

## ADVOCACY AND A VOICE FOR CHANGE TEACHING THE ART OF CARL BEAM

We share our latest resource on the singular vision of one of the country's most iconic contemporary Indigenous artists.



Left: Beam in front of *Exorcism in Thunder Bay*, 1984

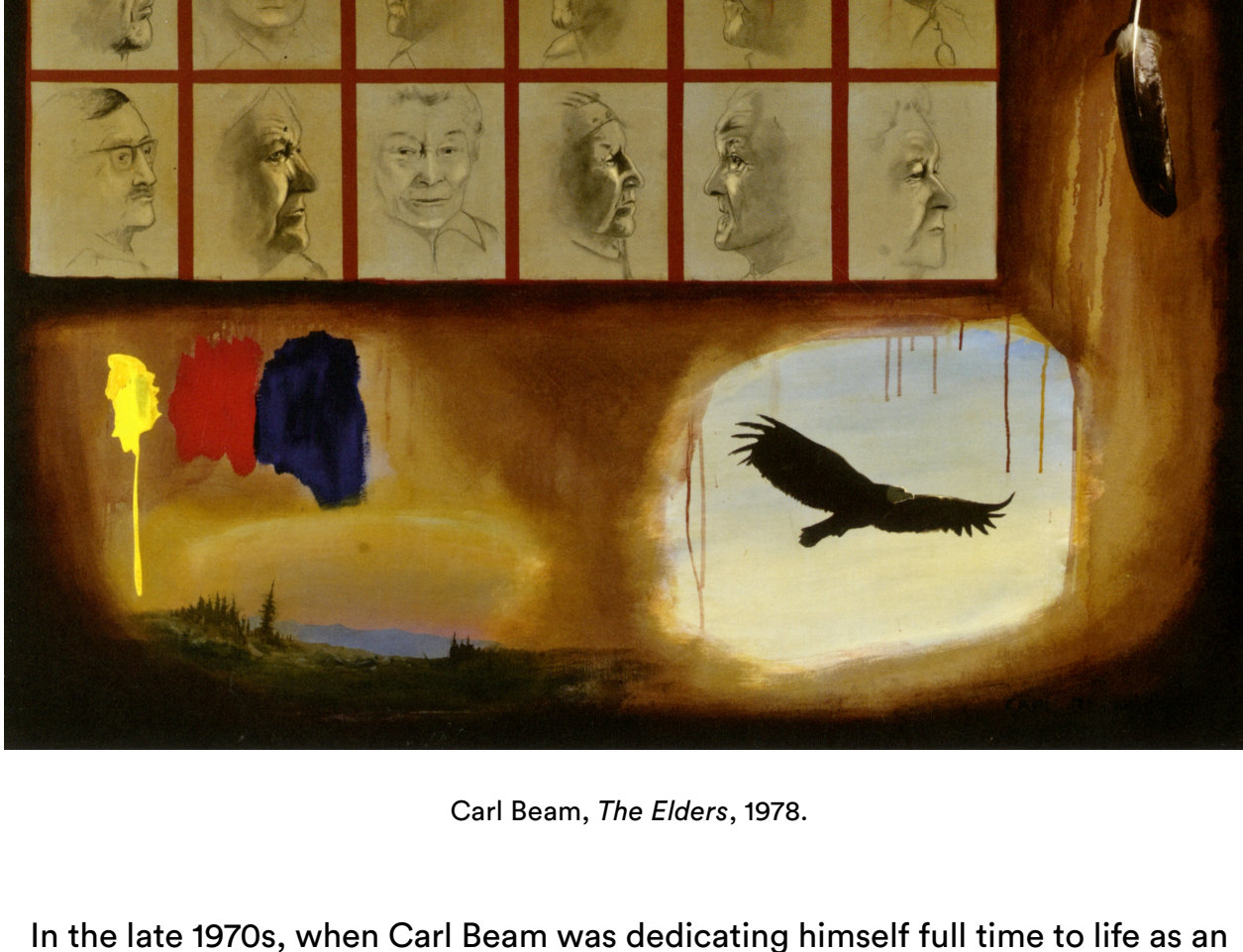
Next week on September 30th, schools across Canada will mark the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Sometimes referred to as “Orange Shirt Day”, it is an opportunity to reflect on the generational harm inflicted by the country's residential school system, and a conduit for committing to a path of healing. Revered Ojibwe creator Carl Beam (1934-2005) (above), himself a residential school survivor, was one of the first artists in the country to shine a light on systemic violence and injustice, using his art as a platform for reclaiming agency, and pressing for change. As his daughter Anong Migwans Beam notes, “He challenged his viewers to grapple with the ideas he treated in his work, to wrestle with his [...] visual language, and to question what they saw and thought.” Our newest Teacher Resource Guide takes inspiration from this visionary leader, presenting three new learning activities that encourage students to find strength in their own voices, and to reflect on the power of artistic advocacy.

Download the [Teacher Resource Guide](#) on Carl Beam

— The Art Canada Institute Education Team

### AVENUES TO EXPLORE

## A Distinctive Style



Carl Beam, *The Elders*, 1978.

In the late 1970s, when Carl Beam was dedicating himself full time to life as an artist, a group of Ojibwe creators known as the Woodland School were making art that was beginning to gain prominence. Its artists, including the renowned Norval Morrisseau (1931–2007), were forging a style all their own—but it was radically different from what Beam was beginning to develop in his own practice. In early works like *The Elders*, 1978, Beam brought together a number of visual references in a creative composition, combining portraits he developed from reference photographs, landscapes, and images of a flying eagle. Through his later work in painting, printmaking, ceramics, and performance art, he challenged assumptions about First Nations creativity and the style and content of contemporary Indigenous art.

Explore a [Learning Activity](#) entitled “Celebrating Artistic Difference.”

## Creating Autobiography



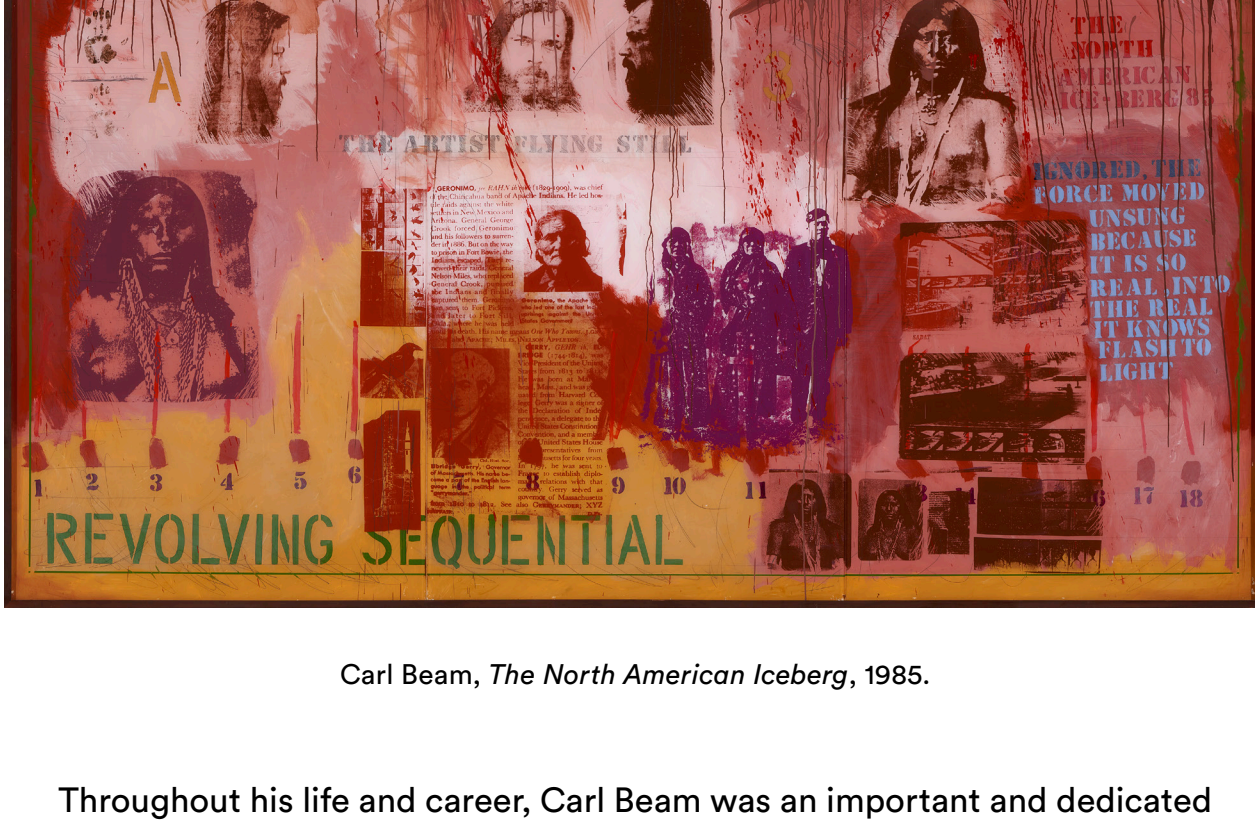
Carl Beam, *Self-Portrait as John Wayne, Probably (from The Columbus Suite)*, 1990.

In many of his best-known works, Carl Beam brought together numerous visual references from his own life, integrating self-portraits and family photographs into larger visual contexts in order to create layers of meaning in his signature personal style. In works like *Self-Portrait as John Wayne, Probably (from The Columbus Suite)*, 1990, Beam integrates an image of himself as a child into a larger suite of prints that he entitled *The Columbus Suite*, exploring such powerful themes as colonization, residential schools, and cultural struggle. Collage was one of the artist's preferred mediums, and is a powerful method for exploring how personal identity may be expressed visually using images, text, and other visual media.

Learn more about this work in [Carl Beam: Life & Work](#) by Anong Migwans Beam

Explore a [Learning Activity](#) entitled “Creating a Personal Identity Collage.”

## Art and Activism



Carl Beam, *The North American Iceberg*, 1985.

Throughout his life and career, Carl Beam was an important and dedicated activist. As his daughter Anong Migwans Beam explains, “In his paintings, prints, and performance works, he tackled contemporary and historical themes that he felt had not been previously explored, making it possible for Indigenous creators to be recognized as contemporary artists in national dialogues.” His monumental mixed-media work *The North American Iceberg*, 1985, is perhaps his best-known work, and critiques European knowledge systems and their role in colonization and cultural violence. It is a powerful gateway to learning about societal misunderstandings, and the power of art to challenge and educate.

Learn more about this work in [Carl Beam: Life & Work](#) by Anong Migwans Beam

Explore a [Learning Activity](#) entitled “Becoming an Activist Artist.”

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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.

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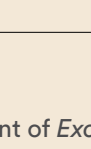
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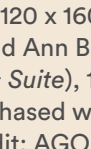
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