

Traditional Birch Bark Canoes

Marcel Labelle was born in the northerly community of Mattawa Ontario and was raised in a very close relationship with the land and nature. Marcel made his livelihood from the land and together with his wife Joanne raised and fed their family from what the land provided. As time moved forward and economic pressures made it impossible to continue their chosen lifestyle, Marcel returned to school, graduated from University and moved his family southward.

Métis people are parts of two worlds. Marcel is of Algonquian and French decent and both Marcel and Joanne worked and lived in south central Ontario in various jobs and became business owners. Their European background served them well and they survived.

As more time passed Marcel became increasingly ill and felt more and more distanced from the land and proximity to nature. In Marcel's own words he felt he was dying, and sought ways to return to the land and the ways of his Algonquian ancestry.

Traditional birch bark canoe building became the vessel to allow Marcel and Joanne to begin the voyage back to Mattawa and the land they both love so dearly. With encouragement from his family and guidance from friends including Order of Canada recipient William Commanda, Marcel began a new chapter in his life. Marcel now builds traditional canoes and teaches and promotes environmental stewardship and the spiritual and ancient ways of the Anishinaabe people.

When Marcel was deemed worthy he was given a spirit name. Marcel is known to his people as Mahigan, (wolf). It is with that spirit that his canoes are crafted and the teachings of the canoe and nature are passed on.

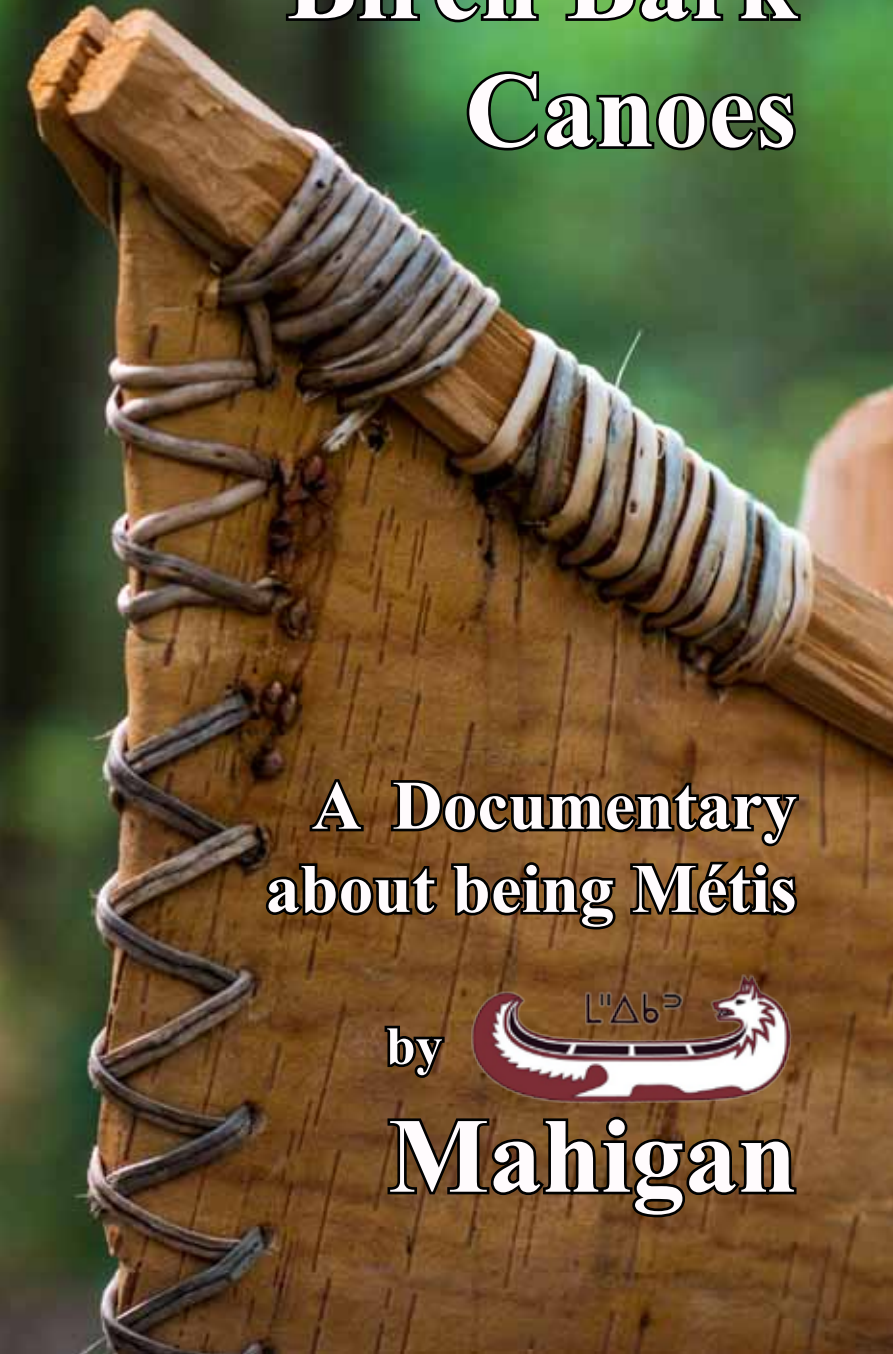
Please join us and discover the art and teachings of the birch bark canoe and learn about the culture, language, history, food and music of The Métis People and Nation.

This documentary was filmed in association with The Indigenous People Project. For more information please email: programs@realitymedia.ca



A Documentary
about being Métis

by 
Mahigan





Spiritual Journey

The documentary follows Mahigan through all the facets of creating a traditional birch bark canoe. Much more than a how to film, the viewer will be taken on a spiritual journey that contemplates the very close relationship The People of The Métis Nation and all Indigenous People have with Mother Earth.

Indigenous People see themselves as an important part of nature, but not more or less important than any other creature in nature. A common respect for all living things and Mother Earth are central themes within Indigenous cultures throughout the world. Indigenous people were the first conservationists and are leaders in earth stewardship today.

Mahigan shares many stories and teachings through the various parts of the creation of his birch bark canoe. From the selection and harvesting of the materials to the shaping of those materials into a finished canoe, the viewer will learn about the Métis and Indigenous culture and perhaps even a little about themselves.

The Art of Being Métis

If you ask someone to define what the word Métis means to them you may hear the phrase, “someone who is part French and part Native American.” That is partly true. The Métis Nation is a recognized Nation by The United Nations, and that is also true. Being and living as a Métis is being part of two worlds that often seem in conflict with each other. That too is true.

Being Métis is more. Being Métis is a practised and spiritual lifestyle, respecting all and having respect for Mother Nature and all things living on Mother Earth.

Mahigan will discuss the meaning of being Métis as well as what living a Métis lifestyle means. The viewer will also learn about the language, customs, culture, food and music of The Métis People.

The birch bark canoe is as much a teaching tool as it is a method of transportation. That has always been true within all the cultures that have used this wonderful vessel for all these many thousands of years.

Join Mahigan and experience the art of being Métis through the building of a birch bark canoe.

al’arvoiyure.....until later



The Birch Bark Canoe

Creating a traditional birch bark canoe is a very rare talent. Most everyone is aware of the extraordinary role this vessel played throughout the Americas but few people have seen a canoe in person. Together with The Inuit kayak, The Haida dugout, and The Totero reed boats of South America the birch bark canoe connected the Indigenous First People of The Americas from sea to sea to sea.

The birch bark canoe also played a vital role in opening up the Americas to settlement, exploration and trade after the arrival of the Europeans.

Most people are also aware of the darker history between the Indigenous First People of the Americas and the settlers from Europe. There are many issues that remain unresolved and troubling even today.

It is Mahigans hope that the timeless beauty of the birch bark canoe can play a new role in uniting all people in our common appreciation and love of this magnificent vessel.

