

Media Contact:
Jessica Orr
North Carolina Arts Council
Telephone: (919) 807-6520
Email: Jessica.A.Orr@ncmail.net
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FIVE MOUNTAIN REGION ARTISTS RECEIVE AWARDS FROM N.C. ARTS COUNCIL

Five mountain artists are recipients of the 2006–2007 North Carolina Arts Council Fellowship Awards. Fourteen total visual and film artists and two choreographers from North Carolina were chosen by experienced artists and art professionals from more than 325 applicants. Each artist receives an award of \$8,000 to further his or her work.

“The Fellowship Awards allow us to recognize the essential work being done by artists within our communities,” said Mary B. Regan, Executive Director of the North Carolina Arts Council. “Their work is essential to our cultural vitality and the creative economy of North Carolina.”

The Artist Fellowship program operates on a two-year rotating cycle by discipline. A panel made up of professionals in the field will decide on applications for composers, songwriters, playwrights, screenwriters, writers of fiction, poetry, literary nonfiction, literary translation and spoken-word artists in the upcoming cycle. Applications for these disciplines are due to the Arts Council office on November 1, 2006. The Fellowship Awards provide resources, equipment, learning experiences and time. Since the program’s inception in 1980, nearly 400 artists have received awards.

Ken Abbott, visual artist (Asheville, Buncombe County)

Ken Abbott received his master of fine arts degree in photography from Yale University School of Art and his bachelor’s degree from The Colorado College. He is a visiting instructor of photography at Western Carolina University and is currently working on independent projects in fine art and documentary film photography including *Rank Strangers* and *The Story of Mrs. Hyatt’s OpraHouse*.

Nelson Reyes, composer (Asheville, Buncombe County)

Nelson Reyes is a graduate of the Escuela Nacional de Danza (The National School of Dance) in Cuba. He joined Asheville Contemporary Dance Theatre and the New Studio of Dance in 2002 as a principal dancer, choreographer and teacher. He currently teaches in Charlotte and Asheville, where he lives.

Jody Servon, visual artist (Blowing Rock, Watauga County)

Jody Servon received her master of fine arts degree from the University of Arizona and her bachelor's degree from Rutgers University. She is currently an assistant professor and gallery director of Appalachian State University. Her recent work includes an exhibition entitled *Holding On and Holding Out*, an installation consisting of painted walls, projected video, sound, drawings, photographs and sculptures.

Gertrude Graham “Gay” Smith, visual artist (Bakersville, Mitchell County)

Gertrude Graham Smith received her bachelor's degree from Harvard University. She is a studio potter single firing porcelain ware and has held teaching positions at Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Penland School of Crafts, the Harvard Ceramics Studio and the Findhorn Foundation in northern Scotland.

Jerilyn Virden, visual artist (Bakersville, Mitchell County)

Jerilyn Virden received her master of fine arts degree from Meadows School of the Arts at Southern Methodist University and her bachelor's degree from West Virginia University. A studio artist, she works in ceramics to explore, through layers of glaze and surface treatments, primitive forms that have contemporary relevance. She resides in Bakersville.

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The mission of the North Carolina Arts Council is to make North Carolina a better state through the arts. The Arts Council is a division of the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, www.ncculture.com, and celebrates those who create and enjoy art in all 100 counties. For more information, visit www.ncarts.org.