

EDUCATION NEWSLETTER

CULTURE, TRADITION, AND VISUAL LEGACIES

TEACHING THE ART OF NORVAL MORRISSEAU

Connect your students to the work of the *Mishomis*, or grandfather, of contemporary Indigenous art in Canada



Norval Morriseau, *Floral Theme in Two Parts*, c.1980-85.

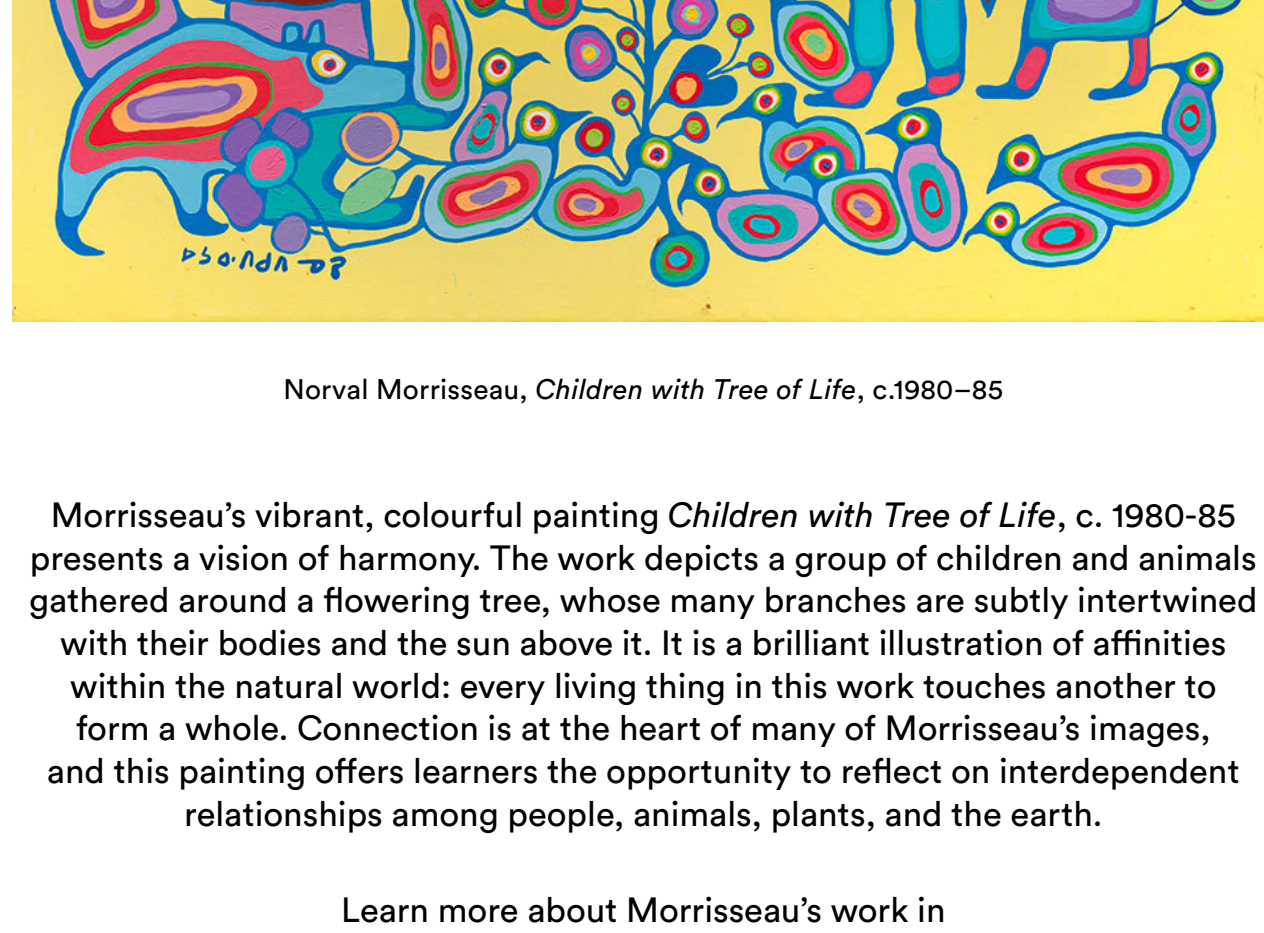
June is National Indigenous History Month in Canada and presents an opportunity to continue learning about the myriad cultural practices of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities across the country. This year, the **weekly theme** from June 1st – June 9th is “environment, traditional knowledge, and territory”—and what better way to explore these themes than through the work of one of the nation’s most iconic visual creators? Anishinaabe artist Norval Morriseau (1931–2007) is considered by many to be a precedent-setter in the world of contemporary Indigenous art in Canada, creating a distinctive style of painting that came to be known as the Woodland School. In *Floral Theme in Two Parts*, c.1980-85 (above left), pictured above, the remarkable symmetry between the left and right sides of the canvas creates a mirror effect between the birds, butterflies, flowers, and berries represented—echoing balance in nature. Morriseau’s art is a compelling visual gateway to a deeper understanding of the inter-relationships between humans, animals, the earth, and the spiritual world, and we hope you enjoy learning more through our teaching resources on this beloved visionary.

Download a [Teacher Resource Guide](#) on Norval Morriseau

— The Art Canada Institute Education Team

AVENUES TO EXPLORE

Exploring Interconnections



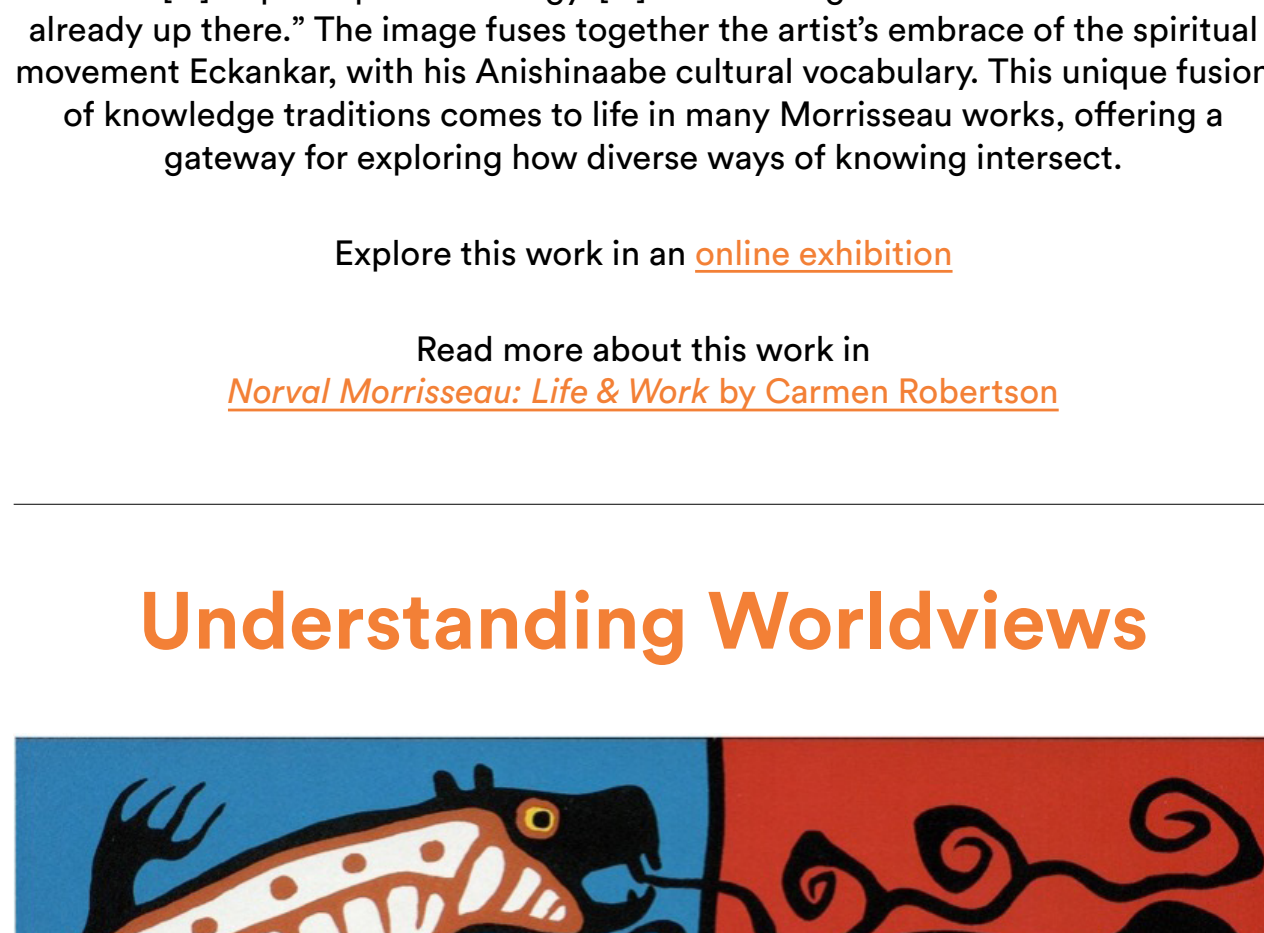
Norval Morriseau, *Children with Tree of Life*, c.1980-85

Morriseau’s vibrant, colourful painting *Children with Tree of Life*, c. 1980-85 presents a vision of harmony. The work depicts a group of children and animals gathered around a flowering tree, whose many branches are subtly intertwined with their bodies and the sun above it. It is a brilliant illustration of affinities within the natural world: every living thing in this work touches another to form a whole. Connection is at the heart of many of Morriseau’s images, and this painting offers learners the opportunity to reflect on interdependent relationships among people, animals, plants, and the earth.

Learn more about Morriseau’s work in [*Norval Morriseau: Life & Work* by Carmen Robertson](#)

Explore the learning activity “Norval Morriseau and Land as Relation” in our [Teacher Resource Guide](#)

Visualizing Knowledge



Norval Morriseau, *Observations of the Astral World*, c.1994

In *Observations of the Astral World*, c.1994, a group of human observers are struck with wonder as they connect with another plane of existence, signified with a vibrant, multi-coloured portal. As Morriseau once stated, “There is a museum of the astral world that each individual goes to by his own free choice [...] to pick up some energy. [...] All the things that men will create are already up there.” The image fuses together the artist’s embrace of the spiritual movement Eckankar, with his Anishinaabe cultural vocabulary. This unique fusion of knowledge traditions comes to life in many Morriseau works, offering a gateway for exploring how diverse ways of knowing intersect.

Explore this work in an [online exhibition](#)

Read more about this work in [*Norval Morriseau: Life & Work* by Carmen Robertson](#)

Understanding Worldviews



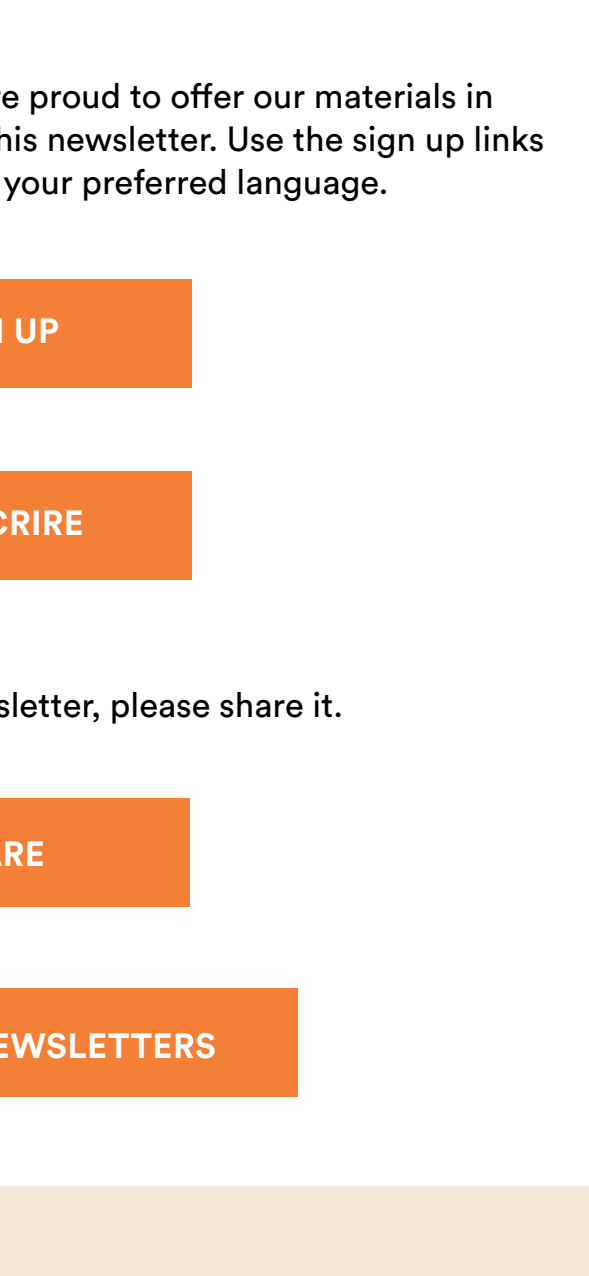
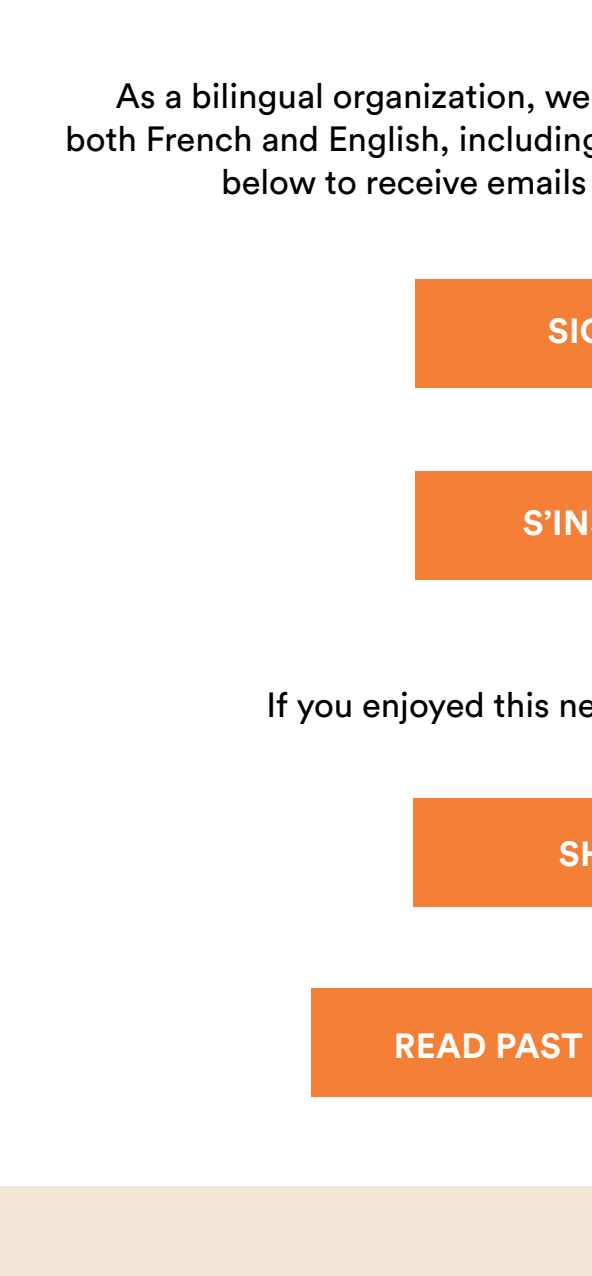
Norval Morriseau, *The Land (Land Rights)*, 1976.

In his painting *The Land (Land Rights)*, 1976, contrasting perspectives come into contact: on the left, Morriseau depicts the worldview held by many Indigenous communities that all living things, human and non-human, are related; and on the right, he pictures a settler outlook, which often interprets humans as separate and above other living things. By separating both sides of the impact with a strong line and a sharp contrast in colours, the artist shows us the canvas of these different ways of knowing. This painting is a powerful classroom conversation starter, and invites reflection on differing viewpoints, land rights, and historic and ongoing activism surrounding land protection.

Watch a short [learning video](#) about Norval Morriseau

Explore the learning activity “Different Views on Land” in our [Teacher Resource Guide](#)

DISCOVER MORE



Looking for more teaching resources to facilitate learning this National Indigenous History Month? Check out the Art Canada Institute [digital resource library](#) for curriculum guides centered on historical and contemporary Indigenous makers. Our program offers ready-to-use lesson plans, learning videos, slide decks, and more to facilitate art-infused engagement in the classroom.

As a bilingual organization, we are proud to offer our materials in both French and English, including this newsletter. Use the sign up links below to receive emails in your preferred language.

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About the Art Canada Institute

Launched in 2013, the Art Canada Institute is the only national institution whose mandate is to promote the study of an inclusive multi-vocal Canadian art history to as broad an audience as possible, in both English and French, within Canada and internationally. The ACI works with more than fifty of Canada’s leading art historians, curators, and visual culture experts who are dedicated to the creation of authoritative original content on the people, themes, and topics that have defined Canadian art history.

We are creating a central digital resource to tell the world about Canada’s most important works of art and where they are located. By functioning as an online art museum, a [digital library](#), and an interactive Canadian art encyclopedia, the ACI is an indispensable resource on Canada’s visual heritage.

Visit us at [aci-iac.ca](#)

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