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INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY
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HOLLANDSTRASSE 11-13, 1020 VIENNA

ISA INTERNATIONAL GUEST LECTURE

AN ANTHROPOLOGIST IN YEMEN

FROM APPRENTICE TO ACTIVIST

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Headlines about Yemen in the twenty-first century have been dominated by news of hijackings, Islamic extremists and political turmoil, and in recent years by the atrocities of a Civil War that is decimating livelihoods and heritage and generating one of the worst humanitarian crises in modern history. The point of departure for this lecture, however, predates the mayhem. A brief window of peace and stability in the country's history allowed Yemen to proudly showcase its rich history, material culture and vernacular architecture on the world stage, develop a burgeoning tourist industry and attract an international cohort of scholars and researchers.

In the mid-1990s I carried out anthropological fieldwork as a labourer and apprentice to Yemen's most-esteemed family of minaret builders. The lecture will illustrate that study and its principal findings and describe the ways in which it informed my apprentice-style field method and inquiries into skill-based learning for subsequent studies. These included training with mud masons in Djenné (Mali) and fine woodworkers in East London; and, most recently, carrying out a one-on-one study with a young Ugandan-British artist/craftsman.

Soon after completing my fieldwork in Sanaa, stability in Yemen deteriorated. A decade later, a similar state of affairs played out in Mali. The content of my lecture will extend into these periods of post-security, describing the ways that an anthropological understanding of craftwork, vernacular building knowledge and architectural heritage has led to political and cultural activism. Since 2012 I have channelled resources into enhancing public knowledge of the value and intelligence of skilled practice and of the critical importance of protecting tangible and intangible heritage in war-torn regions, such as Yemen.



Trevor Marchand is Emeritus Professor of Social Anthropology at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London; recipient of the Royal Anthropological Institute's Rivers Memorial Medal (2014), and consultant for ICOMOS. He is a trained architect (McGill), a PhD in anthropology (SOAS), and a qualified fine woodworker (London Building Crafts College). Marchand has conducted fieldwork with craftspeople in Nigeria, Yemen, Mali, and London. He has published extensively, directed documentary films and curated exhibitions around the world. His forthcoming monograph is titled *The Pursuit of Pleasurable Work*.

