EXTRAORDINARY ORDINARY People
American Masters of Traditional Arts

This exhibition is a journey across America through the lens of individuals whose creativity is rooted in their communities.

Each of the articles featured here is a recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Fellowship, the nation’s highest honor for the traditional arts. These individuals are extraordinary to the people we know in our families or among our friends, but they are extraordinary in their passion and commitment to arts excellence.

They are innovators and teachers, eager to share their skills and knowledge, and dedicated to preserving traditions.

This multimedia exhibition featuring a curating of those who have received the award. 

Folk & Traditional Arts:
Every group with a sense of its own identity is made up of individuals who share its art traditions and who learn about their heritage.

Over time, these practices and activities become traditions.

These traditions are often learned through family or group and passed down from generation to generation.

Folk & Traditional Arts: The traditional arts are the bedrock of America’s cultural heritage and are deeply rooted in the history, values, and beliefs of those who have come before us. These traditions are a vital part of who we are as a nation and are an integral part of our cultural identity.

Protocols & Multimedia:
This exhibition includes a variety of media, including audio and video recordings, photographs, and written material, which provide a rich and diverse glimpse into the lives of these recipients and the traditions they preserve.
This exhibition is a journey across America through the lives of individuals whose creativity is rooted in their cultural identity and community.

Each of the artists featured here is a recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts’ National Heritage Fellowship, the nation’s highest honor in folk and traditional arts. These individuals are ordinary to the extent they remind us of people we know in our families or among our neighbors and friends, but they are extraordinary in their passion and commitment to artistic excellence.

They are innovators and teachers, eager to share their skills and knowledge, and dedicated to time-honored traditions.

This multimedia exhibition, featuring a sampling of those who have received the award, demonstrates the diversity of their contributions to America’s cultural fabric, and challenges viewers to reflect on those who are contributing to the cultural legacies in their own lives and communities.

This exhibition was developed by Documentary Arts, Inc. and Michigan State University Museum.