

# HENRY GLASSIE: FIELDWORK

A film by Pat Collins



105 mins/Ireland/In English and Portuguese with English subtitles/2019

Toronto Film Festival 2019/Galway Film Fleadh 2020 – Best Irish Documentary

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## SYNOPSIS

From the director of *Song of Granite* and *Silence* (a New Wave release) comes this new documentary study of the folklorist and ethnologist Henry Glassie.

Over the last 50 years the celebrated American folklorist Henry Glassie has been writing in-depth studies of communities and their art. Inspired by the writings and ideas of Glassie – ‘Field Work’ is an immersive and meditative documentary set among the rituals and rhythms of working artists across Brazil, Turkey, North Carolina and Ireland. The process of making something out of raw materials is luminously manifested in sequences which reflect in their measured and attentive approach the actual real time process of making, of the work of hands and of the close attention the artist is bringing to the work.

Further information and downloads [here](#)

Photo set for download [here](#)



## BACKGROUND

Glassie’s subject is folklore but his deep abiding love for the people who create it resonates throughout the film. *“I don’t study people. I stand with people and I study the things they create.”*

Field work is at the heart of Glassie’s lifelong engagement with folklore. In the words of poet Seamus Heaney *“where the perfect eye of the blackbird watched, where one fern was always green I was standing watching you” Fieldwork 1979*

This film celebrates Glassie's work, the people with whom he stands and their artwork. Glassie's long professional life encompasses the people and folklore of his native southern states; from the sublime vocal purity of Ola Belle Reed whom he befriended and recorded in the sixties, to the potters, sculptors, metal workers, gilders and painters of sacred art in Brazil, the ceramic masters and the women rug makers and weavers of Turkey, the story tellers and singers of Ballymenone on the Northern Irish border to mention just a few. Pat Collins' positioning of Glassie's own archive photographs, film and exquisite hand drawn maps deepens our understanding both of Glassie and the folklore he has so tenderly honoured in his work over decades of study scholarship love and friendship.

Filmed in Brazil, Ireland and the US in Glassie's presence, artists like the sculptor Edival Rosas from Salvador city describe their practice as one where body and spirit are integrated, where in Glassie's words the creative act brings *"a momentary fulfilment of what it is to be human"*.

Under Pat Collins' gaze the process of making something out of raw materials is manifested in sequences which reflect in their measured and attentive approach the actual real time process of making, of the work of hands, of the physicality of that work, and of the close attention the artist is bringing to the work.

Pat Collins' aim with *Henry Glassie :Field Work* is to bring these makers of art, in wood, fabric, yarn, paint, clay, metal, in song and story to our attention through their work, through the raw materials they shape into art objects and the through the undeniable passion they carry to their work. In this way the work is accorded profound meaning for the societies out of which it is generated an aesthetic value which is transcendent.

*"What matters is passion and the devotion"* and also *"sincerity and fullness of being"*. Without this, for Glassie, no artwork can claim authenticity. The film itself also stands as a realisation of this.



## CREW

Director	Pat Collins
Producer	Tina O'Reilly
Film Editor	Keith Walsh
Director of Photography	Colm Hogan
Location Sound	John Brennan
Special Thanks	Henry Glassie and Pravina Shukla

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## DIRECTOR – PAT COLLINS

Since 1999, Pat Collins has made over 30 films. His latest feature film 'Henry Glassie: Field Work' premiered at Toronto International Film Festival, 2019. The film is a magisterial portrait of the most renowned American folklorist and ethnologist Henry Glassie, funded by the Arts Council of Ireland and the Irish Film Board.

Pat's feature film 'Song of Granite,' funded by the Irish Film Board, BAI, SODEC and Telefilm Canada, is based on the life of the traditional Irish singer Joe Heaney. It received its world premiere at SXSW 2017 and has screened at numerous international festivals. It was released in cinemas by Oscilloscope Distribution in the USA, Thunderbird Releasing in the UK and Canada, and Wildcard Distribution in Ireland. 'Song of Granite' was the Irish nomination for best Foreign Language Oscar 2018. Fionnuala Halligan, Chief Film Critic of 'Screen International' wrote "In an era of safe film-making, especially within the art-house sector, it's rare to view a title as formally audacious as 'Song of Granite.'"

His 2012 Award Winning feature film 'Silence' received its international premiere at London Film Festival in 2013 and was distributed in Irish cinemas by Element Distribution and by New Wave Films in the UK. It was also broadcast on RTÉ 1. He was co-director of the flagship historical 3 part series '1916'. The series was broadcast on RTÉ, BBC and PBS in America. In 2012, the Irish Film Institute curated a mid-career retrospective of his work to date. saying "...Viewed together, these fascinating screenworks offer a unique snapshot of Ireland at the turn of the 21st century.

He has made films on the writer John McGahern, the poets Michael Hartnett and Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill and the Connemara based writer and cartographer Tim Robinson. 'Abbas Kiarostami - The Art of Living' (co-directed with Fergus Daly) was picked up for international distribution in 2004 by the French company MK2. He has directed two political feature essay films 'What We Leave in Our Wake' (2009) and 'Living in a Coded Land' (2014).

Pat Collins has also made a series of short experimental film works all funded by the Arts Council of Ireland. Pilgrim (2008 | 13 mins), What Remains (2013 | 12 mins) and Twilight (2017 | 30mins). His experimental film work has screened at the Absolute Gallery at Galway Arts Festival 2013 and screened at the ICA London and Recontres Internationales London/Berlin, The Visual Carlow and numerous Irish and international film festivals.



## FILMOGRAPHY

2018/19 Henry Glassie: Field Work (Feature Documentary)  
2018/19 Twilight (Short Film)  
2017 Song of Granite (Feature Film)  
2016 1916 (3 hr Series for RTÉ, BBC, PBS)  
2014 Living in a Coded Land (Feature Documentary)  
2013 What Remains (Short Film)  
2012 Silence (Feature Film)  
2011 Tim Robinson: Connemara (Feature Documentary)  
2010 What We Leave In Our Wake (Feature Documentary)  
2008 Gabriel Byrne: Stories from Home (Feature Documentary)  
2008 Pilgrim (Short Film)  
2007 Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill – Taibhsí i mBéal na Gaoithe (Feature Documentary)  
2004 John McGahern – A Private World (Feature Documentary)  
2003 Abbas Kiarostami – The Act of Living (Feature Documentary)  
2002 Oileán Thoraí – Tory Island (Feature Documentary)  
2000 Talking to the Dead (Feature Documentary)  
1999 Michael Hartnett – a Necklace of Wrens (Feature Documentary)

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I first heard Henry Glassie talking on Irish radio. It was a night time show called 'Arts Tonight' and the host was the poet Vincent Woods. They spoke for an hour; about folklore and art, his time in Ireland in the '70s, in Turkey in the '80s and his growing-up years in Virginia. It remains one of my most memorable radio experiences, up there with football matches and the music of the late '70s and early '80s when we were tuning in to discover the sound of a larger world. But Glassie in that hour, took me right back to the small world, the small world that is in fact an everywhere – and to an acknowledgement that the appreciation for art is universal.

A few weeks later I wrote to Henry (he doesn't do email) and we corresponded on and off for several years. It wasn't until 2016 that we finally met in person and I proposed the notion of a film. Glassie is one of the most articulate and thought-provoking people I've ever met. His engagement with his material, with the people he encounters, the artists he

stands with and his philosophical outlook - all coalesce in a very passionate and engaged individual.

In 2018, Henry and his wife, folklorist Pravina Shukla published a book called 'Sacred Art: Catholic Saints and Candomblé Gods in modern Brazil'. We travelled with Henry and Pravina to Salvador in Bahia and to a small pottery village called Maragojipinho and there we encountered dozens of artists who Henry and Pravina had spent so much time with over the previous decade. The artists opened their doors to us because the trust had already been established and we were able to spend time with them and capture their work in real time. We spent two days with Rosalvo Santana in his front room and filmed him as he made a saint from clay – the *Nossa Senhora Desatadora dos Nós* by hand and with the greatest attention and skill. We spent days wondering if we could track down the artist Samuel Rodrigues in the streets of Salvador. When we did meet him, he took us to his father's forge, and we filmed him at work - in 30 intense minutes he made a candomblé God from scrap metal. It was like a performance, pure attention and concentration.



We also travelled with Henry and Pravina to North Carolina where so many great potters live and work. Again, we spent days observing them at work - Kate Johnston and her husband Daniel Johnston and the English potter Mark Hewitt as he fired up the kiln and worked for days and nights in searing heat.

During the filming, Henry often said he didn't care if he appeared in the film or not. I think he would have actually preferred if he wasn't in it at all - that the artists we filmed would get the full attention of the viewer. It was something I struggled with – because I wanted to capture the way I felt when I heard him speak on the radio that first time. Though I did convince him to sit down for one interview in Brazil it wasn't until we reached his home in Bloomington, Indiana that we sat him down and spent two days asking him questions. I knew that his ideas would have to be a part of the film. Much could be expressed by just observing the artists at work, but Henry's ideas were the glue that would bring the film

together. But still, some of that reticence remains in the finished film - Henry doesn't appear fully until mid-way through the film.

It was a great privilege to make this film. I feel the film is a true collaboration and I couldn't have made it without Henry's input and generosity. His outlook and ideas and his writings are the reason this film exists. I hope it brings his important work to wider attention and that small communities everywhere see their own experience mirrored in the works and artists on display. Artists everywhere express the character and personality of their communities.

**PAT COLLINS**

## **HENRY GLASSIE**

Henry Glassie, College Professor Emeritus at Indiana University, has received many awards for his work, including the Chicago Folklore Prize, the Haney Prize in the Social Sciences, the Cummings Award of the Vernacular Architecture Forum, the Kniffen and Douglas awards of the Pioneer America Society, the Nigerian Studies Association Book Prize, and formal recognition for his contributions from the ministries of culture of Turkey and Bangladesh. Three of his works have been named among the notable books of the year by The New York Times.

In 2010, he was given the American Folklore Society's award for a lifetime of scholarly achievement. He received the prestigious Charles Homer Haskins Prize of the American Council of Learned Societies in 2011; the award honours a "scholarly career of distinctive importance," and Glassie is the first folklorist to be so honoured.

Glassie has lectured throughout the United States and Canada, and in Ireland, Scotland, Wales, England, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Malta, Turkey, Israel, Kuwait, India, Bangladesh, China, and Japan. He is the author of *Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States*, *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia*, *All Silver and No Brass*, *Irish Folk History*, *Passing the Time in Ballymenone*, *Irish Folktales*, *The Spirit of Folk Art*, *Turkish Traditional Art Today*, *Art and Life in Bangladesh*, *Material Culture*, *The Potter's Art*, *Vernacular Architecture*, *The Stars of Ballymenone*, *Prince Twins Seven-Seven: His Art, His Life in Nigeria*, *His Exile in America*, and *Daniel Johnston: A Portrait of the Artist as a Potter in North Carolina*. He is also the co-author of *Ola Belle Reed and Southern Mountain Music on the Mason-Dixon Line* and *Sacred Art: Catholic Saints and Candomblé Gods in Modern Brazil*.



## **PRAVINA SHUKLA**

Pravina Shukla is Professor in the Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology, at Indiana University. Her research areas are material culture, specifically dress and costume, folk art, museum studies, and food ways. A passionate teacher, Professor Shukla is a four-time winner of the Indiana University Trustee Teaching Award. In 2018, Shukla won the esteemed Indiana University President's Award for Distinguished Teaching which honours “the most exceptional faculty, their devotion to students and their strong commitment to the university's fundamental missions.”

She is the author of *The Grace of Four Moons: Dress, Adornment, and the Art of the Body in Modern India*, winner of the Milia Davenport Award of the Costume Society of America for the best book on dress, and of the Coomaraswamy Book Prize of the Association for Asian Studies, for the best book on India in the English language.

She is also the author of *Costume: Performing Identities through Dress*, which examines how costume always functions to express identity in situated contexts full of intention and meaning.

Shukla co-edited *The Individual and Tradition: Folklorist Perspectives*, and, co-authored, with Henry Glassie, *Sacred Art: Catholic Saints and Candomblé Gods in Modern Brazil*, a book that displays the diversity of Brazilian artistic techniques and religious interpretations, governed by the understandings of the artists themselves.