

CHARLES HOMER HASKINS  
PRIZE LECTURE FOR 2011

*A Life of Learning*  
**Henry Glassie**

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## ON CHARLES HOMER HASKINS

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Charles Homer Haskins (1870–1937), for whom the ACLS lecture series is named, was the first chairman of the American Council of Learned Societies, from 1920 to 1926. He began his teaching career at the Johns Hopkins University, where he received the B.A. degree in 1887 and the Ph.D. in 1890. He later taught at the University of Wisconsin and at Harvard, where he was Henry Charles Lea Professor of Medieval History at the time of his retirement in 1931, and dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences from 1908 to 1924. He served as president of the American Historical Association in 1922, and was a founder and the second president of the Medieval Academy of America (1926).

A great American teacher, Charles Homer Haskins also did much to establish the reputation of American scholarship abroad. His distinction was recognized in honorary degrees from Strasbourg, Padua, Manchester, Paris, Louvain, Caen, Harvard, Wisconsin, and Allegheny College, where in 1883 he had begun his higher education at the age of 13.

## HASKINS PRIZE LECTURERS

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2011	Henry Glassie
2010	Nancy Siraisi
2009	William Labov
2008	Theodor Meron
2007	Linda Nochlin
2006	Martin E. Marty
2005	Gerda Lerner
2004	Peter Gay
2003	Peter Brown
2002	Henry A. Millon
2001	Helen Vendler
2000	Geoffrey Hartman
1999	Clifford Geertz
1998	Yi-Fu Tuan
1997	Natalie Zemon Davis
1996	Robert William Fogel
1995	Phyllis Pray Bober
1994	Robert K. Merton
1993	Annemarie Schimmel
1992	Donald W. Meinig
1991	Milton Babbitt
1990	Paul Oskar Kristeller
1989	Judith N. Shklar
1988	John Hope Franklin
1987	Carl E. Schorske
1986	Milton V. Anastos
1985	Lawrence Stone
1984	Mary Rosamond Haas
1983	Maynard Mack

## BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF HENRY GLASSIE

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Henry Glassie, College Professor Emeritus at Indiana University, received his B.A. from Tulane University, his M.A. from the Coopers-town Graduate Program of the State University of New York, and his Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania. For most of his career he taught at the University of Pennsylvania, where he served as chair of the Department of Folklore and Folklife, or at Indiana University, where he served as chair of the Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology as well as chair of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures.

In his effort to transform and advance the discipline of folklore, Glassie divided his contribution between the historical analysis of the built environment and the ethnographic study of creative actions, ranging from drama, narrative, and song, through textiles and ceramics, to painting and sculpture.

Glassie's enduring interest in vernacular architecture yielded a regional survey, *Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States* (1969); an innovative local study, *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia* (1976); and a capstone statement, international in scope, *Vernacular Architecture* (2000), which won the Abbott Lowell Cummings Award of the Vernacular Architecture Forum. His architectural research supported Glassie's public work in historic preservation. He designed sections of three outdoor museums, one in Indiana, one in Virginia, and one in Northern Ireland. Twice he served as president of Bloomington Restorations Incorporated, his city's preservation society.

Glassie's comparably sustained concern for art produced a philosophical essay, *The Spirit of Folk Art* (1989), which was named a notable book of the year by the *New York Times*; an international

investigation of ceramic practice, *The Potter's Art* (1999); and full monographic treatment of a contemporary African painter in *Prince Twins Seven-Seven: His Art, His Life in Nigeria, His Exile in America* (2010). Prince Twins Seven-Seven, the modern master of the Yoruba tradition, died in June of 2011. For the artist and for the history of art, it is fortunate that, before the great painter's death, Glassie interviewed him at length, traveled with him through Nigeria, published a book about him, and curated an exhibition of his work in Philadelphia.

The first of Glassie's major ethnographic projects, each lasting a full decade, was conducted in Ireland. It led to five books: *All Silver and No Brass* (1976); *Irish Folk History* (1982); *Passing the Time in Ballymenone* (1982), which won the Chicago Folklore Prize, the Haney Prize in the Social Sciences, and was named a notable book of the year by the *New York Times*; *Irish Folktales* (1985), an anthology from the whole island; and *The Stars of Ballymenone* (2006), a complete study of one community's oral literature. In 2010, he was honored to deliver the address at the National Library in Dublin, celebrating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Irish Folklore Commission.

His second ethnographic project, conducted in Turkey, produced a monumental work, *Turkish Traditional Art Today* (1993), named a notable book of the year by the *New York Times*; a slim book, designed as a gift to the many who helped him, *Günümüzde Geleneksel Türk Sanatı* (1993); and two major exhibitions in American museums. For his Turkish work, Glassie was given the Award of Honor for Superior Service to Turkish Culture from the Ministry of Culture of the Turkish Republic, the Fatih University Board of Trustees Recognition for Contributions to Turkish Cultural Life, and the Outstanding Achievement in the Arts Award from the Assembly of Turkish American Associations. In 2010, the municipal government made Glassie an Honorary Citizen of Kütahya, in recognition of his years of research on the Turkish city's ceramic tradition.

His third ethnographic project, conducted at the invitation of the Bangla Academy, produced a major book, *Art and Life in*

*Bangladesh* (1997). With a colleague, Firoz Mahmud, he also co-authored *Living Traditions*, published by the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh in 2007, which employed Bangladeshi examples to make the current methods of American folklore research available to the nation's scholars. At the request of the prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, he created a massive exhibition, "Contemporary Traditional Art of Bangladesh," at the National Museum in Dhaka. For his work in Bangladesh, Glassie was given the Certificate of Honour from the Ministry of Cultural Affairs of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, the Crest of Honour from the Islamic University in Kushtia, and the Friend of Bangladesh Award in Recognition of Outstanding Contributions toward Bangladesh from the Federation of Bangladeshi Associations in North America.

Henry Glassie has lectured throughout the United States and Canada, and in Ireland, Wales, Scotland, England, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Malta, Turkey, Israel, Kuwait, India, Bangladesh, China, and Japan.

A member of the American Folklore Society since his undergraduate days, Glassie was named a fellow in 1976 and elected president in 1988. In 2010 he was given the society's award for a lifetime of scholarly achievement. He also served as president of the Vernacular Architecture Forum, and in 2003 the society named its prize for outstanding scholarly achievement the Henry Glassie Award.

The father of four and the grandfather of four, Glassie lives with his wife, Pravina Shukla, in the latest of the historic houses he has restored, planning the next project.



## INTRODUCTION

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Professor Henry Glassie's 2011 Charles Homer Haskins Prize Lecture is the twenty-ninth in an annual series named for the first chairman of ACLS. The Executive Committee of the Delegates of ACLS selects the prize winner and lecturer from the many worthy nominations put forward by our community.

The lecturer's charge is "to reflect on a lifetime of work as a scholar; on the motives, the chance determinations, the satisfactions (and the dissatisfactions) of the life of learning; and to explore through one's own life the larger, institutional life of scholarship. We do not wish the speaker to present the products of one's own scholarly research, but rather to share with other scholars the personal process of a particular lifetime of learning."

And what a lifetime of learning it has been and continues to be. You will find in this slim volume Professor Glassie's biography, which details the many achievements that have led his peers to call him "the most erudite, and at the same time the most eloquent, member of his discipline." The pace of his accomplishment has been brisk: at the age of 35, he was a fellow of the American Folklore Society, with three major books published, and a tenured full professor and chairman of the Department of Folklore and Folklife at the University of Pennsylvania. And those achievements have proved durable: his study of material folk culture of the eastern United States has been reprinted 11 times and been in print continuously for 50 years. Since his retirement from Indiana University, Professor Glassie has pursued two major studies: one of Japanese ceramics, and another of the late Nigerian artist Prince Twins Seven-Seven.

Professor Glassie's career illustrates the tripartite dedication to research, teaching, and service that has been the ideal of the American university. He has earned several awards for excellence

in teaching, had one named for him, and served on nearly 200 dissertation and thesis committees. He has served on the editorial board or governance committees of five of the scholarly associations that constitute the American Council of Learned Societies.

An enormously productive scholar, he is also an exemplar of engagement with the public. His first professional position as Pennsylvania state folklorist marked the beginning of years of service to the public humanities through collaboration with museums, mounting public exhibitions and maintaining a world-girdling speaking schedule. He has been a nationally recognized leader in historic preservation and restored six houses himself. His many honors include awards from the ACLS, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Guggenheim Foundation, but also Rotary International. His writings have won prizes from academic societies, and his books have thrice been named notable books of the year by the *New York Times*. One of the more interesting entries on his CV notes that he was named to the National Council on the Humanities by President Clinton in 2000, “inducted,” but then “banished” the next year after the change in administrations.

His research, writing, and public work illuminate the extraordinary in the everyday. As one scholar said of him, “Glassie’s most impressive quality is his insistence on asking hard and far-reaching questions about the large meanings of small objects.” His powerful and moving artifact-based study of pottery, rugs, barns, and pictures shows how the web of culture is studded everywhere with the jewels of human creativity. As another reviewer commented, Professor Glassie’s “approach to the study of material culture ... takes the scholar away from a viewpoint that sees taxonomy as an end in itself, [and asks us to] consider the people represented by that material culture.”

“Owing in part to his intellectual leadership,” noted folklorist Lee Haring, “the discipline of folklore has broadened from a study of the texts of ballads and tales into a kind of descriptive and interpretive ethnography, without leaving behind the scrupulous recording initiated by Franz Boas.”

In his 2011 Haskins Prize Lecture, Professor Glassie posits the necessity of both history and art to human wholeness and helps his audience see how “the marginal, ruthlessly interdisciplinary discipline of folklore could accommodate both—both history and art—with grace.” I trust that many readers will appreciate the graceful artistry of the history of his life of learning.

—Pauline Yu, President  
American Council of Learned Societies



HENRY GLASSIE

## *A Life of Learning*

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When he received the Nobel Prize, W. B. Yeats said, he should not have been alone. The association is preposterous, I know, but this is as close to the Nobel Prize as I will get, and Yeats had a knack for putting my thoughts into words. We do not work alone: I can accept this astonishing honor only as one in a collegial circle, as a member of a minor discipline not previously represented in the distinguished sequence of Haskins Prize lecturers.

Two, Yeats said, should have been at his side in Stockholm: Lady Gregory and John Millington Synge. With him, they had driven drama to a modernist breakthrough, simultaneous with Kandinsky's in painting. Like him, like me, they were folklorists. Lady Gregory ignored academic conventions and listened to the peasants of Galway, embracing their interests in history, mystery, and the sacred. John Synge asserted and subverted his philosophical preoccupations in writing the first great folkloristic ethnography, *The Aran Islands*.

Yeats described Lady Gregory as "an old woman sinking into the infirmity of age." My old woman was my grandmother Alice, who was born in the log cabin her father built after defeat in the Civil War. Slight, sprightly, and vain, she changed the date of her birth in the family Bible, making herself younger, but she came into life only two decades after the war, and she was raised with the stories, with which she raised me, about hard times in

Mosby's Confederacy. The farm, worked by her people since early in the eighteenth century, lay not far southwest of Manassas, and the spring plowing turned up cannonballs and rusted bayonets. There, listening closely, I learned from my grandmother that, in Faulkner's words, the past is not past: it is all around us, a vital, palpable reality. History matters.

John Millington Synge, dead then, had become for Yeats "a young man's ghost." The ghost in my mind is my handsome young father, returning home from his war. Staunchly of the political left, as I am, he wanted to stop Hitler, and he volunteered on the day after Pearl Harbor in the year of my birth, serving in the navy as a radarman and the admiral's tennis partner from the beginning to the end of the Pacific War. For difficult duty, he was granted the right to be the first American among the antique shops of Kyoto. I have no clearer memory: my jaunty young father in his crisp uniform, bouncing out of a jeep and carrying a bundle into the hallway of my grandparents' home. The dark bundle opened to reveal a red silk lining and a black lacquered box, agleam with an abstract floral patterning in gold. It was the first thing in my life that I recognized to be beautiful; it remains the primal ground for my aesthetic, and my father used it to teach me that the Japanese people were not enemies but makers of wonders, creators of art. It breaks through the senses to capture the mind with electric directness. Art matters.

From my old woman: history. From my young man: art. Before I had learned to read or given anything much thought, history and art had become the points around which I would swing the ellipse of my life of learning.

In time I would find that the marginal, ruthlessly interdisciplinary discipline of folklore could accommodate both, both history and art with grace. Folklore provided me, at Tulane, Cooperstown, and Penn, with kind teachers; I name with affection Kenny Goldstein. At Penn and Indiana, it has given me wise colleagues, a multitude of marvelous students, and a beautiful wife, Pravina, who is also a folklorist, a teacher, a fieldworker, and a writer of books.

They should all be standing around me now, for all have helped me forward on my life's mission. Doomed, but personally fulfilling, that mission has been to make more democratic the idea of history (of human significance) and the idea of art (of human excellence).

“To make more democratic” is language too loose. Among my predecessors as Haskins Prize lecturers, some who were mature professionals in the turbulent sixties feared, with reason, the rise of an ahistorical relativism that would flatten distinctions into mediocrity. Relativistic to the core, I was one among those who inspired their fear, one of the kids who stormed Washington after the murders at Kent State, one of the white boys of Southern ancestry who marched loyally behind their black leaders in the civilly disobedient fight for civil rights. I wanted change then, want change now, but I have no wish to abandon history or obliterate the distinction between art and lesser things. I seek through realms of neglect for the principles by which the ideas of history and art can be improved, widened through experience and sharpened through logic, to be more inclusive, of more use to more people.

I began my seeking at home, on a particular landscape, as did Don Meinig, the previous Haskins lecturer to whom I am intellectually closest. My landscape has a red clay lane, a trim white house with scrawny dogs and crazy old uncles on the porch, an orchard, fields rolling east to the Chesapeake and west to the Blue Ridge. Mountains made the horizon of childhood, and early on, lugging a heavy recorder and mad to intellectualize my heritage, I went up to the Blue Ridge to find the elders who told the old tales my grandmother did—tales with numbers in the Aarne and Thompson index to international narrative—who sang the ancient ballads in Professor Child's collection.

I found them, it was not hard, and, visually inclined, I found the buildings, the cabins and barns, that materialized the style of the old songs and stories—structurally rigorous, passionate in restraint—buildings that met my unreconstructably modernist taste, a taste based on the principles that Wright

and Gropius learned from William Morris, that Morris learned from medieval English architecture. Precise, at once humble and proud, the mountain's buildings were, for me, artistically far finer than the pretentious mansions that filled the volumes of architectural history. At that moment occurred the luckiest event of my lucky life: a chance encounter in upstate New York with Fred Bowerman Kniffen.

Professor Kniffen was a renowned senior scholar, a geographer and anthropologist at Louisiana State University, and the author of the most important paper ever written on American vernacular architecture, "Louisiana House Types," published in 1936. I was an undergraduate student of English and anthropology at Tulane, just to the south in New Orleans. I regularly drove north. Mr. Kniffen gave me a bed in his garret, showed me all the photographs he had taken with his old Leica, and taught me everything. He was my master, my mentor, my chief of men, as Morris was for Yeats, and he graciously welcomed me into collaboration.

We divided the American land between us along the Appalachian axis. The east was mine, and with Mr. Kniffen's affectionate direction I learned, learned from lanky old gentlemen in overalls, some black, some white, and more from their buildings, photographed and fastidiously measured. I learned that architecture provides quantifiable evidence of distinct American regions, and it contains a history, a vast American history, not caught in books.

In analyzing buildings for history, my master was a geographer, and eventually my closest comrade would be an archaeologist, Jim Deetz, author of the classic *In Small Things Forgotten*. I dedicated books to Fred Kniffen and Jim Deetz, and standing here, I miss them both.

Architecture does not teach a history of smooth evolution, but one of the will asserted, of revolutionary moments followed by long stretches of adjustment. The great changes were not powered by the elite, as trickle-down histories would have it, nor by the wretched of the earth, as I might wish, but by middling



farmers, artisans, and merchants who rearranged their domestic environments before the politicians could frame their ideologies or start their wars. Americans had united and separated from England before the Revolution; the South had left the union three decades before the Civil War.

This I learned on my undramatic native landscape, then tested in Europe and Asia: the buildings say that the great changes happen among workers on the ground in advance of the violence to which change is customarily attributed. My conclusion is that the landscape, with buildings at center, provides a resource that is wider in reach through society and time and space than the writings of the literate few, the best resource for composing a more democratic history of continuity and change during the long span from 1200 to 1900. I follow W. G. Hoskins, who urged historians to get out of the study, look over the hedge, and learn the complex but comprehensible language of the landscape.

I began at home, then went east to Ireland and England, to Turkey, India, Bangladesh, and Japan, south to Nigeria and Brazil, conducting the projects that, more than shifts in employment or academic promotions, divide my life of learning into phases.

My task in learning has been to manage a productive relationship between reading and experience. Many traits connect my predecessors as Haskins lecturers. Dominant is an orientation to history, which I share. Another is an association with Harvard, which I do not. A third is a love for reading. That fits. We live, Pravina and I, in a library, ornamented with too many pots and rugs. Aided by the world's antiquarian bookmen, we gather around us the books we need, and, fortunate to hate televisions and computers, I get hours to read every day. Through reading, great writers and thinkers—above all William Morris—have become my companions. But in the dialectic of my learning, experience leads. I am, at last, at heart, a fieldworker. Clifford Geertz, in his Haskins lecture, used the word brutal. The difficulties are real, we all get seriously sick, and it is easy to turn the errors and pains into anecdotes, but I find fieldwork more exhilarating than hard. It is thrilling to be so steadily awake and aware—the

whole sensorium on alert—as I settle into new places and stay long enough to learn the language and make the friends who fill the tapes and notebooks.

Luck upon luck: I was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship at 30, and drawn by her writers—by Yeats and Joyce and Beckett, of course, but more by Estyn Evans and Seán Ó Súilleabháin—I chose Ireland. My desire was to do a piece of fieldwork that could meet the standards developed during a scatter of acts in New York and Pennsylvania, Virginia, North Carolina, and Louisiana. Inspired by anthropological ethnographers, in particular Oscar Lewis, my aim was to study a rural community—not one that was isolated into timelessness, but one that was pulled apart and pushed together by the cross-currents of history.

It was 1972, the bloodiest year of the Troubles, the year of the massacre in Derry, and I settled into a place on the embattled border, Ballymenone, at the river's mouth in the County Fermanagh. By day, they cut turf and hay and followed the damned old cows. At night, they sat by the hearth in the convivial chat of the *ceili*. Newsworthy history surrounded them with helicopters in the air, soldiers on the road, and bombs in the night. To understand, I came into colloquy with Ballymenone's own historians, Hugh Nolan and Michael Boyle, and with their neighbors who did not claim, and were not granted, the high name of historian, but who were also knowledgeable about their place and its past: Peter Flanagan, Hugh Patrick Owens, and James Owens.

The philosopher among them was Hugh Nolan. He was born in 1896 in the house his grandfather built out of slap brick, and there—farmer, old bachelor, and saint—he lived in one of its two black rooms. Mr. Nolan had studied in his youth with the historian Hugh McGiveney, who was, they say, a great wit and a fine hand at dressing a stack of hay, and he taught me as old Hughie had taught him. During conversations that continued until his death in 1981, I learned Mr. Nolan's idea of history.

Hugh Nolan built his historical practice in a series of logical moves. Truth was first. The last time I saw him, in the old men's ward at the Erne Hospital, he defined his life's goal as keep-

ing the truth and telling the whole tale. The truth, he knew, is more than the factual; the facts shift and accumulate into contradiction. The truth, he said, is what, collecting and assessing the facts, you are willing to live by. Truth guides. Lies put the mind and soul at odds, causing the tongue to stumble, but the truth flowed sweetly in his mouth, keeping him young and empowering him to tell the history his neighbors had to hear.

Bringing him personal pleasure and enabling him to fulfill his social obligations, truth was first, as it must be for all artists of nonfiction. Space came second. Histories that spread too wide, snapping free of particular earth, inevitably, he believed, fall into falsehood through omission and abstraction. Hugh Nolan's thinking was like Fernand Braudel's, who, faced with the task of world history, recognized that it must begin with distinct civilizations, limited in spatial extent. Mr. Nolan's region of responsibility stretched only ten miles south and west, eight miles north and east, but still he felt that any single chronological line would omit too much. In his third move, the move to time—again like Braudel—he divided time into simultaneous streams, flowing at different rates.

To account for the fast history at the fluttering surface, Mr. Nolan employed the concept of progressive development (a pattern that expands too often to explain too much), but he restricted it rigorously to the technological sphere, where it actually works sometimes, and he set technological progress against an equal and opposite force of regress in the social sphere. As things get better materially, he argued, they get worse socially. Hugh Nolan lived long, saw much, and summarized by saying, "The two things happen at the one time. Things get better. And they get worse."

Deep time Mr. Nolan divided into two realms, so slow in their motion as to yield the constant conditions of human existence. In the realm of faith, the heroic saints of the Christian dawn arrive in Fermanagh and leave signs on the land, counters to doubt that prove the existence of God. To love one's neighbor is the eternal commandment. In the realm of conflict, the heroic

warriors of the Irish past repetitively resist invasion and bring death to their neighbors. Their acts are valiant, their hope is victory, their risk is eternal damnation.

In a Sartrean manner within a Braudelian frame, Hugh Nolan and his colleagues exemplified continuity in the inter-linked realms of faith and conflict by narrating specific events of spiraling typological significance. Their tales set the dilemma of virtue. The good must love. The brave must fight. In this life, between faith and conflict, there is no choice but choice.

“What can we do?” the defeated peasants cried at the end of Ignazio Silone’s *Fontamara*. Carry on, answered the peasant Hugh Nolan, propping his hope with parables, with truthful stories about people he had known, country people like those who gathered at the small fire in his miserable house. By day, the people of story worked the land, courageously enduring through conditions of famine and war, bodily decay and dreary labor. At night, in the sociable ring of the *ceili*, the gifted among them—George Armstrong and John Brodison, Hugh McGiveney and John O’Prey—became stars, glittering against the prevailing darkness with spectacular feats of wit, with hyperbolic Beckettian narratives that made hardship, pain, failure, and even death into a joke.

Set in their historical dilemma, alive in a predicament of violence and deprivation, they found the consolation of art.

So you see: my life of learning, driven by experience, has recapitulated the progress of ethnography. The purpose is always to write honorably and usefully about other people, but once I sought informants to provide texts for my analysis. Then I dug deeper for the native concepts that could improve my interpretations and patterns of presentation. Now I seek colleagues, fellow intellectuals like Hugh Nolan, who, having been trained differently in different circumstances, can collaborate in the solution of grand problems that have proved intractable within the confines of the fractured academy.

Aspects of Hugh Nolan's thought find parallels in the writings of the great French thinkers who have worried over history and influenced my effort—Marc Bloch, Fernand Braudel, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Claude Lévi-Strauss—but Hugh Nolan, his mind ground sharp by hardship, traded sequence for significance; he situated his vision in space, split time, oriented his discourse to moral problems, and joined the geographical, the religious, the military, the political, the economic, the social, the technological, and the literary into a comprehensive program that made him my master of history.

In his system, history is the means by which conditions are understood; art is the means by which they are overcome. History and art: four years after Hugh Nolan's death, I found my master of art in Ahmet Şahin.

Ahmet Şahin was born in 1906, in Kütahya, an ancient city in western Turkey. The mountains rising around Kütahya carry *dümbüldek*, a white clay that has been exploited since the fifteenth century to produce splendid ceramics, ware painted underglaze on a composite body and called *çini*, a word cognate with china. Trained in the workshop of Hafız Mehmet Emin Efendi, Ahmet Şahin became the leading designer in this city of 10,000 potters.

When the cruel wars were over and the Turkish republic had been established, Ahmet Şahin formed a partnership with Hakkı Çinicioğlu to bring their city's wounded industry back to vitality. Their work challenged and inspired the masters of subsequent generations: Ahmet Şahin's sons Zafer and Faruk, Zafer's son Ahmet Hürriyet Şahin and his wife Nurten, Hakkı Ermumcu and Sıtkı Olçar, Mehmet Gürsoy, İbrahim Erdeyer, Mehmet Koçer, İsmail Yiğit—from all of them I learned, but Ahmet Şahin held the center.

We were walking on the street one day when he stopped and told me that I had learned enough to write a book about Turkish art. I should write a book, he said, and he should be its *kahraman*, its hero. Eventually I did just that, but then, intending to compliment him, I called him the *son usta*, the ultimate master

of Kütahya. No, he corrected me, he was the ultimate master of all Turkey, and now, correcting myself, I would say that Ahmet Şahin was the greatest master of modern Islamic ceramics, one of the three most important ceramic artists of the twentieth century, along with England's Bernard Leach and Japan's Shōji Hamada.

During conversations that ran from my arrival in 1985 to his death in 1996, Ahmet Şahin offered me the most coherent formulation of an idea of art that was shared widely by Turkish artisans, by the weavers and potters, carpenters and smiths who welcomed and taught me.

Ahmet Bey's idea of art, logical and widely applicable, contains direct solutions to our problems. Basic is the definitional problem. Weak definitions do little damage during research on the canonical monuments of Western art, but they befuddle cross-cultural study.

Societies generally develop hierarchies of media, coming to place high value on certain techniques, their allied materials, representational goals, and functions. That is as true in the East as it is in the West. But if the Western appreciation of painting and sculpture is used to separate art from craft and extended to societies different in value, if people are approached as painters and sculptors when, say, textiles and ceramics mean more to them—which is the case for many of the world's people—then their excellence will remain out of focus and, during comparison, intellectual inquiry will descend into a rhetoric of Western superiority, an excuse, perhaps, for colonial intrusion, if not by soldiers, then by educators.

Turkish artisans, too, arrange media hierarchically. At the top, they place calligraphy, the beautifully measured inscription of God's word. They rank carpet-weaving high, basket-making low. But differences of medium and function are not used to separate art from other things. Biographical accidents provide people with different opportunities for self-expression. Some are calligraphers, others make baskets, but what makes art is not chance, but will—the will to dedicate oneself sincerely and completely to the task at hand. Some calligraphies are art, some are

not; some baskets are art, some are not. It depends on the will and skill of the maker. I recall farmers sitting with tea in a village—Karagömlek in Çanakkale—and talking about hunting. All men use shotguns to kill rabbits for dinner, but one of their neighbors they called a true artist: he blew the brains out of bunnies with consummate elegance.

For Ahmet Şahin, art comes of *aşk*. *Aşk* is the passion of lovers separated and pining for embrace, the passion of the Sufi who yearns for reunion with God; it is the passion of artists who, longing for perfection, forget all else and devote themselves utterly to their work. Art, for Ahmet Bey, does not lie in the eye of the beholder, which is always, he said, less acute than the artist's eye, but in the mind and hand, the heart and soul of the creator. And this thought of Ahmet Şahin's echoes in writings by Suzuki in Japan, Coomaraswamy in India, and Kandinsky at the dawn of modernism in Europe.

Not art is the perfunctory, the thing done for money, not love, even if appealing, even if it takes shape as painting or sculpture. Art is passion incarnated through skilled action in any medium. That is what Ahmet Şahin thought and said, and it is an existentially grounded, portable definition.

Tradition is another of our problems. Just as art can be casually identified by medium—normally among us by media dominated by prosperous white males—tradition can be casually used to separate old art from new, conventional from innovative, parochial from cosmopolitan, folk from fine. But Ahmet Şahin would agree with T. S. Eliot that all art is traditional. The Turkish word for tradition is *gelenek*. In explaining tradition—here I am following my dear friends Mehmet Gürsoy and İbrahim Erdeyer, who followed Ahmet Şahin—potters in Kütahya do not speak of handing things down but of living and breathing amid conditions. From birth, the artist breathes in the air of an environment, absorbing influences, intentionally or not. The air circulates within, mixing with the silt of the deepest self, and when the artist exhales in creation, the result will perpetually emit the *hava*, the air of a place, a time, a culture, and an inviolably unique individual.

As Robert Plant Armstrong argued in his marvelous trilogy, the work of art is an object encountered as a subjectivity, a presence that fills the void left by a missing person. If art, this thing will be, always and at once, old and new, traditional and intensely personal, a seal of the self. Why should the work of art be signed, James Joyce mused, when the whole thing is a signature?

Ahmet Şahin's formulation also solves our problem of communication. Since the work of art contains, by definition, the creator's fullness, it stands as an exhibit of *zevk*. "Taste" is a dilute translation. *Zevk* is a style of life, a chosen code of conduct that gains material presence in an artifact's style. The beholder, too, has a *zevk*, which is matched during evaluation with the *zevk* in the work, and a swift, direct, nonverbal communication links the beholder to the creator. They connect through the qualities—*sade*, *canlı*, or *ciddi*; plain, playful, or virtuosic—that abide in an object, made by one, apprehended by another, and judged, perhaps favorably, perhaps not.

Folklorists, guided by Dell Hymes and Dick Bauman, have long known that this is how society is built. Laws set boundaries, but the inner territory is configured in performance, by creative acts—tales told, pots thrown, lectures delivered—that attract some, bore some, and repel others in the continual restructuring of social relations.

Turkish artists intend social connection—and more. They intend benefit, as Hugh Nolan did in telling his stories, and they regularly say it like this: to the artist, art is *aşk*, the yield of love; to the beholder, art offers a *merdiven*, a stairway of ascent. The beholder in ascent, like the artist in creation, becomes wholly engaged—body, mind, and soul. The art that lifts them together is the most human of things: useful, beautiful, intellectual, and spiritual all at once.

On the stairway's first step, art offers a gift to the hand, an aid in labor. On the second step, art offers a gift to the eye, an aesthetic stimulus that pulls the mind in through the senses. On the next step up, the mind is informed through the intertextual



references embedded in style and content. On the top step, the mind, having learned, awakens the soul to the wonder of God.

God is beautiful and loves beauty, the potters say, and their art is one of the abounding beauties of the earth that, like the signs left on the land by the Irish saints, bear witness to the existence of God.

Turkish artists intend to build a society, not one that is merely connected, but one founded on moral precepts and governed by love.

Love is the force that drives creation.

We are at an end. Always communicative and moving, inevitably traditional, an embodiment of taste and devotion, art is, in Ahmet Şahin's terms, passion incarnate, and in Hugh Nolan's, a gift and a consolation. What we do when we are sincere, engaged, and responsible, art is the best that can be managed, given the unruly conditions.

In our scale of values, though not in Hugh Nolan's, the fictional ranks higher than the factual. Novels get more praise, but scholarship, my work and yours, can be art, and it is art when done with a passion for learning and exposition. It is our consolation, sufficiently fulfilling, I have found, to carry us through these disappointing times.

Near the Buriganga, in his cramped, damp shop in Old Dhaka, Haripada Pal shapes clay into *murtis*, images of the deities worshiped in pujas and temples by his fellow Hindus. Haripada learned his art in the village of Norpara from his beloved grandfather, Niroda Prasad Pal, then traveled, learning more and rising to be the greatest sculptor in all of Bangladesh. We became close immediately, he said, because in some former life we were married, and we were sitting on the floor of his shop in the outrageous heat, sweating and holding hands, when he told me that his work had not brought him riches or fame, but it fills his days, benefits others, and whatever it is, he said, it is enough.

My resources are different. Instead of clay, I have thick notebooks, piles of reeled tape, and thousands of photographs. I have different tools: cheap pens already charged with ink, paper ready ruled. But I set about my daily work with excitement and sincerity, dedicated to the truth, and whatever it is, it has been enough.

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