

One of Canada's foremost Aboriginal artists is set to open his first major solo exhibition in nearly a decade at Banff's Canada House Gallery after a breakthrough residency at The Banff Centre.

Alex Janvier, one of the significant pioneering First Nations artists in Canada and commonly referred to as a member of the "Indian Group of Seven" – along with Norval Morrisseau, Jackson Beardy, Daphne Odjig, Eddy Cobiness, Carl Ray and Joseph Sanchez – will be exhibiting 41 new works of art, all created during and since the six-week Banff Centre residency last winter.



BC-Drum is Home acrylic on canvas 48x72"

Canada House owner Barbara Pelham said the new pieces are both breathtaking and stunning, vibrant and lyrical, and a quick perusal of the Canada House website would indicate a pent-up demand for Janvier's work. Of the 42 works displayed, 18 are already pre-sold at prices ranging from \$1,000 to \$10,000. "It's spectacular – a fabulous collection, and this is so exciting for us... a huge coup to be able to display his new work," Pelham said.

Janvier will be in attendance at the opening of the show Sept. 6 from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. The show runs Sept. 6 to Sept. 18.

Janvier, who was named to the Order of Canada last year and earlier this year received a Governor General's Award and an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from the University of Alberta, was yesterday (Aug. 20) announced as one of three finalists for a newly created \$50,000 Alberta Foundation for the Arts Visual

Arts Award. The winner will be announced the evening of Sept. 6 at a gala ceremony at the Jubilee Auditorium.



Purple Dots acrylic on canvas 48x36"

Pelham said Janvier's connection with Canada House goes back decades, to when her parents owned the gallery.

"I can remember meeting him when I was in my early 20s. He was always charming, a real artist. His work was always so detailed, so exquisite – losing his mobility to paint was devastating."

In the late 1990s, Janvier developed Bell's Palsy on his right side and was forced to alter his work dramatically to accommodate his physical limitations. He changed his technique, style and materials. His work, already abstract, became more so as he tilted the canvas and paper to let the paint drip around the surface.

"I did the Jackson Pollock routine," Janvier joked Wednesday (Aug. 20) in a telephone interview from his studio and gallery in Cold Lake, Alberta.

"I got up on a stepladder and dripped the paint down on the paper."

The illness is not something Janvier particularly likes to talk about, only to say it left him a changed man. "I have learned a lot. When under the influence of

illness, you create something else, something different. I found another part of me, another side of me that was there, ready to express.”

In February of this year, he completed a six-week residency at The Banff Centre, and unexpectedly, his ability to paint in his traditional style returned. Pelham said: “He came down to see me and said, ‘Barbara, you’ve got to come and see what I’ve done.’ I couldn’t wait. “My jaw just dropped. Everything in there, in his studio, was so spectacular, so exciting. He’s back. That Banff Centre residency just opened the floodgates.”



canvas 14x11”

Feb 2008 Banff Series Cherry Day acrylic on

Janvier, born of Dene Suline and Saulteaux descent in 1935 in Northern Alberta, graduated from the Alberta College of Art in 1960, although he had been painting and selling his work previous to that, in the 1950s. In 1972, at a joint exhibition in Winnipeg with Jackson Beardy and Daphne Odjig entitled Treaty Numbers 23, 287 and 1171, indigenous modern art was brought to an appreciative Canadian audience and the emphasis shifted from “Native art” to “artistic value”. Janvier in particular changed the art world by not painting what was expected from a Native artist. Shortly afterwards, led by Odjig, the three artists and another four of their counterparts created the Professional Native Indian Artists Incorporation (PNIAI), and because they were seven, journalists referred to them as the “Indian Group of Seven”.

Janvier cites artists Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee as influences, but his style is unique, blending both abstract and representational images with bright, often

symbolic colors. As a First Nations person with a lifetime of struggling for cultural empowerment, his work reflects both the challenges and the celebrations he's encountered in his lifetime, and he credits the beadwork and birch bark basketry of his mother and other relatives as influences.

Exhibited worldwide, Janvier has been commissioned to create everything from a 450-square-metre mural for the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Ottawa to the image on a specially minted \$200 coin from the Royal Canadian Mint.

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