

James Jackson awarded National Heritage Fellowship

FROM STAFF REPORTS

SHERIDAN — James “Jim” F. Jackson, a leatherworker from Sheridan, has been awarded a National Heritage Fellowship, the nation’s highest honor in the folk and traditional arts.

Jackson is recognized for his excellence in leather carving. He has spent the bulk of his career doing custom work for King’s Saddlery King Ropes in downtown Sheridan and now demonstrates his leather carving at The Brinton Museum in Big Horn.

Jackson is deeply rooted in the leather carving tradition, having grown up primarily in Sheridan, which is known worldwide for its distinctive Sheridan Style of leather tooling.

Jackson learned the art form from his father, the saddlemaker Edward Jackson, and other Sheridan leather carvers

including Don King, Bill Gardner, and Ernie Ernst. Consistent with Sheridan Style, Jackson carves a tight pattern, with a lot of small flowers wrapped in nesting circles of swirling leaves. At the same time, Jackson develops his own patterns and also experiments with form, combining his painting and leatherwork. Jackson is also a formally trained artist, holding a Master of Fine Arts from the University of Wyoming.

“Jim being awarded a National Heritage Fellowship is truly a testament to the caliber of his work. The NEA only gives these fellowships to the best of the best, and Jim belongs in that group. It’s difficult to understate both how prestigious an award this is, and how strongly Jackson deserves it, for his excellence in an art form that is in many ways, highly representative of

Wyoming and our western, ranching culture,” said Josh Chrysler, folklorist for the Wyoming Arts Council, which nominated Jackson for the award.

Jackson joins three previous National Heritage Fellows from Wyoming: Don King, Western saddlemaker, 1991; Eva McAdams, Shoshone crafts and beadwork, 1996; and Martin Goicoechea, Basque bertolari poetry, 2003. Jackson, along with eight other recipients from across the nation, will be honored in Washington, D.C., in

September 2019.

The National Heritage Fellowships recognize the recipients’ artistic excellence and support their continuing contributions to the country’s traditional arts heritage. Including the 2019 class, 440 NEA National Heritage Fellowships have been awarded, recognizing artists working in more

than 200 distinct art forms.

Fellowship recipients are nominated by the public, often by members of their own communities, and then judged by a panel of experts in the folk and traditional arts.

The panel’s recommendations are reviewed by the National Council on the Arts, which sends its

recommendations to the NEA chairman, who makes the final decision. Visit the National Endowment for the Arts website for more information about the Fellowships or to submit a nomination.

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