

## **ETOBICOKE CAMERA CLUB PRESIDENT'S TROPHY 1970-2011**

Submitted by Carolyn Francis-Scobie

MSc. U of Toronto; Art History Dip. U of Cambridge-Christies

My search began following the Etobicoke Camera Club (ECC) Annual Banquet after becoming the 2010 President's Trophy recipient. I felt a strong need and unexplained sense of urgency to uncover the authenticity of this trophy.

### **PRESIDENT'S TROPHY DESCRIPTION**

A paper label found on the green felt pad underneath reads HANDMADE BY "HEIKKI". This begs my first question: Who is Heikki? The enameling technique used in making this object is familiar to me. I will describe the trophy so that you can visualize this handsome object. The trophy takes the form of a chalice which is a footed bowl. The hand hammered and raised copper bowl has dark green enamel on the exterior surface and red-orange radiating petals in yellow-green enamel inside. Enamel is a glasslike material and fused on copper. The bowl is fixed to a sculptured foot. The foot metal is patinated and gold coloured, possibly bronze. Confirmation of the metal is possible by testing and examining the base structure under the felt pad. The diameter of the bowl is 32.5 cm or 13", stands 17.5 cm or 7" tall and weighs 2.3 kg or 5 pounds.

### **ECC ORAL HISTORY**

It became clear from the start that if Heikki is Heikki Seppa and maker of this chalice, ECC owns a very important object. Heikki Seppa is an internationally acclaimed silversmith who contributed significantly to the arts, and was professor emeritus in the College of Art, Washington University in St. Louis.

The chalice was talking to me, saying Heikki Seppa made me. I contacted Judy Griffin, as Secretary, for any information from the archive boxes. She identified Ovais M. Quraishi as president when ECC acquired the trophy in 1970. She noted that much club documentation was destroyed at this time. From talking with Bill Harrison, I learned more about the acquisition of this trophy. Mr. Harrison has been an ECC member since its inception in 1957 and Honorary Board member. He confirmed that Mr. Quraishi, an engineer with the Ford Motor Co., commissioned the chalice in 1969 and that Heikki Seppa was the maker of the chalice, and a personal friend of the president. He recalls its arrival and knew that the club paid no money for it. Whether or not the maker was paid is still unknown. Based on the focus of my research, "Heikki Chalice" is my name given to the "President's Trophy" in this paper.

Judy located support from old Viewfinders. In September 1969, it states that Tyro Division was going to get a handsome new trophy for Photographer of the Year. In April 1970, it states that the President's Trophy will be awarded for the first time to a Tyro. Their thinking must have changed because the first recipient of the trophy was Harold Reinke in Advanced Division in 1970. Since then, it remained as the President's Trophy for the top Advanced photographer. Honorary Board members and long term club members are indeed a valuable resource.

Photographing the reflective enamel surface of the bowl was a big challenge. Mr. Harrison suggested shooting the chalice outdoors when overcast or under even shade. Thanks to Clyde Elkins and Bruce Lewis, I also did some photos of the chalice inside a large soft box. Four photographs are found at the end of this paper to provide a visual record of the excellent condition of the chalice.

## RESEARCH CONTACTS

Online, I learned that Heikki was alive and living in Bainbridge Island Washington, but no specific contact details were given. Continuing my search, I found his name on a members' list of the Society of North American Goldsmiths/SNAG. Founded in 1969, eighteen metalsmiths, including Heikki, chose the name, planned the first conference and exhibition for 1970 in St. Paul, Minnesota. Criteria for membership were: proven professionalism, outstanding creative achievement in metal work and contributions to the field for other than creative work. Tara Jecklin, through SNAG, offered to post my information letter and photos to him. I hastened to prepare my package to email her. Ms. Jecklin confirmed that she received and posted my package on 18 May. Remember this date, only one week following the 2010 Annual Banquet.

Thinking about the financial evaluation of this object, I phoned Suzanne Davis, consultant & International Representative Christies, formerly president of Christies Toronto office that closed 2009. She said that to process a formal written evaluation for insurance will cost upwards of US \$1000.00. She referred me to Carina Villinger, Senior Specialist 20 Century Decorative Art & Design, VP Christies New York, who found no auction records for this artist. This means no comparative evaluation to ascertain the market value of the chalice.

Learning that the Smithsonian held a collection of Heikki Seppa's papers and publications, I contacted Marisa Bourgojn, Archives of American Art Smithsonian. She reviewed this collection briefly and found no mention to the object that I described. She added that their files do not include commissions. She also offered to forward a letter to Heikki for me.

## WHO IS THE MAKER?

I will cite sources and trace information as it relates to the chalice, the technique which the maker used, and the Canadian connection. In 2001, Heikki gave his oral history to Lloyd Herman, Archives of American Art Smithsonian and in 2003, he received the Hans Christensen Sterling Silversmith's Award. Both these resources provide much insight into an innovative and influential silversmith of the latter 20th century. Many of his artistic accomplishments are in America and Finland. We are fortunate that our camera club has one such treasure in Canada.

## CHILDHOOD & EDUCATION

Heikki was born in Sakkijarvi, Finland in 1927. As a child, he was housed with 100 other children in a remote old Russian mansion 50 km from St. Petersburg. With his manual skills and creative ability, he made toys for the other children. At age 14, Heikki studied at the Goldsmith School and the Central School of Industrial Art in Helsinki, completing a four year program in 1945. The curriculum was strenuous with goldsmith school 8-5 p.m., art school 6-9 p.m., including Saturday, plus YMCA Sunday class for English. His instructors were Fabergé-trained metalsmiths who returned home to Finland, following the Russian Revolution. The enameling at the Faberge Studios, St. Petersburg, was now out of fashion.

Following graduation, he worked in industry. He had great admiration for the craftsmanship of an enameler employed in the company (Hopeatakomo Oy) who had worked for Carl Fabergé. Heikki observed him working but received no instruction in the technique of enameling. Being a silversmith, he repaired the army's many dented horns during his nine months service in the Finnish army. He continued his professional training in 1948-49 with George Jensen Silversmiths in Copenhagen, Denmark on an exchange scholarship program.

### CAREER AS METALSMITH & EDUCATOR

Two years later, he immigrated with his Danish wife to Prince Rupert British Columbia to live with his wife's relatives. He worked with refrigeration systems in a pulp mill, soldering copper pipe installations. In 1956 he became a Canadian citizen. In Canada, he started his teaching career doing workshops in jewellery and metalsmithing at the local community centre, during the evenings and without pay. Winning prizes for metal sculptural objects exhibited at two Canadian National Exhibitions, he credits as the turning point in his life. In 1961, determined to master English-language terminology so that he could more effectively teach his craft, he furthered his postgraduate studies at Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan, receiving his Master of Fine Art degree. In 1962, he accepted a teaching position at a private art school on the campus of U of Louisville KY. At Louisville, he took a class in enameling and found a way to add color and gemlike brilliance to his metalwork. Based on its acquisition date and technique, I propose that the Louisville period, spanning three years, is the genesis of our Heikki Chalice. It was here too that his popularity as a metalsmith began to flourish. The Art Center School changed its name to the Louisville School of Art in 1968, continuing until 1983 when it closed and was absorbed by the University of Louisville. The university holds exhibition catalogues of this private art school. Is it possible that these catalogues, show photographs of Heikki's objects and/or works by his students, using the enameling technique?

In 1965, he joined the faculty of Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, where he led the metalsmithing program until his retirement in 1992. Retirement was difficult initially. His department was closed, contact with Faculty members stopped, and his wife died within a year. In 1998, he found himself moving to Bainbridge Island, Washington, where he built his dream house and studio with his new wife, Laurie A. Lyall, a metalsmith and former student. His intention was to add to his personal collection remaining "in the barrel", an expression he used to describe his noncommissioned and experimental works.

### NOTABLE COMMISSIONS

Heikki created large installation sculptures, tabletop hollowware, ecclesiastical pieces (1986-7 St. Louis, Missouri), and countless wearable jewellery designs. His pieces are in private and public collections, including the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum and St. Louis Art Museum. Each year, Washington University presents a silver replica of Seppa's sculpture "The Search" representing pursuit of truth and knowledge. Although he had notable commissions in America and Finland, his drawings are limited. He got commissions, fulfilled commissions, and phoned his client when the piece was ready for pick up. He never advertised, and never looked for customers.

He gave summer workshops (14 visits to Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Isle, Maine) where he created his objects to demonstrate his techniques. He used little drawing in preparation of his works and, like his teaching masters, he would smash any unsatisfactory piece. There are few online images of his designs and finished works. No enamel technique was evident on any of these pieces.

## PUBLICATIONS

In addition to his teaching, summer workshops and studio work, Heikki authored two significant books. **Form Emphasis for Metalsmiths** (1978) redefined the formal vocabulary of contemporary metalsmithing and has remained in print for more than three decades. **From the Silversmith's Workshop (Hopeasepän Pajasta)** (1998), was the first illustrated book on silversmithing in Finnish and is required reading for all Finnish metalsmithing students today. In 2003, Heikki donated to the Smithsonian, eight sketchbooks, ca. 1957-1991, his lecture and demonstration notebook with photographs of Seppa and his work, Mestariafiria certificate, 1963.

## HONOURS & AWARDS

Documents show numerous honours and awards, culminating with a Lifetime Achievement Award from SNAG in 2008. The maker of our chalice was indeed an innovative metalsmith and teacher.

## CONCLUSION

Recall the date of 18 May. This is the day Heikki died, at age 83 after suffering three strokes. His life was well-lived with focus, struggles, and success. We will forgive him for becoming an American citizen in 1975. Since 1970, ECC has honoured Heikki's work at our Annual Awards Banquet. I hope my paper helps you to remember the maker. I have enjoyed this object for the past year and pass it along to the next deserving recipient. Take care of it as past recipients have done because it is a rare and valuable object in so many ways. Congratulations and best wishes to the 2011 winner of the President's Trophy, our Heikki Chalice.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have received help from libraries and archives, professional organizations, auction houses and members of the Etobicoke Camera Club. Names of all individuals and their contributions are included in my paper. I ask them to accept this small tribute and my sincere thanks. I am grateful to Judy Griffin, who encouraged me from the outset and made constructive criticisms of the draft. Also, I thank Kas Stone for her final reading of this paper to my immense benefit.



