Two UW profs win Guggenheim Fellowships

Two UW professors are among 180 scholars, artists and scientists from the United States and Canada to receive fellowships from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation.

Heidi Pauwels, professor in the Department of Asian Languages and Literature; and Michael Honey, Haley endowed professor of humanities at UW Tacoma were among those appointed on the basis of prior achievement and exceptional promise. The successful candidates were chosen from a group of almost 3,000 applicants.

Pauwels, who earned her doctorate at the UW, has taught here since 1996. She plans to use her fellowship to study an 18th century art patron and poet, the crown prince Savant Singh, also known as Nagridas, who commissioned miniature paintings to illustrate his own poetry. He mainly composed devotional poetry to Krishna, Pauwels said, but she discovered that he also tried his hand at composing in the then-new style of poetry, originally known as Rekhta, but later called Urdu and associated with Islam. Thus Hinduism and Islam were less distant from each other at that time than has been generally believed. Pauwels is working closely with Purnima Dhavan, who is on the faculty of the History Department.

Honey's project is an oral history of John Handcox, an important but little known figure in African American and labor history who was the poet and songwriter of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union in the 1930s. Honey said he was able to interview Handcox at length before he died in 2002 and has collected his songs and poems to be published in the Palgrave Macmillan oral history series. The project, he said, is an effort to make Handcox's work known to the African American musical world and also provide the first lengthy black narrative of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union. Honey earned his doctorate at Northern Illinois University and has been at UW Tacoma since its opening in 1990.

In all, 62 disciplines and 74 different academic institutions are represented by this year's Guggenheim Fellows. Fifty-one Fellows are unaffiliated or hold adjunct or part-time positions at universities.

According to Guggenheim President Edward Hirsch, “The Guggenheim Foundation began as a wonderfully novel experiment. In its first few years, the foundation supported maybe a dozen Fellows in a few key fields. Over the years, its size and impact have grown tremendously. The initial $3 million endowment has ballooned to over $260 million. We now give 180 fellowships in some 78 fields.”

Since its establishment in 1925, the foundation has granted nearly $290 million in fellowships to more than 17,000 individuals. It continues the mission Senator and Mrs. Simon Guggenheim set for it: to "add to the educational, literary, artistic, and scientific power of this country, and also to provide for the cause of better international understanding."