



# MONTANA CIRCLE OF AMERICAN MASTERS

2023

By Taylor Burby *Photography by Eric Heidle*

The Montana Circle of American Masters (MCAM) recognizes Montana folk and traditional artists for artistic excellence in their work, along with their role in preserving and passing on their knowledge. This May, the Montana Arts Council will welcome three new additions to the Circle: saddle maker Marc Brogger of Three Forks; blacksmith Glenn Gilmore of Corvallis, and segmented woodturner Terry Hill of Great Falls. Brogger, Gilmore and Hill join 46 previous honorees in an illustrious group that represents some of the most skilled and respected tradition bearers in Montana. The new inductees will be honored May 19th at a public ceremony in the State Capitol in Helena.

**“MCAM shines a light on Montanans who are among in the best in the world in their artform and who are a vital part of Montana’s heritage and cultural landscape,” says Montana Arts Council folklorist Taylor Burby.**

Folk arts can be function-focused, such as quilting, leatherwork, weaving, woodwork and metalwork. But they also tend to be rooted in cultural heritage, and include beading, instrument-making, singing, dancing and storytelling. The skills of producing the artwork are often taught person-to-person, and a practitioner’s craft exists as part of a lineage and tradition which extends well beyond their own career. As such, MCAM honorees are expected to not only display artistic mastery but also show a commitment to passing on their knowledge.

Join us in welcoming Marc Brogger, Glenn Gilmore and Terry Hill to the Montana Circle of American Masters.





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MASTERS**

MARC  
BROGGER

Marc Brogger, a fifth-generation Western horseman, has built over 900 saddles since the start of his career in 1981. He is well-respected in the Western community for his intricate leather work and flower stamping, bringing his skills to creating ornately hand-tooled saddles which bridge art and utility. On the enriching nature of his work, Brogger states, "I believe in art and in not just being little machines that go to work every day. I think art just makes life for everyone more interesting."

The friendship between his father, a large animal veterinarian, and master saddle maker Ray Holes sparked Brogger's interest in leather work at a young age. After graduating from Montana State University where he was on the rodeo team, he served a three-year apprenticeship with Jim Lathrop, a well-known custom saddle maker. Brogger then worked for Dale Harwood of Shelley, Idaho, and received guidance from Don King of Sheridan, Wyoming, both of whom are considered masters of the craft. After working for Three Forks Saddlery, he struck out on his own and has since built saddles on an entirely custom basis for a clientele located everywhere from Montana to Norway.

For Brogger, the horse is central to Western culture. For 25 years, he day-worked on the Climbing Arrow (CA) Ranch of Madison Valley, a historic cow-calf operation that has since closed. Unlike modern-day ranches that rely on off-road machines, Brogger spent innumerable days on horseback while trailing and moving cattle across the ranch's 79,582± acres. This experience influenced his perception of what is most important in the saddle-making world: the construction of practical and high-quality saddles that, first and foremost, fit the horse.

Using traditional tools, methods and high-quality materials, Brogger creates superior products that are not only carefully designed to fit the horse and rider but that are also built to last. His daughter, musician Lilly Platts, remarked that the saddle her father gifted her for graduation would last her a lifetime: "I'll never need another saddle." According to one of Brogger's customers, he has been riding a saddle that Brogger built since 1988, a testament to the quality and longevity of his work.

Dedicated to supporting and preserving the creation and use of Western art, Brogger has participated in workshops, art shows, gatherings and rodeos. His saddles have been featured at the Western Folklife Center in Elko, Nevada, at the Dry Creek Arts Fellowship in Flagstaff, Arizona, and in multiple publications including on the covers of books

such as *David Stoecklein's Saddles of the West*. In 2015, the Academy of Western Artists named Brogger "Saddle Maker of the Year."

Today, Brogger operates out of Three Forks, Montana. His wife and daughters, both passionate horsewomen, as well as his place in the Western and local ranching community, are what drive him to continue to make his living building saddles. While the commercialization of Western products, the use of off-road machines and closures of ranches have put pressure on his business, Brogger remains unwavering in his commitment to producing exceptional products and advocating for the use of custom gear. By doing so, he contributes to the preservation of saddle making as an art form and a viable career option for generations to come.

Montana Circle of American Master's George Holt writes in his evaluation:

"I strongly believe that Marc Brogger would be an asset to the Montana Circle of American Masters.

He has the work ethic, honesty and drive of a Montana man who takes great pride in his work."



While growing up, artist-blacksmith Glenn Gilmore's parents encouraged him to observe and question the processes and mechanics that produced the world around him. These formative experiences catalyzed what's become more than a four-decade-long career using the command of his eyes and mind, and the skill of his hands, to give life to his artistic vision through metal. "Working with metal heated to 2,300 degrees, sweat on my forehead, scale falling from the steel as I shape it—these have been the 'big part' of my life," he states.

His career began with the horseshoe, the gateway to creating visually stunning yet functional architectural metalwork. After attending his first Artist/Blacksmith Association of North America (ABANA) Conference in 1978, Gilmore became interested in the creative side of forging and began studying, first under Francis Whitaker at the John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, and then under Artist-Blacksmith Manfred Bredohl at the Vulkanschmiede Aachen in Germany. While in Germany, he attended the International Teaching Center for Metal Design and earned his diploma in Forging and Metal Design.

Since 1980, Gilmore has compiled an extensive resume that includes over 25 honors, including "Best Artist—Metal" in 2001, 2012, 2013, 2015 and 2016 at the Western Design Conference in Jackson, WY; features in over 30 prestigious juried exhibitions, such as the Invitational Metalwork Exhibition at the Artist Blacksmith Association of North America International Conference, in Salt Lake City, Utah; and features in over 50 books and national publications, such as *Western Art & Architecture*, *Fine Furnishings International* and *Cowboys and Indians*.

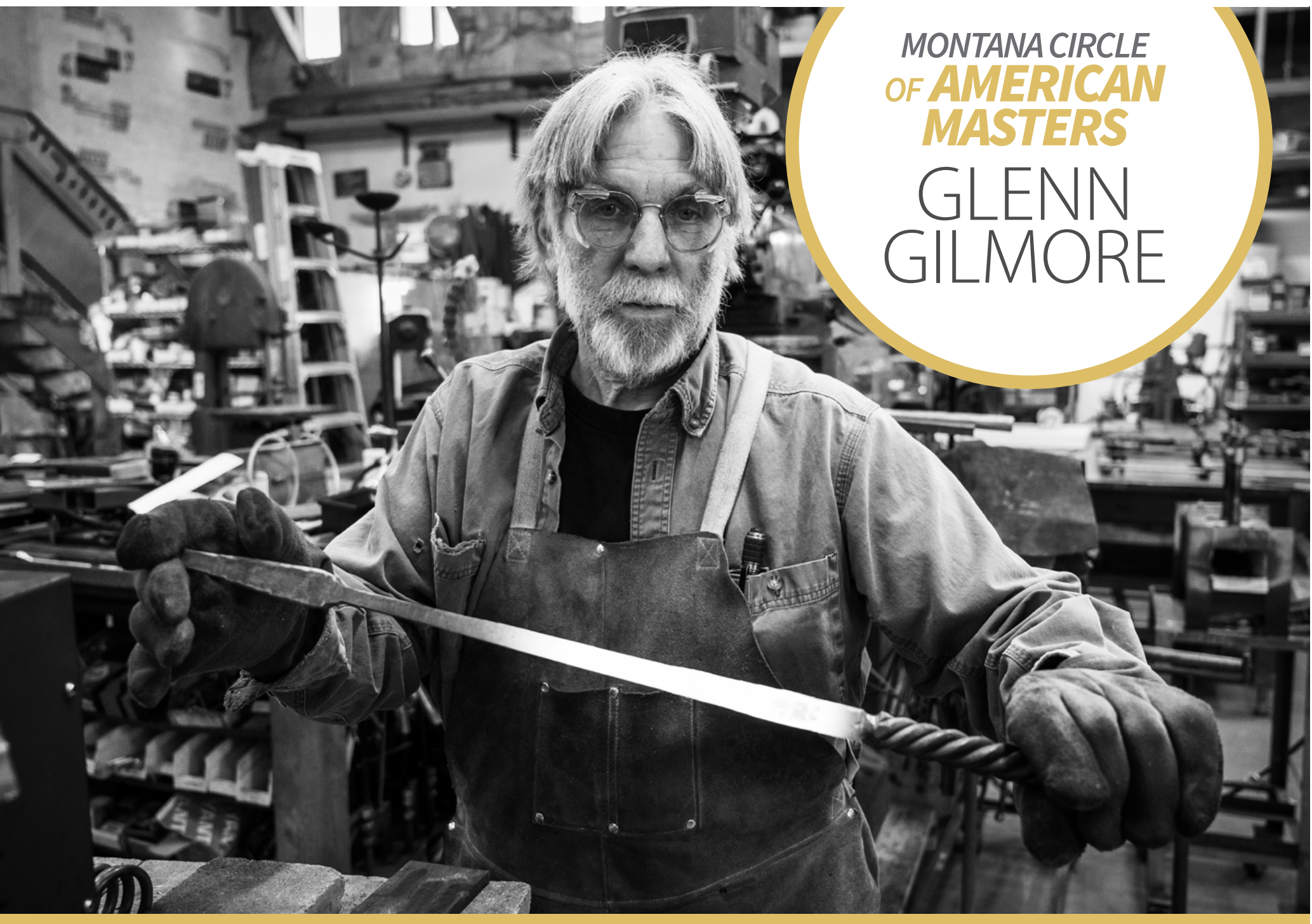
Gilmore believes in passing on the knowledge he has gathered and feels strongly about the importance of ensuring his craft's continuation for future generations. From Layton, New Jersey to British Columbia, Canada, and many places between, Gilmore has offered apprenticeship and journeyman trainings, demonstrations at conferences and craft centers, and provided opportunities for school-aged students to learn about the artistry of smithing.

Today, he resides in Corvallis, and continues to build custom pieces for clients nationwide, including at properties such as the Yellowstone Club, Spanish Peaks and Moonlight Basin of Big Sky.

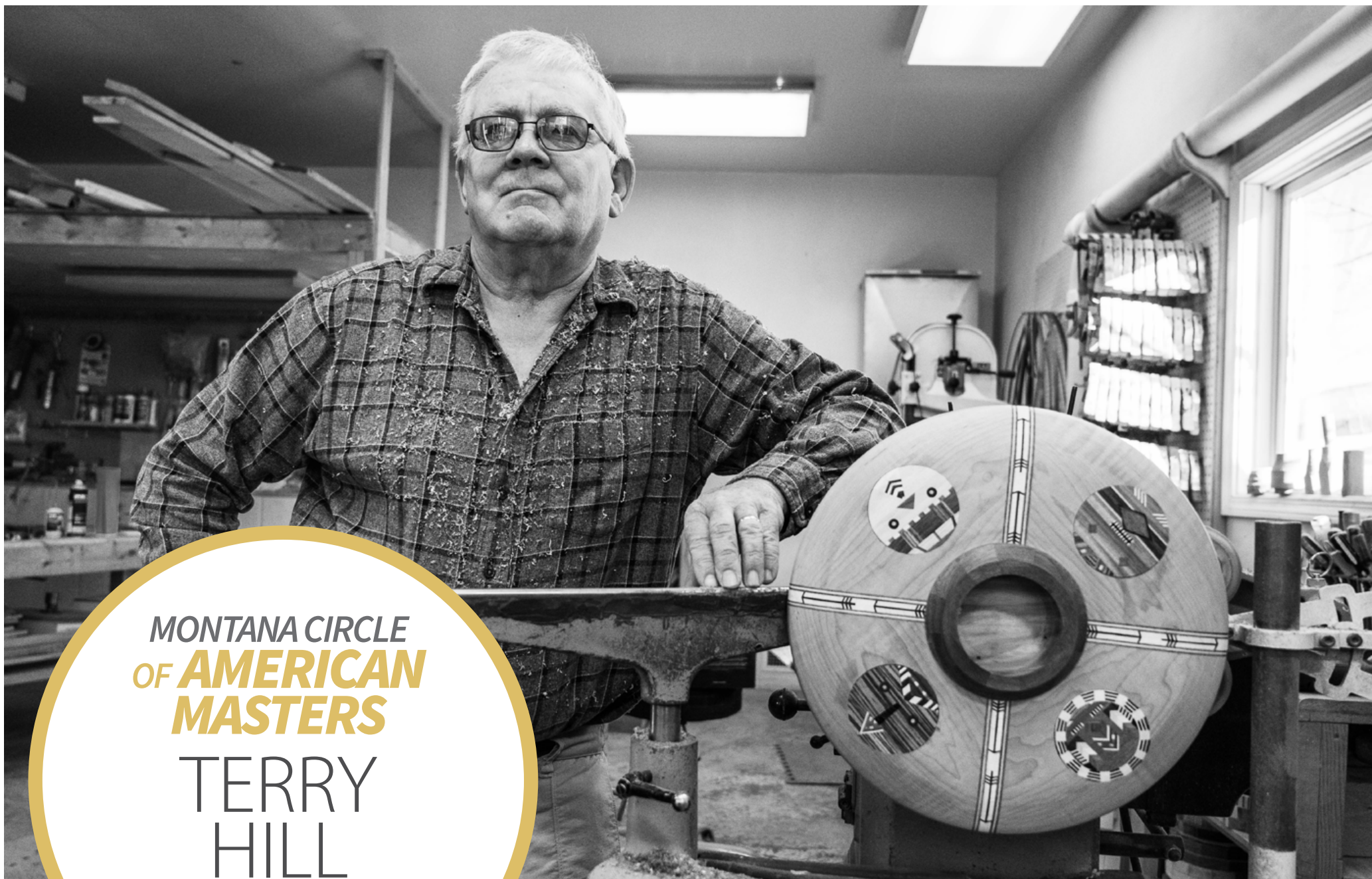


Of Glenn's work, Montana Circle of American Master's Tom Dean writes:

"As with any of the previous Montana Circle of American Master's award winners, we came from raw talent—talent that was in our soul and talent that was self-taught. [Becoming a Master includes] wanting to educate and teach others of what and how we do what we do, to pass our talents on to others. Glenn has done all of this and more; he is a brilliant artisan with masterful iron work."



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TERRY  
HILL

Terry Hill, a fourth-generation Montanan, spent 29 years as a game warden for the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks before retiring in 2007. Come 2009, Hill discovered his love for segmented woodturning through a course taught by Rich Charlson, a previous MCAM honoree, who he studied under for six months. Today Hill channels his passion for Montana's natural beauty and wildlife through his stunning segmented woodturning, specializing in designs that depict natural scenes, wildlife, ranching and farming,

In high school, Hill recalls taking an exam that revealed his aptitude for abstract thinking, a skill essential to creating and producing complicated designs during the segmented turning process. The process includes meticulously gluing pieces of wood—yellowheart, walnut, maple, wenge, bubinga, purpleheart, bloodwood—into intricate patterns before woodturning on a lathe. Working alongside his closest collaborator (and son) Ben, he transforms these designs into ornate bowls, vases, platters and open-segments pieces. Some of Hill's works have included upwards of 11,000 pieces, such as his 16" by 11.5" vase, *Thunder*.

Hill's project ideas will wake him in the middle of the night or the wood itself will speak to him; while turning, Hill seeks to accentuate what "God has already given us." He starts with an idea but remains adaptable, knowing that those plans may change if the wood "needs something else." This intuition and mastery has won the Hills numerous awards, such as "Best of Show" in various categories at the 2013 and 2014 Montana State Fairs, and the "Artist Choice Award" at the 2012 and 2013 Shadows of the Past Art Auction, a fundraiser for the Teton Medical Center in Choteau. Further, Hill's work has been published in the *Treasure State Lifestyles*.

Hill's artistic legacy transcends his craftsmanship. He has donated his works to numerous charities and auctions, including those for families burdened by extreme medical costs, to be auctioned for medical bill assistance. Also a general stick-building wood craftsman, Hill also makes and donates gun cabinets, china cabinets, poker tables and other items to local conservation groups, including Pheasants Forever, the Turkey Federation and the Safari Club.

He is also generous with his time; Charles Sampedro, the President of the Great Falls Woodturning Club, describes Hill not only as an esteemed member of the club but as a mentor and friend to all members. Hill shared that his shop is open to anyone who wants to learn turning techniques and according to Sampedro, community members consistently rely on his skills while learning the art of woodturning.

On Terry's work, Montana Circle of American Masters' Rich Charlson joked that some of Hill's skills may have even surpassed his own. Evaluating Hill's work, Charlson writes in support of his induction to MCAM:

"Terry has demonstrated that he has mastered the art of segment designs, is a very capable teacher, and he continues to push the limits of segmenting."

