

Elder Leland Bell



Elder Leland Bell, born in 1953 on Wiikwemkoong Unceded Territory, Manitoulin Island, Ontario, is a distinguished Anishinaabe artist whose work beautifully reflects the rich cultural heritage of his community. Raised on Wiikwemkoong and later in Toronto, he graduated from Laurentian University with a major in Native Studies. A member of the Loon Clan and affiliated with the Three Fires Midewiwin Society, he embodies a deep commitment to his Anishinaabe identity, which is vividly expressed through his art.

His artistic journey began in 1972 under the mentorship of the Professional Native Indian Artists Incorporation, known as the “Indian Group of Seven.” Officially starting his painting career in 1976, Elder Bell developed a distinctive style influenced by the Woodland School, featuring stylized figures that convey nurturing, peace, and serenity, often inspired by his family and friends.

Beyond painting, Elder Bell is a dedicated musician and writer. He has collaborated with Shirley Chee Choo and Blake Debassige on music for various film projects, enriching his community's cultural tapestry.

A central motif in Elder Bell’s work is the sacred circle, representing harmony and interconnectedness. He states, “The circle is central to our tradition... what I create is something simple, serene, and peaceful.” His belief in the survival and flourishing of Anishinaabe culture informs his artistic practice, as he integrates elements from various cultures while remaining true to his roots. Elder Bell’s artwork has been showcased in numerous exhibitions across Ontario, British Columbia, and Switzerland, earning him recognition from collectors and institutions worldwide, including the Vatican Museum.

He is also an art instructor at Cambrian College, conducting workshops throughout North America, inspiring future generations to embrace their heritage. In recognition of his contributions, he received an Honorary Doctorate in Letters from Laurentian University.

With each brushstroke, Elder Leland Bell weaves a narrative of resilience and cultural pride, ensuring the continuation of Anishinaabe traditions and stories for future generations.

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