

THE CHANGING FACES OF TRADITION



A REPORT ON THE FOLK AND TRADITIONAL ARTS
IN THE UNITED STATES

Written, edited and compiled by Elizabeth Peterson

Research Division Report #38
National Endowment for the Arts

CAMBODIAN SILK WEAVER BUN EM AND HER DAUGHTER PEGH YUOS,
HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA. (PHOTO BY JANE LEVINE © 1996/COURTESY
OF PENNSYLVANIA HERITAGE AFFAIRS COMMISSION)

Copyright © 1996 National Endowment for the Arts
Published by the National Endowment for the Arts

Statistical Research:

NuStats, Inc., Austin, Texas

National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, Washington, D.C.

Design:

Cox & Associates, Inc., Silver Spring, Maryland

Visually or learning impaired people may obtain a cassette
recording of this report by contacting the Endowment's Office
for AccessAbility at the address below:

Phone: (202) 682-5532

Voice/TT: (202) 682-5496

Permission to copy, to disseminate or to otherwise use
information from this report is granted as long as appropriate
acknowledgment is given.

Copies of this report can be obtained by contacting:

National Endowment for the Arts
Office of Public Information
1100 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, D.C. 20506

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Peterson, Betsy.

The changing faces of tradition : a report on the folk and traditional arts
in the United States / written, edited and compiled by Elizabeth Peterson.

p. cm. -- (Research Division report ; 38)

Includes bibliographical references.

1. Folk art--United States. 2. Arts, Modern--20th century--United States.

I. Title. II. Series: Research Division report (National Endowment for the
Arts. Research Division) ; 38.

NX504.P48 1996

700'.973'0904--dc20

96-41191

CIP

CONTENTS

Foreword	5	Chapter Five: Organizing	68
Chapter One: Introduction	6	Hanging by a Blade of Grass: Traditional Basketmaking in Maine, South Carolina and California by <i>Theresa Hoffman</i>	70
Chapter Two: Inheriting and Sharing	16		
Mariachi Conferences and Festivals in the United States by <i>Mark Fogelquist</i>	18	Chapter Six: Counting Us In	80
Investing in the Future of Tradition: State Apprenticeship Programs by <i>Susan Auerbach</i>	24	Blues and Bluegrass: Tough Arts of the Underclass by <i>Joe Wilson</i>	82
Chapter Three: Creating, Changing, Renewing	32	Chapter Seven: Coming Home	90
Brave New Worlds: Mindanaoan Kulintang Music and Cambodian Classical Dance in America by <i>David Roche</i>	34	Contributors	92
A Revival Meeting and Its Missionaries: The Cowboy Poetry Gathering by <i>Buck Ramsey</i>	42	Notes and Other Works Consulted	93
		Acknowledgements	96
Chapter Four: Connecting and Translating	50		
Common Threads and Common Ground: Mississippi Cultural Crossroads by <i>Deborah Boykin</i>	52		
Folk Arts Private Non-Profit Organizations by <i>Elizabeth Peterson</i>	58		

FOREWORD

The poet Wendell Berry has a vision for a future where communities are guided by local culture. He writes:

“We can perhaps speak with a little competence of how it would begin. It would not be imported from critically approved cultures elsewhere. It would not come from watching certified classics on television. It would begin in work and love. People at work in their communities three generations old would know that their bodies renewed, time and again, the movements of other bodies, living and dead, known and loved, remembered and loved, in the same shops, houses, and fields. That, of course, is a description of a kind of community dance. And such a dance is perhaps the best way we have to describe harmony.”

When thinking about the folk and traditional arts, one automatically thinks of community, or traditions passed down through generations, or—to paraphrase Berry—art that is remembered and loved, renewed by the living and dead, arts in harmony with our instinct to create.

The folk and traditional arts field described in this study is enormously complex, encompassing the traditions of literally thousands of communities, but in another way it is quite simple to comprehend. Folk and traditional arts have the aura of authenticity about them: real art by real people who draw their inspiration, technique and aesthetics from traditions as old as the land, as old as home, as old as a family and community.

The stories and findings of this report bear out the need for us to continue to support and sustain the traditional arts. Alan Lomax warns: “If we continue to allow the erosion of our cultural forms, soon there will be no place to visit and no place to truly call home.” The folk arts are part of what make our homes and communities ours. They breathe life into the community dance.



Jane Alexander
Chairman, National Endowment for the Arts