgot his sorrow, and eventually he was happy.*

*As the Ojibwe man sat under the tree, he saw another man approaching in the distance. This newcomer was crying as he walked toward the tree, but eventually he saw the tree's beauty and stopped under it. The Ojibwe man said, "I lost ten sons in war and was so heartbroken that I wandered away to die, until I came to this tree. Why have you come here?" The newcomer, an [Odawa], said, "I too lost ten sons in war, and I lost myself in grief until I came to this place". The two men sat and talked of their troubles.*

*As the two men talked, a third approached weeping. The first two watched as this third came to the tree. When they asked, the third man, a Potawatomi, told how he had lost ten sons in war and had walked in grief until he came to this beautiful place.*

*The three men talked and realized that their sons had died fighting in the same wars. They concluded that the Great Spirit had brought them together to this tranquil place, where they could hear the spirits speak. They agreed that there had been too much fighting between their tribes, and too much grief. They resolved to go back to their tribes and get them to live in peace. They made three pipes, and each took a pipe of tobacco home to his people as a symbol of peace.*

*Ten days later, the three old men led their people to the great tree. Each man brought wood from which they built a fire together, and they cooked food from each tribe. They filled a pipe and offered its smoke to the Great Spirit above, to the spirits of the four directions, and then downward to the spirit that keeps the earth from sinking into the water. The tribes each smoked from the pipe of peace and ate of the common meal, and their chiefs agreed that they should live in peace. The three old men agreed to a set of rules to preserve the peace and to guide their peoples. This is how the Potawatomi, the Ojibwe, and [Odawa] came to live in peace and to intermarry, as one people.*

Source: [www.newsfinder.org/site/more/a\\_potawatomi\\_story/](http://www.newsfinder.org/site/more/a_potawatomi_story/)

### Activity: The Spirit Tree

Grades K - 12

Read the description in the story of the great tree. Draw the tree. When the three men were under the tree, they felt they could hear spirits speak. Draw the spirits living in the tree.

## Carl Ray (1943-1978)

Born on the Sandy Lake Reserve, Ontario, and was of Cree heritage.



Image: Carl Ray, *Medicine Bear*, 1977, acrylic on canvas, 79.7 x 99.1 cm. Collection of Sunita Doobay.

For more information about Carl Ray, visit this link:

[www.native-art-in-canada.com/carlray.html](http://www.native-art-in-canada.com/carlray.html)

### Quotes:

*What you are looking at is ancient and sacred. In fact, what you see could be described as a part of my soul.*<sup>23</sup> (1971)

*The legends, beliefs, and stories of my people have all but disappeared. My paintings are an attempt to preserve the stories of my people. Most of the stories I have learned were taught to me by my mother Maggie Ray and the old people on the reserve.*<sup>24</sup> (1968)

*The last time there was a ceremony in our band was when I was about six years old. It was a berry festival that was being held in a birch bark lodge. The whole village was there and the priest came and told us to stop the berry festival. The priest understands now, but it is too late. The ceremony is gone.*<sup>25</sup> (1968)

### Influences:

- Traditional stories from his Mother, Maggy Ray, and Elders on his reserve
- Norval Morrisseau
- Rock Paintings near Sandy Lake and North Spirit Lake

### Major Themes:

- Creation Stories
- Cree Ceremonies

### Style:

- Bold, fluid silhouettes
- Figures subdivided into cellular units
- Vibrating filaments fill the interior forms
- Black ink with fills of terracotta wash
- Birds are always portrayed positively (because birds are an important contributor to life in First Nations traditions)

**Frequent forms that appear in the work:**

- X-ray Style
- Glaring Sun or Moon in the background
- Male Figures are depicted with heightened musculature
- Loons
- Wolves
- Moose
- Fish
- Manitou
- Trickster stories
- Thunderbirds
- Water spirits
- Giants
- Strange animals

**Materials used by the artist:**

- Pen
- Ink

**Activity: What is there but cannot be seen?**

*Grades 4 - 12*

**Discussion:**

- What is there but cannot be seen, smelled, heard or felt?
- What is there but some do not believe exists?
- What is there and people spend their entire lives looking for it?
- What was there from the beginning and will be there until the end?
- What is all over and still cannot be found?
- What holds everything together yet its cause is unknown?

**What are some sacred beings?**

**Thunderbirds** produce thunder by flapping their wings and lightening by opening and closing their eyes.

The **serpent** is the enemy of Thunderbird, thus expressing the eternal struggle between the upper and lower worlds.

**Procedure:**

Make up your own imaginary creature. Give it super strength and special powers.

View images of Thunderbird and Serpent. Make your own representation of the struggle between Thunderbird and Serpent.

## Joseph Sanchez (b. 1948)

Born in Trinidad, Colorado, and is of Spanish, German, and Pueblo descent.

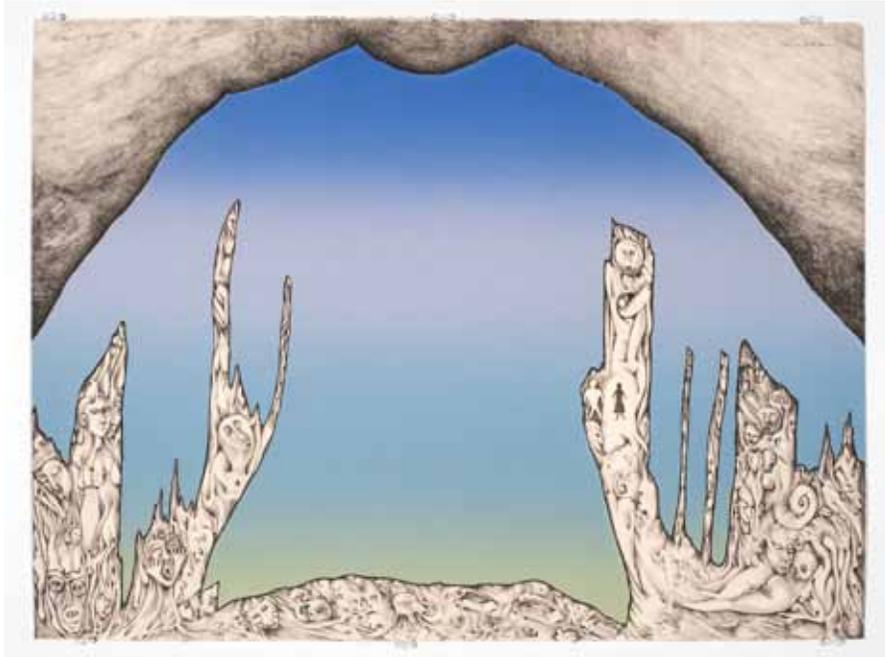


Image: Joseph Sanchez, *Ghost Shirt*, 1979-80, stone lithograph, 56.4 x 76.2 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

**For more information about Joseph Sanchez visit this link:**

[www.hambletongalleries.com/dynamic/artists/Joseph\\_Sanchez.asp](http://www.hambletongalleries.com/dynamic/artists/Joseph_Sanchez.asp)

### Quotes:

*My life then and now is informed by a cultural and ceremonial life blessed with the guidance and wisdom of many elders.*<sup>26</sup> (2012)

*The strength of the group allowed me to exhibit in places I could only dream of being included.*<sup>27</sup> (2009)

### Influences:

- Daphne Odjig (as a mentor and close friend)
- Ancestral history
- Spirituality

### Major Themes:

- The natural beauty and spirituality of the landscape around Northeastern Arizona
- Spirits of the Earth
- Abstractions of the surreal-reality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- Femininity in the world
- Ghost Dance

### Style:

- Sweeping colours and forms
- Expressive movement
- Abstracted
- Navaho and European style
- Earthy colours

**Materials used by the artist:**

- Oil
- Pencil
- Ink
- Charcoal
- Watercolour
- Pastel
- Acrylic

**Suggested Activities****Activity: Tribal Painting**

In 2011 Alex Janvier and Joseph Sanchez conducted art workshops with youth and local artists at the Ndinawe Youth Centre in downtown Winnipeg. For several days, youth and practicing artists painted onto large sheets of paper together. The end results were paintings that reflected personal visual narratives, cultural concepts, community cohesiveness, and various levels of experience. Janvier considers the process of collaborative painting to be "Tribal Painting." And that the tribal painting that took place followed the ways in which First Nations historically worked together for the sake of the collective.<sup>28</sup>

**Activity: Make a Community Painting**

Grades K - 12

**Discussion:**

Discuss the concept that everyone and everything is related.

**You will need:**

- Large sheet of brown wrapping paper (brown paper roll)
- Pencils
- Chalk pastels
- Acrylic or tempera paint
- Paint brushes with fine tip
- Reference images of artworks by the 7: *PNIAI* artists

**Procedure:**

- Ask each student to pick a bird, animal, insect or imaginary creature.
- Demonstrate making a quick and simple sketch to outline the shape of the chosen image.
- Have the students make quick outline sketches of their chosen creature.
- Next, students should think about the interior of their subject - the energy and the emotions inside.
- Using the chalk pastels, fill the interior with bright colours
- With the fine tipped brush and black paint draw over the outline of the image.
- Continue using the brush and paint and draw detail lines and shapes inside the subject. This can include the organs and skeleton, and also the life energy in the body.
- When each individual drawing is completed, connect all the images with black energy lines.

Examples of the Suggested Activity:



## Endnotes

1. Daphne Odjig, *Odjig: The Art of Daphne Odjig* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 2001), 78.
2. Carl Ray quoted by James Stevens in "Paintings Recreate Ojibwa Past," *Winnipeg Free Press*, December 7, 1968.
3. Jackson Beardy quoted in "Jackson Beardy - A Dedicated Artist," *Thunderbird Quill Newsletter*, June 1969, 4.
4. Daphne Odjig (address at exhibition reception, Institute of American Indian Arts Museum, Santa Fe, NM, August 20, 2009).
5. Jackson Beardy quoted by Andrea Lang in "He paints living legends," *Indian Record* 42, no. 1 (1979): 13.
6. Jackson Beardy quoted by Kathleen Walker in "Artist keeps legends alive," *Ottawa Citizen*, November 25, 1977.
7. Jackson Beardy quoted by Jacqueline Fry in *Treaty Numbers 23, 287, 1171* (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1972), 2.
8. Colleen Cutshall, "Jaxon Beerdi: Ambassador, Alchemist, Artist," in *Jackson Beardy: A Life's Work*, ed. Shirley Madill (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1993), 22.
9. *Ibid.*, 28.
10. Eddy Cobiness, *The Flowing Art of Eddy Cobiness*, no date.
11. Tony Davis, "Gentle, flowing lines helped to define Canadian Native art," *Winnipeg Free Press*, January 3, 1996.
12. Jack Pollack and Lister Sinclair, *The Art of Norval Morrisseau* (Toronto: Methuen Press, 1979), 7.
13. Norval Morrisseau, *Norval Morrisseau, Return to the House of Invention* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 2005), 92.
14. *Ibid.*, 102.
15. Barry Ace, "Reactive Intermediates: Aboriginal Art, Politics, and Resonance of the 1960s and 1970s," in *7: Professional Native Indian Artists Inc.*, ed. Michelle LaVallee (Regina: MacKenzie Art Gallery, 2013).
16. Daphne Odjig quoted by Sandy Wabegijig in "In the Spirit of our Ancestors: Who We Are and Where We Come From" in *Selected Proceedings of Witness: A Symposium on the Woodland School of Painters*, ed. Bonnie Devine (Toronto: Aboriginal Curatorial Collective and Witness, 2009), 82. [www.aboriginalcuratorialcollective.org/PDF/ACC-witness-small.pdf](http://www.aboriginalcuratorialcollective.org/PDF/ACC-witness-small.pdf).
17. Daphne Odjig (address at Honourary Degree Ceremony, University of Toronto, ON, June 17, 1985).
18. Daphne Odjig, artist statement in *7: Professional Native Indian Artists Inc.* (see note 15).
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*
22. Daphne Odjig (address at exhibition reception, 2009).
23. Carl Ray quoted by James Stevens in *Sacred Legends of the Sandy Lake Cree* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), xi.
24. Carl Ray quoted by James Stevens in "Paintings Recreate Ojibwa Past," *Winnipeg Free Press*, December 7, 1968.
25. *Ibid.*
26. Joseph Sanchez, unpublished artist statement, 2012.
27. Joseph Sanchez, "The Formation of Professional Native Artists Inc., The Indian Group of Seven," in *Witness* (2009), 23.
28. Adapted from Cathy Mattes, "'Winnipeg, Where It All Began'-Rhetorical and Visual Sovereignty and the Formation of the Professional Native Indian Artists Inc.," in *7: Professional Native Indian Artists Inc.* (see note 15).