



Ontario Provincial Police
Police provinciale de l'Ontario

News Release/ Communiqué

FROM: Criminal Investigation Branch

DATE: March 3, 2023

EIGHT ARRESTED AS OPP, THUNDER BAY POLICE SERVICE LAY CHARGES IN APPARENT DECADES-LONG ART FRAUD INVESTIGATION

More than 1,000 alleged fraudulent artworks purported to be painted by Norval Morrisseau seized

(ORILLIA, ON) – On March 1, 2023, the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) and the Thunder Bay Police Service (TBPS) arrested eight individuals for their involvement in the apparent fraudulent manufacturing and distribution of artwork purported to be that of Indigenous artist Norval Morrisseau.

Morrisseau — also known as Copper Thunderbird — was a prolific Indigenous artist from the Bingwi Neyaashi Anishinaabek First Nation. Before his death in 2007, allegations began to emerge of individuals creating and selling art under his name and made in his distinctive Woodland School of Art style.

Since 2020 and together with the TBPS, a major case manager with the OPP Criminal Investigation Branch has been leading the investigation of the alleged production, distribution and sale of fake artwork falsely attributed to the late Morrisseau.

As a result of this two-and-a-half-year investigation, eight people have been arrested and are facing 40 total charges. More than 1,000 alleged fraudulent paintings, prints and other artworks have been seized. Some of these paintings sold for tens of thousands of dollars to unsuspecting members of the public who had no reason to believe they weren't genuine.

Please see the attached for an addendum of charged persons.

The OPP is not in a position to authenticate any artwork. If you believe you may be in possession of a suspected forgery or fraudulent work of art, it is recommended that you seek legal advice by contacting a lawyer or the Law Society of Ontario, which operates the Law Society Referral Service. This service provides a free half-hour consultation with a lawyer. For more information, please visit <http://www.lso.ca>.

QUOTES

“Norval Morrisseau was a prominent artist of the Thunder Bay region and to profit off of his name is not only unethical, but also illegal. Together with the Ontario Provincial Police, I congratulate all involved for the successful resolution of such an important investigation.”



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- Chief Dan Taddeo, Thunder Bay Police Service

“It was important for the OPP and the Thunder Bay Police Service to identify and hold accountable those who allegedly profited illegally by forging Norval Morrisseau’s artwork. The results of this investigation are a testament to the commitment and competence of the investigators and the collaboration of policing partners.”

– OPP Commissioner Thomas Carrique

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