



## NEA NATIONAL HERITAGE FELLOWSHIPS

*[The National Heritage Fellowships] present to Americans a vision of themselves and of their country, a vision somewhat idealized but profoundly longed for and so, in significant ways, profoundly true.*

*~ Bess Lomax Hawes, former NEA Director of Folk & Traditional Arts*

The NEA's National Heritage Fellowships program was initiated in 1982 to honor individual artists who have made major contributions to the excellence, vitality, and public appreciation of the folk and traditional arts. As the years have passed, the honorees have demonstrated and reflected our nation's diverse living cultural heritage.

With the announcement of the 2015 class, the NEA has awarded 404 National Heritage Fellowships, recognizing master artists working in more than 200 distinct art forms including bluesman B.B. King, Cajun fiddler and composer Michael Doucet, sweetgrass basketweaver Mary Jackson, cowboy poet Wally McRae, Kathak dancer and choreographer Chitresh Das, and gospel and soul singer Mavis Staples.

In 2000, the NEA inaugurated a special recognition— the Bess Lomax Hawes NEA National Heritage Fellowship recognizes achievements in fostering excellence, ensuring vitality, and promoting public appreciation of the folk and traditional arts. These recipients include artists whose contributions, primarily through teaching, advocacy, organizing, and maintaining important repertoires, have greatly benefited their artistic tradition, or an individual such as a producer or advocate whose efforts have significantly increased opportunities for and public visibility of traditional arts and artists.

The NEA honors up to nine artists each year, with each receiving a one-time award of \$25,000 and being honored at an awards ceremony and concert in Washington, DC. Fellowship recipients are nominated by the public, often by members of their own communities, and then judged by a panel of experts in folk and traditional arts on the basis of their continuing artistic accomplishments and contributions as practitioners and teachers.

**NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS**

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**Harold A. Burnham**  
Master Shipwright  
2012 NEA National Heritage Fellow  
Essex, MA

Photo by Perry Ardele Burnham

View by Year  
View by Name

National Heritage Fellow Portraits by Tom Pich See all portraits >>

**Content available at**  
[arts.gov/honors/heritage](http://arts.gov/honors/heritage):

Bios, photos, video, interviews, audio samples

Podcasts

Video from 2010-2014 NEA National Heritage Fellowships Concerts

Portraits by Tom Pich of more than 170 Heritage Fellows in their homes, studios, and at sites that most vividly reflect the essence of their artwork