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Willard John Named Inaugural Taproot Fellow, Will Receive \$60,000 Investment To Continue Education, Promotion of Moko Jumbie Tradition

The Alliance for California Traditional Arts names Willard John as one of 25 inaugural Taproot Fellows, awarding him \$60,000 to continue his work promoting the Moko Jumbie tradition and educating youth across the USVI and the Caribbean

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Moko Jumbie at the Crucian Christmas Festival on St. Croix. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

On Wednesday, the Alliance for California Traditional Arts (ACTA) announced the members of the inaugural class of the Taproot Fellowship, which according to ACTA is “the nation’s most extensive, dedicated fellowship program for culture bearers.”

Among the 25 fellows chosen from across the United States is local cultural icon Willard John, who has dedicated his life to the preservation and promotion of the art of the Moko Jumbie, especially among the territory's youth. Mr. John, in whose honor the [2023-2024 Crucian Christmas Festival Village](#) was named, also received accolades from the V.I. Legislature in [July](#).

Now, along with fresh recognition of Mr. John's enormous contributions to culture in the territory from Taproot, comes a generous monetary contribution to ensure that his work can continue into the future. "This fellowship is an award and a commitment to preserving the rich tapestry of our nation's diverse traditions. By supporting these artists, we are nurturing the roots of our cultural traditions to come," said Amy



Culture Bearer Willard John. (Credit: V.I. Legislature)

Mr. John, along with the other 24 Taproot fellows selected this year, will receive \$50,000 in unrestricted funding, as well as an additional \$10,000 which must be used for community-focused projects. His group, Guardians of Culture Moko Jumbies, headquartered on St. Croix, will use the funds to "travel to our sister islands of St. Thomas, St. John, & the British Virgin Islands," said Mr. John. There, they will "provide workshops and edutainment that chronicle the history of Moko Jumbies from Africa to the Caribbean."

This is exactly what the Taproot Fellowship is meant to do, says Ms. Kitchener. "The Taproot Artists and Community Trust program and its Fellows seek to show the power of art to heal, inspire, and unite communities. It celebrates the storytellers, the keepers of sacred knowledge, and the innovators who breathe new life into age-old traditions," she said. "These artists are the lifeblood of their communities."

The fellowship program is supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the nation's largest supporter of the arts and humanities.