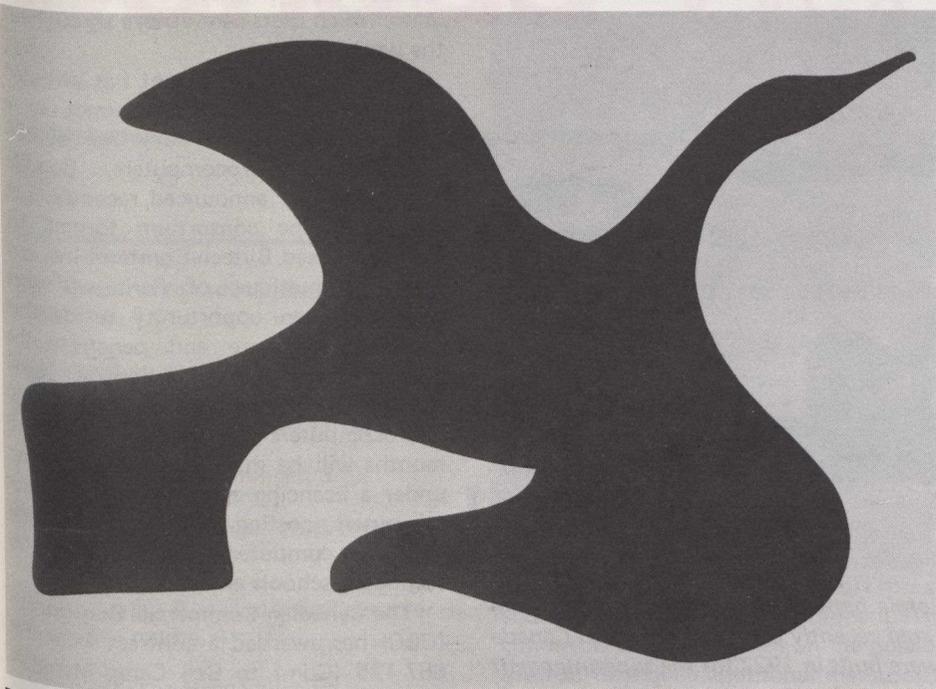


News of the arts

Benjamin Chee Chee: young Ojibwa artist marked by talent and tragedy



Bird in flight (1977) acrylic on paper by Benjamin Chee Chee.

The National Exhibition Centre and Centre for Indian Art in Thunder Bay, Ontario is currently showing a unique collection of works by Ojibwa artist, Benjamin Chee Chee. The 49 paintings and five prints span a period from 1973 to 1977.

Born in Temagami, Ontario, Mr. Chee Chee largely taught himself to draw and paint. His father died when he was two months old and he lost track of his mother. One reason behind his drive for success as a painter was his ambition to be reunited with her.

Woodland Indian painters

He was a prominent member of the second generation of Woodland Indian painters, a native art movement that began in the early 1960s and has since become one of the important art schools in Canada. Unlike many of his contemporaries, he painted in a style influenced by modern abstraction.

While most of the young Woodland Indian artists were content to follow the style of the movement's founder, Norval Morrisseau, in depicting myths and legends by direct and "primitive" narrative means, Mr. Chee Chee pursued a more economical graphic style, a reduction of line and image more in keeping with the mainstream of international modern art.

Benjamin Chee Chee wanted his work

to be accepted on its own terms, not as "Indian art", and he proceeded to break the mould of what Indian art was thought to be. His life was filled with ironic and frequently tragic twists of fate, often reflected in his art, culminating in his suicide in 1977, shortly before his thirty-third birthday.

In describing the artist's work, Elizabeth McLuhan, curator of the Thunder Bay National Exhibition Centre and Centre for Indian Art, says "Chee Chee evolved a lyrical, expressive line to depict, in a few strokes, the essence of birds and animals from the Canadian landscape... his work changed the look of Canadian Indian art and captured the imagination of the Canadian public."

Many of the examples of Mr. Chee Chee's best known style as well as a significant number of powerful abstract designs little known by viewers today are included in what is probably the largest collection of Mr. Chee Chee's work in existence. Miss McLuhan says "Benjamin Chee Chee's life and work epitomizes much of the talent and tragedy inseparable in today's Indian life."

The collection will be on display until January 29. For further information, please contact the Thunder Bay National Exhibition Centre and Centre for Indian Art, P.O. Box 1193, Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada P7C 4X9.

Cinema academy head named

Quebec movie producer Denis Héroux will become the new chairman of the Academy of Canadian Cinema, it was announced recently.

Mr. Héroux, a former history professor, began his film-making career with such popular Quebec movies as *Valerie* before moving on to international movie co-productions including *Violette Nozière*, *Atlantic City* and *Quest for Fire*.

Mr. Héroux becomes the academy's third chairman, taking over from Toronto music score composer Paul Hoffert.

Actress to join Yellowknife anniversary festivities

Canadian actress Margot Kidder will be guest of honour in the city of her birth next summer, Yellowknife's fiftieth Anniversary Committee has announced. Miss Kidder was once famous as reporter Lois Lane in the *Superman* movies.

Miss Kidder's father Kendall was a gold miner and later manager of the Yellowknife Telephone Co. in the 1940s. Her mother, Jill, was a volunteer announcer at the community radio station. Miss Kidder herself left the north as an infant and now lives in California.

Activities celebrating Yellowknife's fiftieth anniversary will take place from June 23 to July 7, 1984.

Art good enough to eat

Susan Rott's portraits are meant for eating, not hanging on the wall, because her edible art is made of solid chocolate.

Prince Charles, Diana Princess of Wales and Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau are three subjects Susan Rott has "painted" in chocolate in the four months since she dreamed up the idea.

She uses her own moulds to give slight contours to the portraits and chocolate "paints" made of tinted white chocolate.

"It's a real challenge to mix the colouring powder and chocolate to reproduce skin tones and hair colours," said Susan Rott, who takes commissions and prefers to work from a photograph.

But it takes a lot of chocolate money to commission edible art. A small portrait, 22 by 22 centimetres of two-tone, multi-hued chocolate costs \$75.

R. Spooner