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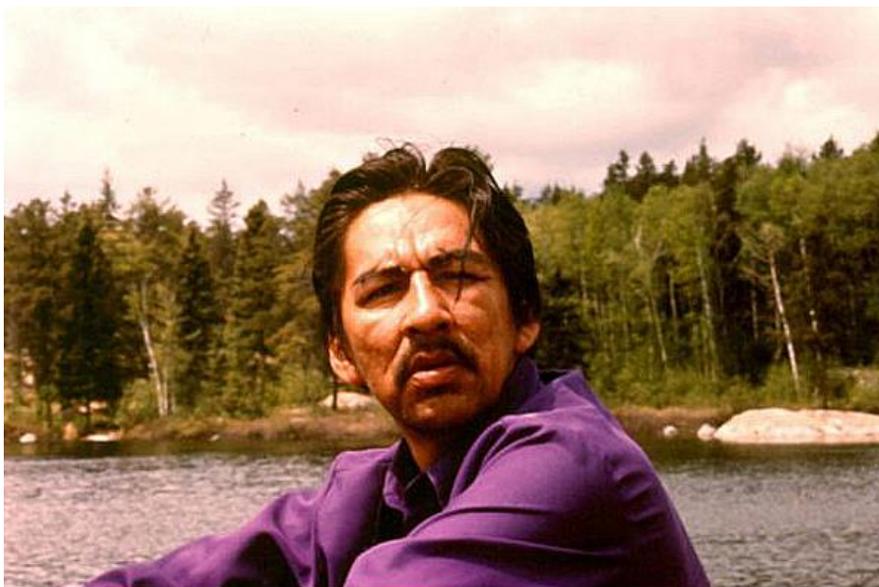
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Charges Dropped in Norval Morrisseau Forgery Case

Coline Milliard, Monday, November 3, 2014

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Norval Morrisseau
Photo via: The Star

One of Canada's most publicized art forgery cases in recent years has come to an abrupt end. [According to the *Globe and Mail*](#), renowned tenor John McDermott dropped his case against Toronto's Maslak McLeod Gallery this past June. The Scottish-Canadian musician filed his initial complaint in October 2013, accusing the gallery of selling him three paintings by the aboriginal Canadian artist Norval Morrisseau (a.k.a. Copper Thunderbird). He believes the paintings are "fakes and imitations."

McDermott, who did not explain why he was terminating the lawsuit, also claimed that these works were likely from "a fraud ring operating out of Thunder Bay [and] run by an individual by the name of Gary Lamont who at various times has employed various forgers, including local artists Benjamin Morrisseau [son of Barney Morrisseau, a brother of Norval Morrisseau] and Timothy Tait [a First Nations artist]." He sought \$69,500 in damages, but his allegations couldn't be proven in court.

The Norval Morrisseau market has long been plagued with fakes. The artist even took the matter into his own hands towards the end of his life. According to the website [Norval Morrisseau Legal](#), Morrisseau made several declarations on fakes, denying the authenticity of artworks sold in six outlets: Artworld of Sherway, Gallery Sunami, Maslak McLeod Gallery, Randy Potter Estate Auctions, Bearclaw Gallery, and Woodland Gary Bruce Thacky Gallery.

In 2005, two years before he died of Parkinson-related disease, the artist launched the Norval Morrisseau Heritage Society (NMHS) to compile a *catalogue raisonné* of his oeuvre. The Art Dealers Association of Canada backed the organization, acknowledging it as "the sole authority for the authentication of works by Norval Morrisseau" in 2007. But NMHS has been bitterly contested by others, including Morrisseau collector [Ugo Matulić \(a.k.a. Spirit Walker\)](#). He says the artist was far too affected by dementia at the time to be able to set up such a body. [Norval Morrisseau Legal](#) lists 19 lawsuits involving fakes since 2007.

The end of McDermott's case doesn't mean that the Maslak McLeod Gallery is out of trouble. Still ongoing is a case filed in 2012 by Barenaked Ladies keyboardist Kevin Hearn, who claims that a painting the gallery sold him in 2005, *Spirit*

Energy of Mother Earth, is also a fake. Maslak McLeod firmly denies the allegation.

Hearn and McDermott share the same lawyer, Jonathan Sommer. He intends to use the knowledge gained working with McDermott to the advantage of his other client. Speaking to the *Globe and Mail*, he said "Those facts as they were presented in the McDermott claim, those are exactly the facts we'll be proving or attempting to prove in the Hearn case." A ruling isn't expected until next year.