



## **Speech by Reza Abedini at the Presentation of the 2006 Prince Claus Awards. Amsterdam, December 13, 2006.**

Your Majesty, Your Royal Highnesses, Your Excellency the Prime Minister, Excellencies, Members of the Board of the Prince Claus Fund, Honoured Guests of the Prince Claus Fund, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank you all for this honour.

When I was told that I should deliver a short speech in this highly special ceremony, I thought it would be a good idea to begin with history and to focus on “communication”, which is the major concern of my profession, and to look at it in the passage of history and for example to look for the first encounter between Iranians and Dutch people. By searching and studying some books and documents, I found a very interesting point. The first Dutchman who came to Iran and lived there around 1620 was Jan Van Hasslt and he was a painter. He had connections with the court and became very close to the great Iranian king of the Safavid era, Shah Abbas, who was a great patron of the arts.

Jan Van Hasslt lived in Iran for almost twenty years and it was a very effective presence, because the paintings on the walls of Chehel Sotun, the palace which Shah Abbas built to receive his foreign guests, and also the paintings above the entrance door of the Qeisariye Bazaar which show a group of Fleman musicians, are among the works which were influenced by him. He encouraged the king to send an ambassador to the Netherlands and this ambassador was warmly welcomed by Prince Hendrick and the other Dutch aristocrats and elites. So the first connection between our nations was made through an artist, or in better words, through “image”.

And again, a century later, this same communication was made by the great Dutch painter, Rembrandt. He had a collection of world masterpieces and was very much interested in Iranian paintings and made several works which were influenced by them like “majles-e darwishaan”.

After that, many other Dutch ambassadors and merchants came to Iran and the interesting point is that to reach Isfahan, then the capital city of Iran, they all had to cross a very famous and beautiful bridge which still stands elegantly over the river “Zayande rood” in Isfahan, “The Khajoo Bridge”.

In this brief introduction and also all through the history of human beings, the concept of “the bridge” was used as a vehicle to cross a world and enter another world.

Today, the concept of passage and crossing can not be totally confined to crossing a bridge as a physical structure. Perhaps today the media, including graphic design, plays the role of a bridge. And this is one of the major reasons why I am so pleased that this prize was given to a graphic designer, since I believe that graphic design is the art of our time and can play the role of this bridge very effectively.

I have come from a culture where mythology is still living and has not reached an end.

I think that graphic design is a sophisticated de-formation of mythology through the ages.

So, from a post-historical point of view, one can distinguish the reincarnation of myths in graphic works. And that’s why we call the buttons and small images on our software “icons”.

Letters and words are other appearances of myths in our time. Writing is no longer just a means to save information. In today’s world, images have a similar role. The forms and shapes of the letters and words have become very important, and so has the art of working with these forms, that is to say, typography and calligraphy, which I love the most, as do many other graphic designers and other artists of the world.

At the beginning of the Bible we read: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”. There is a similar concept in Islamic mysticism which says: “All the meanings of the world are hidden in one sentence, and all the meanings of that sentence are hidden in one word, and all the meanings of that word are hidden in its dot”. And this is the concept that I’ve worked with in my film, “In the Beginning”.

In the Iranian culture of the Islamic era, words were considered to be the incarnation of the truth, and that is why script and calligraphy were so highly

respected and considered as the noblest art for the Iranians. The act of writing which is called “xosh-nevisi”, that is to say, the good-writing, was a sacred deed and was performed as a ceremonial act. To put it another way, words are themselves, a passage, a passing way for the truth, bridges to link the truth with the people, and the people together.

These concepts have been changed through time and especially with the emergence of Modernism. Words lost their sacred being and came down to the level of a means for exchanging information.

But today they emerge from another ground and that is typography in general which characterizes words as images especially in contemporary graphic design.

In graphic design, publishing and publications have focal importance. One can easily say that, in the past, people went to see works of art, but today, through publishing and publications, graphic works go out to be seen by people, and this is a secret which lies in the hands of the designer.

Every work of art can act as a word, as a bridge for passing from one meaning to another, from one word to another.

In addition, in Iranian beliefs, the human body is called “the small world”, where the words come down, as I have always tried to show in my works. Therefore the human body is sacred, like words, and is a passage to convey meanings through itself. The words increase and pass through the human body and make its form and become one, and so the human being becomes the word itself and so it can be a passage this time, a bridge.

I have come to you by passing through a bridge, which I have made from my body with the words, and now I'm with you.

Thank you.