

John Eric Laford



John Eric Laford was a celebrated Anishinaabe artist from M'Chigeeng (formerly West Bay) on Manitoulin Island, Ontario. Through his art, he carried forward the teachings, stories, and legends of the Ojibwe Anishinaabe First Nations, drawing deeply from his cultural heritage and ancestral roots. As the grandson of hereditary Chief Dominic Migwans and Anne Commanda, Laford's creative journey was inseparable from the traditions and history of his people.

Laford brought the visions, stories, and legends of his elders to life through magnificent paintings. He worked with diverse materials, including paper, birch bark, canvas, pine, cedar, and pipestone, creating poignant studies of creation that encompassed spirits, elders, animals, birds, and plants. His vivid colours and intricate geometric compositions vividly narrated the interconnectedness of the animal and spirit worlds.

From 1989 to 1990, Laford was selected as one of only two First Nations artists by the Canada Council's Visual Arts Section for the National and International Studies Art Program. A Canada Council award enabled him to travel across Canada, the United States, and Spain, where his talents were evaluated by the prestigious P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Centre in New York. From 1995 to 1996, Laford was a sessional lecturer on Ojibwe art and culture at Algoma University in Sault Ste. Marie. Laford's paintings are featured in museums across Canada, the U.S., and Australia and are part of private collections worldwide. From 1977 to 2010, his work was exhibited internationally in cities across the U.S., including New York, New York; Santa Fe, New Mexico; and Petoskey, Michigan. In Europe, his exhibitions were held in Vienna, Austria; Fribourg, Switzerland; Bad Nauheim, Hesse, Germany; and Ibiza, Balearic Islands, Spain. In Canada, his work was showcased in Vancouver, British Columbia, and Montreal, Quebec.

Notable Exhibitions

1982

Spirits in the Rock — An exhibition of paintings by Ojibwe artist John Eric Laford
Museum of Anthropology at UBC — Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Other Exhibitions

Royal Ontario Museum — Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Canadian Museum of Civilization — Hull (now Gatineau), Quebec, Canada

MoMA PS1 (Institute of Contemporary Art, P.S.1.) — New York, USA

Barcelona, Spain

Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, Canada

1989–1990

Museum of Modern Art — Manhattan, New York, USA

Laford's legacy endures as a vivid testament to his talent, culture, and storytelling, celebrating Anishinaabe traditions and the interconnectedness of all life.