

*At a meeting of the FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES on October 6, 2015,
the following tribute to the life and service of the late Seymour Slive
was spread upon the permanent records of the Faculty.*

SEYMOUR SLIVE

BORN: September 15, 1920

DIED: June 14, 2014

Seymour Slive, Gleason Professor of Fine Arts, *Emeritus*, a giant in the field of Dutch seventeenth-century painting, died in June 2014 at the patriarchal age of 93. He taught at Harvard for thirty-seven years, chaired the Department of Fine Arts from 1968 to 1971, and directed the Fogg Museum from 1974 to 1982.

Seymour was born in Chicago to a family of Russian immigrants. He came to art history through painting and sculpting and graduated from the University of Chicago in 1943. Wartime service with the U. S. Navy as a commanding officer of small craft in the South Pacific from 1943 to 1946 was followed by graduate study at Chicago, where he took his doctorate in 1952. Two Fulbright Fellowships to the Netherlands confirmed the glories of Dutch painting to him. His first book in 1953 was a study of the *fortuna critica* of Rembrandt that remains the standard treatment of what would now be called the reception history of the artist.

Seymour will always be associated with the great Haarlem portrait painter Frans Hals. His three-volume study of the artist (Phaidon 1970–74) was awarded the Charles Rufus Morey Prize by the College Art Association in 1972. Though the book was meant to be a scientific catalogue, his empathy for the artist transpires at every turn: “Apparently Hals only felt inspired to paint when he was confronted by a fellow human being.” He wrote the essential survey book on Dutch art and architecture with Jakob Rosenberg and E. H. ter Kuile for the Pelican History of Art series in 1966, and in 1995 he republished what had been the lion’s share of the original book, his chapters on painting, with a fuller photographic apparatus. He wrote widely on Rembrandt’s drawings, including a delightful book brought out by the Getty Foundation in 2009. *Jacob van Ruisdael* was published in 1981 as the catalogue for the first major exhibition on the artist, held at the Mauritshuis and at the Fogg; this was followed by his definitive catalogue of Ruisdael’s paintings, drawings, and etchings in 2001 and *Jacob van Ruisdael: Windmills and Watermills*, published by the Getty in 2011.

Seymour was an inspired lecturer, drawing huge numbers into Fine Arts 13, the legendary course he taught in alternate years with James Ackerman. “People, look at that!” he would begin, and then rivet the students’ attention with his special blend of enthusiasm and analysis. This esteemed specialist and renowned connoisseur, who imparted the most rigorous standards of scholarship to faculty and curators across the country, on the Harvard stage exuded sheer joy in the widest possible range of art: “Only donkeys work in fields” was his maxim.

Scholarship and teaching are enough for many, but Seymour was also a gifted museum man. His four exhibitions on Hals and van Ruisdael were pioneering and visually compelling. He was named acting director of the Fogg in 1974 and director the following year, remaining at the helm until 1982. It was not unusual at the time for faculty to assume curatorial positions and even the directorship, and Seymour brought amazing energy to the role. Realizing the half-century-old museum of 1927 was bursting at the seams, he undertook the construction of a new museum for ancient and Asian art, which would also house the Fine Arts Department. He toured the world with the building committee looking at great modern museums and finally selected the distinguished British architect James Stirling. Then began one of the more fraught building projects in Harvard’s history, but it was kept going by Seymour’s dedication and his ability to enlist friends, “begging cup in hand,” in particular Arthur M. Sackler. It is said that at a critical moment, Seymour raised \$3 million in three weeks to keep the project alive. He retired as the Elizabeth and John Moors Cabot Founding Director of the Harvard University Art Museums in 1982 and was there to see an inscription with his name on it when the museum was dedicated, to critical acclaim, in 1985. In the end Stirling’s futuristic bridge over Broadway was never built, and with the three Harvard art museums now collected under Renzo Piano’s glass roof, Seymour’s Sackler awaits a new co-tenant with History of Art and Architecture.

Seymour’s honors began early and continued to accumulate over a lifetime: Officer of the House of Orange-Nassau (1962); two Guggenheim Fellowships; Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and of the Dutch Society of Sciences; member of the Board of Directors of the Burlington Magazine Foundation; Trustee of the Guggenheim Museum (1978–2008) and the Norton Simon Museum; member of the Consultative Committees of the J. Paul Getty Study Center (1984–91) and Museum (1992–96); and Slade Professor of Fine Arts at Oxford (1972–73).

Seymour’s wife of almost sixty-eight years, Zoya Sandomirsky, was born in Moscow but left the Soviet Union in 1927. She was a student at the University of Chicago when they met and married in 1946. The Russian connection remained important to Seymour even at the height of the Cold War. He was an exchange professor at the University of Leningrad in 1960 and served as co-chairman of ACLS/IREX, the Soviet Ministry of Culture

Commission of Fine Arts and Art History that arranged exchanges between the Soviet Union and the United States.

In 1995, on his seventy-fifth birthday, sixty-nine of Seymour's students, remembering not only his vibrant seminars but also the extraordinary letters guiding their studies abroad and his inspired editing, often for a lifetime after the thesis, offered him a hefty Festschrift, *Shop Talk: Studies in Honor of Seymour Slive*. A month before his death, his lifelong service to the university was recognized by an honorary doctorate.

Seymour leaves his wife, Zoya, daughters Katherine and Sarah, a son, Alexander, and five grandchildren. He will also be remembered by dozens of teachers and museum curators of Dutch and Flemish art and countless College alumni in myriad professions who discovered art as the "People" in Fine Arts 13.

Respectfully submitted,

James Ackerman
Thomas Lentz
Joseph Connors, Chair