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“Masters of Tradition: A Cultural Journey Across America” Launches Sept. 16
New Online Multimedia Story Map Spotlights America’s Cultural Diversity

For more than 35 years, the National Endowment for the Arts has awarded National Heritage Fellowships to an astonishingly diverse group of artists, recognizing their extraordinary skills and contributions to their communities. Now, for the first time, the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, the NEA, and Esri have collaborated to present [*Masters of Tradition: A Cultural Journey Across America*](#), an interactive story map and multimedia library showcasing the lives and works of National Heritage Fellows. Launching on September 16, this online resource documents and celebrates the rich cultural diversity of the United States.

The newest class of National Heritage Fellows will be inducted on September 18 in a ceremony at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. On September 20, a concert at the Shakespeare Theatre Company’s Sidney Harman Hall will feature music, demonstrations, and conversations with the 2019 award recipients. Both events are free and open to the public. (See arts.gov for more information.)

To date, more than 400 individuals and groups from every region of the country have received the nation’s highest honor for excellence in the folk and traditional arts: Navajo basket makers, Japanese American drummers, African American quilters, Appalachian storytellers, Hawaiian hula masters, a Tlingit woodcarver, an Iraqi American oud player and many more. Over 100 of the fellows have music available through Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, and many more have participated in the annual Smithsonian Folklife Festival on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

“These artists are not only masters of their tradition,” explains Smithsonian curator Marjorie Hunt, who has led the story map project. “They are teachers, mentors, innovators and advocates who have worked tirelessly to sustain and share the cherished traditions of their communities, fostering pride, recognition and respect while building cultural bridges and strengthening identity. Together they represent a remarkable portrait of America’s diverse living cultures.”

Developed in collaboration with NEA and Esri, *Masters of Tradition* is an innovative new multimedia-rich digital resource that features the compelling stories of the National Heritage Fellows through photographs, text, first-person quotes, audio and video using Esri’s ArcGIS StoryMaps platform. Many of the video and audio recordings come from the Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections at the Smithsonian.

“America’s artistic and cultural diversity is a powerful testament to the vibrant interplay of creativity, tradition, and innovation alive in our communities,” says Michael Atwood Mason, director of the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. “It speaks to the treasured principles of cultural democracy that characterize this nation and the shared humanity that links us all.

Masters of Tradition is currently online at folklife.si.edu/masters-of-tradition and will launch for the public on September 16. More fellows will be added to the map in the coming months.

About the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage

The [Smithsonian’s Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage](http://www.si.edu/folk) uses the power of culture to increase understanding, strengthen communities and reinforce our shared humanity through rigorous research, educational programming and community engagement. Through the [Smithsonian Folklife Festival](http://www.si.edu/folk), [Smithsonian Folkways Recordings](http://www.si.edu/folk), exhibitions, documentary films and videos, symposia, publications and educational materials, the Center works to sustain traditional and expressive culture such as music, language and craft in a wide variety of locations around the world.

About the National Endowment for the Arts

Established by Congress in 1965, the [NEA](http://www.nea.gov) is the independent federal agency whose funding and support gives Americans the opportunity to participate in the arts, exercise their imaginations, and develop their creative capacities. Through partnerships with state arts agencies, local leaders, other federal agencies, and the philanthropic sector, the NEA supports arts learning, affirms and celebrates America’s rich and diverse cultural heritage, and extends its work to promote equal access to the arts in every community across America.

About Esri

[Esri](http://www.esri.com) is the world’s leading provider of geographic information systems software and services. Headquartered in Redlands, California, and with offices and partners across the globe, Esri inspires and enables people to positively impact the future through a deeper, geographic understanding of the changing world around them. [ArcGIS StoryMaps](http://www.esri.com/storymaps) are web applications that combine interactive maps with multimedia content—text, photos, video, audio—to tell stories about the world.

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