



National Gallery of Canada

Norval Morriseau, *Indian Jesus Christ* (1974). Acrylic on paper. 134.6 × 68.5 cm. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Gatineau, Quebec

and the concept of the necessity of two halves to balance the whole.

In 1972, Morriseau suffered serious burns to three-quarters of his body in a Vancouver hotel fire and reportedly had a vision of Jesus telling him to be a role model through his art. He converted to the apostolic faith, which is part of the Christian Fundamentalist movement, and he embarked on a spiritual path with works such as *Indian Jesus Christ* (1974), which challenges the missionary zeal to convert and the presumption that Aboriginals have to abandon their own culture to become Christian.

He was not reluctant to offer political comment either. In *The Gift* (1975), a dotted (powerful) missionary gives an Aboriginal adult and child dots — smallpox, which wiped out about 90% of Aboriginals in North America.

Around this time Morriseau was introduced to Eckankar, a spiritual belief in the ability of the soul to exist and travel separately from the body and even the mind, and which leads to spiritual

Poem

Death of a doctor

Be the shade from sun on the snow covered road
a white scar left where the basal cell was removed
deep and rooted

Be the cut of the surgeon's knife
the harbinger of news from tall places
the bridge you stood on the night you thought

I could if then not now maybe
be the long shadow that is lost in the dark
in a prairie city on a uneasy March night

Gather the many white scars of stars
in the backyard of your retinas
They are the ones you can see

Your discontent feeds your memory
The white ash is only the ash
of another barkless tree without birds

Your hands hold open a new book
They are not the hands that once pushed you
To obey or not to obey

is your choice
is your choice
Your recall is excellent

You put on your white lab coat
over the pressed striped shirt
over the black pressed pants

You put on your polished black shoes
You combed your hair across your forehead
You pared your nails

You noticed the white in the nail beds
It was telling you something
You listened:

“Today is the day you risk everything
to discover the last philosophy
of yourself on this earth.”

Yvonne Trainer, PhD
Faculty of Humanities
University of Alberta (Augustana Campus)
Camrose, Alta.

DOI:10.1503/cmaj.060177