

ELEANOR CREEKMORE DICKINSON  
2125 BRODERICK STREET  
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 94115

Ms. Pat Sanders, Administrator  
Folk Arts Program  
National Endowment for the Arts  
1100 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20506

Dear Ms. Sanders,

I would like to Second the Nomination of Brother Harrison H. Mayes,  
409 Chester, Middlesboro, Kentucky (606) 248-1752, for a 1985  
National Heritage Fellowship, as proposed by Bill Henry of Oak Ridge, TN.

Bro. Mayes was born and raised in Tenn. and as a young man working in the coal mines moved to the Kentucky side of the Cumberland Gap. Obsessed with communicating the word of God he wrote on walls in the mines in slate, pieces of paper on trees - anything. Badly injured in the mines (struck twice by a coal car taking on sand and mutilated) and pronounced dead he had a vision of huge signs of JESUS SAVES, GET RIGHT WITH GOD, JESUS IS COMING SOON. When he suddenly recovered by a miracle he felt that God had spared his life to make these signs. In over half a Century since then he has covered this country with every conceivable sign, sent thousands to other countries with the help of missionaries, and tried his best to reach the stars ( a cross waits at Cape Canaveral for transportation to the Moon.

His house in Middlesboro is his largest sign and its construction likens him in my mind to the cathedral builders of the Middle Ages. It too is built in the shape of a cross, not for angels to look down on but for airline passengers. He also has three steps up with religious messages cut in the concrete. The number of windows, doors, rooms - all have a planned religious significance. He built the house himself, casting each brick himself with a special mold that indented a cross in each brick. By any test or definition I know, Bro. Mayes is one of this country's finest folk artists as his way of proclaiming the word of God.

I have been drawing, taping, photographing and video taping Bro. Mayes since 1968 after a long search for his whereabouts. Each year since then I have visited and documented the Mayes and consider them very dear friends. I am enclosing a copy of my book REVIVAL! published by Harper and Row (nominated for a Pulitzer Prize) which has a chapter on Bro. Mayes, also a description of an edited video tape of both Bro. and Sister Mayes and an extremely poor dub of the video tape, 1980. When I sat down to make you a copy I discovered that the tape had deteriorated badly and that I must now go back to the original tapes and reconstruct the tape. Please, therefore, see and hear the tape for content not for technique. I have many, many photographs of the Mayes. Richard Ahlborn, Curator at The Smithsonian is in charge of my Collection there of Revival artifacts and can tell you of many items of Bro. Mayes including a 1400# concrete cross in the "Nation From Nations" exhibition and another 1400# concrete heart in storage; I trucked both these up from Kentucky for the Collection. Jerry Parsons, Librarian, at the Archive of Folk Song, Library of Congress, can find for you many tapes of Bro. Mayes in my Collection there; the Library and Smithsonian also have various drawings I made of Bro. Mayes as well as photographs; two shows at The Corcoran Gallery (1970 and 1974) included drawings and photographs; SITES toured the second show (Ann Gossett, Curator) for six years so many parts of the country saw the

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work of Bro. Mayes. The Smithsonian is also showing a wooden cross and has two large painted metal signs plus many other artifacts. In 1981-2 in a major exhibition at the Tenn. State Museum, Nashville, Tn. (Lois Riggins, Director) an entire case was given to small artifacts of Bro. Mayes plus two 1400# signs - cross and heart - a wooden cross, metal sign and his bicycle with religious signs (he rode in local parades). There has been some discussion with my Editor of doing a book on Bro. Mayes. By the way, last year it seemed remiss of me to not introduce two men with so much in common so I drove Rev. Howard Finster and Beverly Finster to Middlesboro, Ky. and then back to Sumerville, Ga. so these two aging giants of Southern religious folk art could meet. They were both very happy to meet and neither stopped talking for the entire weekend; my tapes, photos and drawings of this meeting are a treasure. I'm working on an etching of the two men.

Obviously one could talk endlessly about Bro. Mayes! I hope you will take the time to see the video tape and look at the book. If you would like copies of the various articles about him or other documentation please let me know.

Considering Bro. Mayes' age I hope you will seriously consider extending him this honor during his lifetime. I am also very worried about the ultimate preservation of his totally unique home with the row of crosses across the backyard. I have given applications for Historical Site designation to his sons but they seem uncertain of the need for this protection. Any honor you can do him may help in attracting the attention of the local community to the uniqueness of his contribution, and perhaps help preserve it.

Please feel free to call or write for any further information.

Yours truly,



Eleanor Dickinson  
Professor of Art  
California College of Arts and Crafts

CC:Henry

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