THUNDER BAY ART GALLERY

MEDIA RELEASE

50 YEARS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: September 3, 2026

Subject: Gallery to Unveil 22 ft Morrisseau Painting Not Seen in over 40 Years

Location: 1080 Keewatin St., Thunder Bay, ON

On Friday 18, September, the Thunder Bay Art Gallery will unveil a masterwork painting by Ojibway artist Norval Morrisseau. This monumental work spans an astonishing 22-feet long by 10-feet tall and has not been viewed by the public since 1986. The work is on loan from EA Studios Calgary, and marks a collaboration between two organizations with deep and longstanding connections to Morrisseau and his artistic legacy.

EA Studios Director, Joseph Helmy, reminisced on his familial connection to the work, Morrisseau, and the significance in bringing the work to the Thunder Bay Art Gallery. “Norval Morrisseau painted this work of extraordinary scale for my father, Galal, while living and working at our family’s Tea House in Jasper … The painting has remained in our family’s care ever since and is now returning to public view for the first time since 1986.

That history is exactly why partnering with the Thunder Bay Art Gallery for this unveiling matters so much to us. What began as [patronage] between Norval and my father grew into a genuine friendship, one that left a lasting impression on my father and remains an important part of our family’s history. Given Thunder Bay’s connection to Norval’s home territory and the Gallery’s longstanding stewardship of his legacy, there is something profoundly fitting about this canvas beginning its return to public view so close to his birthplace.”

“Norval Morrisseau is widely regarded as the ‘Mishomis’ or ‘grandfather of contemporary Indigenous art in Canada‘” Thunder Bay Art Gallery’s Executive Director, Matthew R. Hills stated, “The impact he left on Canadian and international art is tremendous. This masterwork reflects that significance, in both scale and history. The Thunder Bay Art Gallery is grateful to serve our community in presenting this epic work for the first time in over 40 years.

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Thank you to Joseph Helmy for presenting us with the opportunity to showcase this masterpiece in the region Morrisseau called home."

EA Studios Calgary was founded in 1973 by Galal Helmy in Jasper, Alberta and operated out of the Maligne Canyon Tea House between 1978 to 2018. In the mid 80s, Morrisseau lived and painted in a studio above the Tea House. Galal Helmy is known as having a significant role in the artist's life during this period and described by the artist as his friend and patron.

Travelling to Thunder Bay as a rolled, raw canvas, this large Woodland Style mural depicts an impressive gathering of human figures including adults, children, animals, birds, and spiritual beings in an scene featuring natural elements. An interpretive panel includes family photographs and ephemera related to the creation of the piece. The large-scale work will be on public display at the Thunder Bay Art Gallery's upcoming exhibition: *Morrisseau Masterwork*, on view from September 18, 2026 until January 3, 2027.

For inquiries, photos, and interview opportunities please contact:
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