



PAX CULTURA

**NICHOLAS ROERICH**

Sina Fosdick





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**IN COMMEMORATION**

of the

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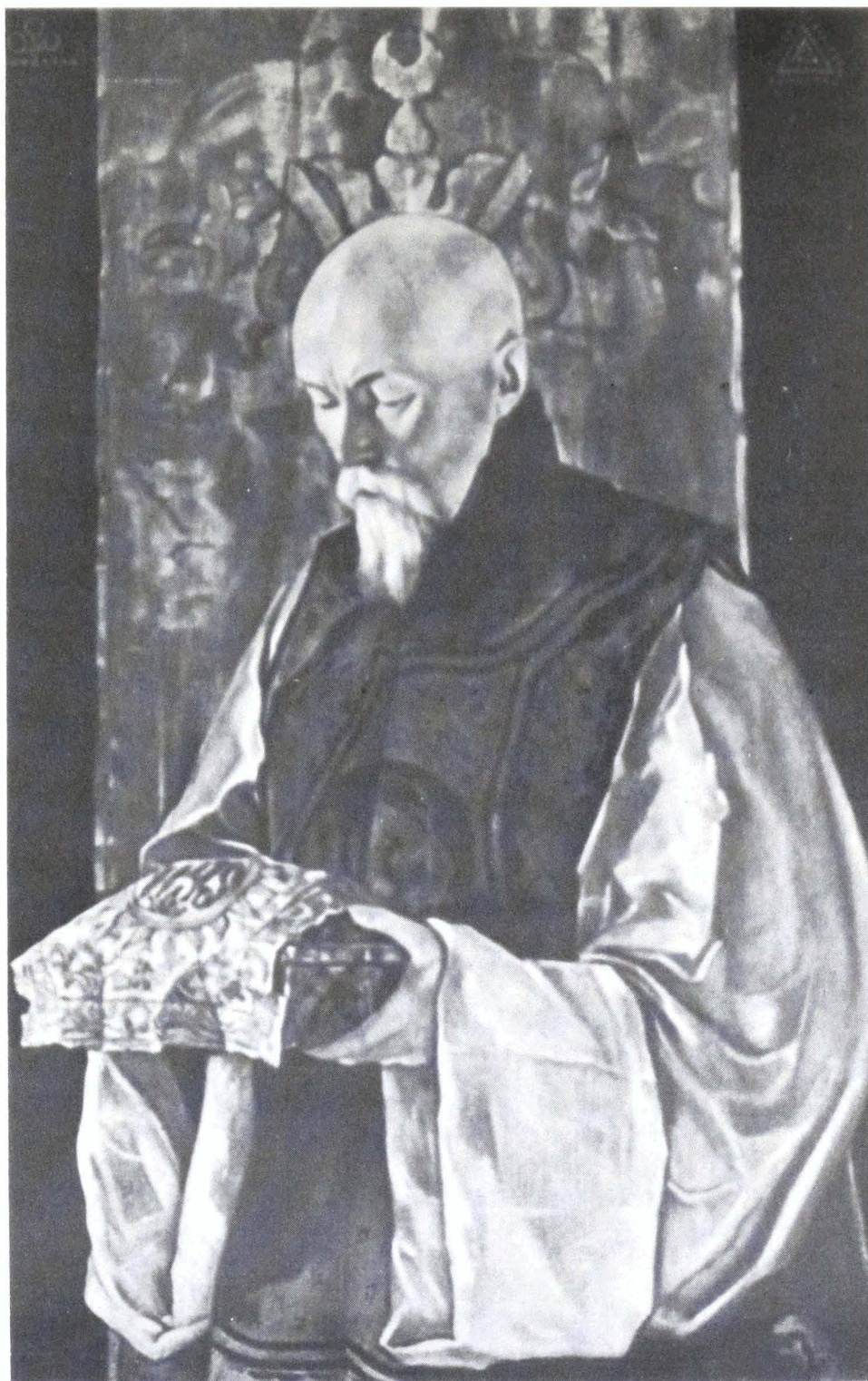
**NICHOLAS ROERICH MUSEUM**

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PORTRAIT BY SVETOSLAV ROERICH

# NICHOLAS K. ROERICH

1874 – 1947

"Father was a great Philosopher, a constant seeker after Truth. These aspects of his life were the paramount beacons of all his creative activities. Whatever he did, whatever he has accomplished, has always been closely interlinked with his own inner attitude. His writings, like his paintings, reflect that constant inner search and realisation."

Svetoslav Roerich

It is a difficult task to evaluate a great man, as there are immeasurable phases of his creativity. They form an integral whole and one cannot separate them. Thus, one may speak of them as multifaceted links of the one lofty, limitless chain.

"In the history of fine arts certain individuals have appeared from time to time, whose work has a unique and profound quality which differentiates them from their contemporaries, making it impossible to classify them in any known category and to ally them with any school, because they resemble themselves only – and one another, like some spaceless and timeless order of initiates. Such were Leonardo, Rembrandt, Duerer, Blake and in other fields Beethoven, Balzac, Rodin....Roerich in his life, in his character and in his art reveals himself as a member of this fraternity".

To these words of Claude Bragdon one may add that Roerich's art lies outside time and place. The many phases of his creativity bring to us not only the image of an artist, but also the images of scholar, scientist, writer, creator of unique humanitarian projects and an interpreter of our epoch.

Nikolai Konstantinovich Roerich was born in St. Petersburg on October 9, 1874. His childhood and early years were passed on his parents' estate "Isvara," among impenetrable, northern forests, which left an indelible stamp upon his whole life. Frequently left to himself, and under the influence of his surroundings, he was greatly attracted to the poetry and romanticism of the legendary Russian past. At an early age, he had an opportunity, not only in books, but with a spade in his hands, to read the history of Earth, excavating the prehistoric tumuli, contacting the distant past – there and then he sensed the earth, the stone, not only on their surface, but as life itself. In these

early impressions he found the means of communing with nature and with the past, which preserves the sources of our existence that have long since gone.

At the same time his talent for drawing was developing. M.O. Mikeshin, a well-known sculptor, saw his first drawings and while guiding him, watched with admiration his rapid progress.

Roerich continued with his excavations, finding many objects of antiquity which led to his subsequent studies of archaeology. Later he was to become one of the leading archaeologists in Russia, and his authoritative knowledge in that field greatly influenced his creativeness in art. Already, during his first years in school (Russian "gymnasia") he began to write; his articles on archaeology, short stories, poems, and legends, were published in many magazines. While still at school, he applied himself seriously to painting. Upon the insistence of his father, a noted attorney who wished him to follow the same career, he entered the University of St. Petersburg in the faculty of law in 1893 and, at the same time, he passed the entrance examination for the Academy of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg.

The academic years of young Roerich were full of intense, creative work. He continued with his writings on art and archaeology, devoting much of his time to his chosen art – painting. An important role in his creative development was played by his teacher at the Academy of Fine Arts, A.I. Kuindji. Himself, a renowned artist, of tireless energy, Kuindji stimulated many of his students, and had a great influence on Roerich. Allowing complete freedom to his students, never imposing upon them his method of painting, he awakened in them an urge for self-expression. Roerich became his ablest and most famous pupil, although Kuindji's style of painting was never reflected in his art.

In the academic exhibition, prior to his graduation from the Academy of Fine Arts in 1897, Roerich's painting, "The Messenger," attracted wide attention. It was at once acquired by P.M. Tretyakov for his unique collection at the Tretyakov Gallery, which established the name of the young artist and inscribed it on the pages of history of Russian art.

Undoubtedly, his archaeological researches, into the Stone Age, were of great importance to him. They formed the basis of his style, and many paintings of his first period have a neolithic grandeur all their own.

In "The Messenger" Roerich brings us close to the remote past, with its hard, austere life. In a primitive skiff, the messenger paddles hastily across the river, in the light of the northern evening. What is the news he is bringing? Of the imminent danger? And the epic landscape with two lonely people, stealing through the night, portends some historic and significant event full of foreboding and mystery.

The later paintings: "The Slavs," "The Elders are Meeting," "Guests from Beyond the Sea," "Idols," "Building the Ships," reveal the primordial freshness of color and the heroic strength of the subject



matter. The ancient man in his paintings is generally a hunter, a fisherman, a builder or a warrior – ever strong in body, tempered in labor and battle, and always linked with the majestic scenes of the Russian north. In his paintings of ancient Russia, Roerich relies upon historic sources, folk-lore, legends and ancient monuments, but a greater emphasis is placed by him on intuition, and the penetration into the spirit of the past. He knows how to perceive and awaken in a landscape its remote history, buried in the mist of ages. The vivid blue of the water reflecting the bright, clear, spring morning, purple-yellows, vivid reds, glowing in the sun, merge into a strong tonal harmony, full of ringing joy.

"He tells us of the first days of human existence on the earth, of man's ideas and struggle with the dark powers of nature. He describes the customs and habits of our forefathers with a vibrant emotion and with such an abundance of details, that the power of the past completely overcomes us." \*1

This powerful desire to grasp the monumental beauty of the treasures of Russia's past caused him to make several trips to the ancient Russian cities in 1903-1904. He visited Yaroslavl, Rostov, Vladimir, Suzdal, Pskov, Novgorod, Isborsk, Pechory, Uglich and many other ancient centers of Russian art and culture. From these trips Roerich made a great number of sketches depicting the early Russian architecture. With these remarkable drawings and paintings, and numerous articles, he began a public campaign for the defence and preservation of ancient Russian art, whose significance was hardly known to the general public. \*2

In one of the paintings of that period, "Building the Ship," we see the artist's keen interest in the early Slav's creative abilities. People are hurriedly building a big galley-ship. Heavy logs are sawed into pieces and carried by the men garbed in white. The northern landscape, with its patch of murky skies, furnished a cool tonality for the background contrasted with the red banners of the galleys.

In many paintings of that period the decorative element is emotional and even dramatic. Thus, in "Battle" (1906), the very combination of coppery-yellow, red and dense blues brings the feeling of tumult and agitation. It is characteristic of Roerich that the battle is not only conducted by the Viking galleys, but also by the waves of the foaming sea and by the stormy onrush of fantastic clouds. Thus he spiritualizes Nature, making her, as it were, the accomplice of human deeds. This pantheistic feeling for nature reveals an important side of his art.

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\*1 ROERICH, by Michael Babenstchikoff, New World Library, New Delhi, India

\*2 Due to a strange destiny most of these architectural sketches of churches, cathedrals, monasteries, city walls and towers came later to America. The Oakland Art Museum loaned a large collection of these to the Nicholas Roerich Museum in New York.

These formative years brought him fame and success, not only through his exhibitions in Russia, but also abroad in Prague, Berlin, Vienna, Dusseldorf, Milan, Venice and Rome. His name became widely known and his paintings were acquired by many European museums and private collections. In 1907 an Exhibition of Contemporary Russian Art was organized in Paris by Princess M.K. Tenishev in which Roerich exhibited 130 works. He was elected member of the Salon d'Automne, of the Vienna Cession, and to the National Academy in Rheims.

As the Director of the School for the Encouragement of Arts in St. Petersburg, Russia, he brings to this institution of 2,000 students a national reputation of the most progressive school in Russia. He introduces many reforms, believing that students should not only receive practical knowledge and development of their abilities but also must embrace the entire scope of all living, active parts of art. Special workshops, ikon-painting, and handicrafts are organized, and also a museum of Russian art is founded by Roerich.

At that period Roerich was also attracted to a unique art project, created by Princess M.K. Tenishev at her estate, Talashkino, near Smolensk. He encouraged folk-art, woodcarving, mosaics and even drew personally sketches for furniture. For the Memorial Church in Talashkino he painted his famous frescoes: "Queen of Heaven," "The Throne of the Invisible God," and the image of Christ in mosaic, giving his own interpretation of the Byzantine Tradition. \*1

He was made a member of The Academy of Fine Arts, and at the same time elected to the Board of the Society of Architects.

The summers of 1909 and 1910 Roerich spent in Italy, Germany, Holland and England. At the same time he painted the stage settings for the "Prince Igor" Ballet Suite for a Diaghileff production in Paris. His Exhibitions were also shown in Paris, London, Brussels, Rome and Zurich.

In Russia the Tretyakov Gallery and the Museum of Alexander III acquired several of his paintings. A great recognition was accorded him in electing him the president of "Mir Iskusstva". \*2

As early as 1912 one can detect a prophetic trend in Roerich's art. "The Last Angel", standing among whirling clouds, over the earth surrounded by fire; "The Conflagration" – a castle aflame, with a bas-relief of a Belgian lion and a knight standing on guard; "Crowns – three kings give an oath in some alliance, and in the air, among the clouds, their crowns disappear into the mist; "The Doomed City" surrounded by a giant serpent, closing all exits; "The Sword of Courage" in which a flaming guard raises his sword at the castle-stronghold, and at the gates careless guards are asleep; "Human Deeds" in which a

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\*1 The writer, while in Russia, in the summer of 1961, learned that most of these frescoes were destroyed during the war.

\*2 An organization consisting of leading Russian artists under the name "The World of Art," which became internationally known.

group of terrified wise men are looking down at a destroyed city, and other paintings of similar character, in which the artist foresees and paints the threatening catastrophe.

His great interest in the theatre is evident in a series of remarkable sketches for the stage settings for the opera "Prince Igor." Among these "Putivl," showing Russia of the early Kiev period, and "Polovetsky Camp," of the second act of the opera, reveal a mood of history, combining it with emotional power. This opera, produced by Diaghileff in Paris, gave Roerich the reputation of a great stage designer. Later on he did settings for "Peer Gynt", "Princess Maleine," "Sister Beatrice," for the Moscow Art Theater, and "Tristan and Isolde" for the Zimin Opera in Moscow, along with several operas by Rimsky-Korsakoff.

Barnett Conlan gives a fine description of the "Sacre du Printemps" settings by Roerich. "When Roerich designed the settings for the 'Rite of Spring' in 1912, his style was at that time the most advanced, and it is a question if any other painter could have approached the heart of the subject with so much insight. Not only did he give the outer sense of spring – the great spaces of the growing light, the hard green landscape caught up by the evening glow, but he also gave that inner sense of the sharp, chill sap rising through the pores of the earth, all the acid activity of fresh vegetation as shrill in its movements as the east wind. The colors were hard and clean, the forms rough and primitive, and what was infinitely old in a circle of ancient rocks, seemed to have again come round on the ring of time and pointed to the future.

"The most modern technique of today could not have done more, not half as much." \*1

Roerich's literary activities were continuous and in 1914 the first volume of his writings was published by Sytin, well known publishers.

Successful exhibitions in Malmo, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Helsingfors, spread his fame in Scandinavian countries. In 1915 were celebrated 25 years of his artistic and creative activities. A splendid monograph was published by "Svobodnyoe Iskusstvo" (Free Art) for this occasion, with articles by Baltrushaitis, Benois, Gidoni, Yaremich, Remisoff, illustrated by many reproductions, from Roerich paintings. \*2

In May, 1917, Roerich was living in Finland, on the north shore of Lake Ladoga. There he painted "Finland-Heroica Series" in rich harmonies of colors. Leonid Andreev's article "The Realm of Roerich" (the last he wrote before his death) appeared in a Helsingfors paper in Finnish at the time of the Roerich Exhibition there, in March, 1919. At

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\*1 NICHOLAS ROERICH – The Master of the Mountains by Barnett D. Colan, "Flamma," Liberty, Indiana, U.S.A.

\*2 A copy of this rare publication can be seen upon request at the Nicholas Roerich Museum.

the same time, Leo Feigenberg, a renowned Dutch art critic, also, through a strange coincidence, wrote an article, "In the Land of Roerich," not knowing about Andreev's tribute to the artist.

In 1920 Roerich exhibits in London at the Gupil Gallery in an exhibition entitled "Spells of Russia", and Herbert Root, Director of the London Public Library, calls him "the strongest personality in modern art." The Victoria Albert Museum purchased two Roerich paintings. A number of his paintings were acquired by private collections in England, among them "St. Mercury of Smolensk", "Churchyard in Pskov" and others. The Worthing Museum held an exhibition of his paintings and bought "The Dragon and the Crown." In the meantime the artist worked on the stage settings for "Sniegurochka," (Snow Maiden) for a Covent Garden production. He also designed the sketches for the operas "Tzar Saltan," "Sadko," and "Prince Igor." "Polovetsky Camp" – a ballet from "Prince Igor" with settings designed by Roerich was by then an internationally known classic, which has reached its 500th performance, as Diaghileff wired to the artist.

In April of 1920, Dr. Robert Harshe, director of the Chicago Art Institute invited Roerich for an exhibition tour through the United States; Roerich accepted the invitation and arrived in New York on October 2nd of that year. His first exhibition of nearly 400 paintings took place at the Kingore Gallery in New York. An enthusiastic reception by the press and public alike established Roerich's name in America. This exhibition toured the country through 29 principal cities and lasted for one and a half years.

The summer of 1921 Roerich spent in Monhegan, Maine where he painted the "Ocean Series." In that year he founded the International Society of Artists – "Cor Ardens." He traveled widely, and gave lectures at the University of California, Santa Fe Museum, Chicago Art Institute, and other centers. At the same time he continued writing and his articles appeared in art magazines and publications in America and abroad. In the same year he founded the "Master School of United Arts." embodying his firm belief that "all arts should be united under one roof." A group of renowned artists, musicians and teachers, joined Roerich in this unique cultural enterprise.

The "Snow Maiden" by Rimsky-Korsakoff, with the stage setting by Roerich was commissioned by Mary Garden and given at the Chicago Opera, becoming an immediate success.

In 1923 the artist left for Europe, en route to the East for his Central Asiatic Expedition. And on May 3rd of that year, he left Europe for India.

On November 17th the Roerich Museum was opened in New York, comprising several hundreds of his paintings.

Brief as it was, the artist's stay in America, from 1921-23, was marked by the creation of some of his important paintings, such as "Ocean Series," "Monhegan Series," Santa Fe, Arizona, "Messiah Series," "Grand Canyon," "Sancta Series," also numerous costumes

and sketches for "Sniegourotchka," besides much else. He also lectured in those cities where his exhibitions were held. Cultural leaders, representatives of governments, artists and young people flocked to Roerich from all over the country; groups were formed which later took on the name of Roerich Societies, proclaiming his ideals and precepts for Peace, Beauty and Knowledge. People were drawn to him as a great humanitarian and spiritual leader, and not only as a famous artist. His books – ADAMANT, PATH OF BLESSINGS and later, FLAME IN CHALICE appeared in English and other languages. His art and writings had a profound influence on old and young, on both simple and renowned. Those who met him left spiritually enriched, looking forward to a new life of service for the Common Good of humanity, and inspired by his panhumanitarian ideals. His paintings, apart from their beauty, their mastery of technique and his brilliant colors, evoked a deep response because of their themes. His power to translate art into spiritual and visionary language gave special significance to his paintings. In assimilating them, one derives a new force, which quickens the spirit and opens new reaches of attainment. As one writer said about him – "he leads humanity to the gates of heaven," for as Roerich asserted in one of his essays: "From continually living in fear and fighting against the world that surrounds him, man has come to imprison himself in a labyrinth from which there will be no escape until he again strikes the broad highway whence he started. This immense beauty of a far-off past stirs him to visions of the future, of a New Era, when the aspiration toward art and the effort to beautify life will again be universal."

Research pertaining to the rather uncommon name of "Roerich" and its history was undertaken by this writer. In a book "N. ROERICH" by A. Mantel (1912, Kazan, Russia) the author states that it is the Danish-Norwegian name of the family which became known at the time of Peter the Great. However, centuries before this, the family name was already known in Denmark, Jutland, Zealand and England. Famous war commanders and bishops were members of that family.

An interesting detail – in ancient Scandinavian rich means literally rich (as in English) and ro or ru means glory – rich in glory. From ancient Russian history we learn: "Rurik arrived with his brothers Sineus and Truvor," which, as interpreted by the northerners, means: "Konung Rurik came with his house (sinhuus) and faithful warriors (tru ver)."

In 1907 a book in German by E.W. Rohrig – STUDY OF THE NAME ROERICH appeared in Barmen, Germany. In it the author after exhaustive study shows that in 850-873 Frankish chronicles mention a Dane Rorich, who was also known as Rorichus, Roric, Roricus. This Dane was a stranger in France at that time. In a chronicle dated September 13, 860, Kaiser Lothar II mentions the lands of Rorich, meaning undoubtedly the same Dane. He was baptized in 863 and gave up his Danish rights, and sent back to Denmark his followers. Because

of this, Lothar II rewarded him with many benefits and distinctions. The name in the chronicle was written as Hroericus, belonging to a Northman (a Dane). In the year 1,000 the Swedish-Gothic form of the name was Hroerik (Hrurik). In the southeast of Sweden one meets a Rurik, who is supposed to have been the founder of the Russian State. This seems to show that Rurik and the old Nordic Hroerik are identical.

In his chronicles, Nestor a monk-historian of the Pechorsky Monastery in Kiev (1056-1115) speaks of Vassily Rostislavich Rjurik, who was the Prince of Kiev. Nestor calls him Rurik.

And so Roerich, like this possible ancestor who came to Russia to build and organize, in the first period of his creativeness dedicates his art to the early history of Russia. From that source, he derived his own, specific style. Many of his early paintings are dedicated to the Stone Age and to the early Slav Builders, their austere life, their battling with the elements, their glimpses of higher forces, their gradual spiritual awakening. By means of his art, the artist tells us that humanity has existed here on Earth for many a million years, and that the immense cycle of time is again bringing us round to a New Era. The landscapes of 1916 are amazing in their strength and beauty. Here the artist, as it were, takes farewell for a while of his homeland and all that was most dear and near to him.

A new period in the life and art of Roerich began in 1923 when he came to India. Heading an artistic-scientific expedition for five years, he explored the "Heart of Asia" – India, Tibet, Mongolia, Chinese Turkestan, Altai and other remote places in Central Asia. From Kashmir to Ladak – the Western-Tibetan highland – he took the caravan route, which is the highest in the world, across the Karakorum Pass to the ancient Khotan oasis, which in the early medieval period was one of the centers of Indian Buddhist culture. It was then that he began the series "Signs of Maitreya" – the Buddhist world of legend and the austere nature of Tibetan highlands. From there he proceeded to Altai, Mongolia and Tibet, collecting data on Asiatic culture and philosophy and painting over 500 magnificent works – a panorama of Asia, which no Western artist had ever produced. In these paintings Roerich revealed the virgin, untouched beauty of these parts; his art language became still more sonorous and his colors reflected the vivid aspects of nature. He was the first to discover and capture the majestic beauty of the Himalayas.

In his book ALTAI-HIMALAYA, he evokes the immense space of Inner Asia, the sources of ancient Indian culture, the monuments of her great past as well as her stores of folk-lore. From Altai in the North to the Himalayas in the South, from Belukha to the summits of Himalayas, he sees the poles of one grandiose mountain worlds.

On his returning from the expedition to Darjeeling in India at the end of 1928, he finally settled in Naggar, Kulu, in the western Himalayas, thus realizing the dream of his life. The majesty of this great mountain world, with all its beauty and splendor, took hold of



him. He observed it at all hours of the day and night. Many of his important paintings – "Remember," "Drops of Life," "Pearls of Striving," "Signs of Maitreya," "Banners of the East," "Tibetan Strongholds" – belong to this period.

The chief objective of the Roerich Expedition was to create a pictorial record (in paintings by Roerich) of the lands and people of Inner Asia. The second objective was to survey the possibilities for further archaeological explorations, and the third was to secure art treasures and ethnographical collections revealing the culture of asiatic peoples. This expedition was the first one to cross the Tibetan highlands from North to South, from Western China to India.

Several books by Roerich, HEART OF ASIA, REALM OF LIGHT, ALTAI-HIMALAYA, SHAMBHALA and the important Monograph, HIMALAYA, published by Brentano in 1929, New York, are the main records of the Expedition.

1\* "The Himalayan Research Institute was inaugurated by Roerich in Naggar, Kulu, in the Punjab, India, after his return from the Expedition, and dedicated to the study of the Himalayan mountain region. The Institute was also intended to serve for many new expeditions of a broad character, covering both nature and the inhabitants of these regions. The tasks of the scientific research of the Himalayan mountains country had to be of a more exacting nature and one which could not be achieved by the comparatively short-timed duration of a big expedition.

"The buildings of the Institute were erected on a mountain ridge, at an altitude of 6,500 feet.

"From 1930-1939 scientific work and explorations were conducted under the guidance of the artist, until the events of the Second World War brought about a temporary halt to those activities.

"The Himalayan Research Institute had two departments: botanical and ethnological – linguistic – the latter was also concerned with exploring archaeological sites. Each year, at the beginning of summer, when the mountain passes were open, the expedition squads went their way toward the Tibetan highland and into the high mountain zone of the Himalayas. In October they returned to the main base of the Institute in Kulu and spent the winter months in working on the materials collected. Rich botanical collections were gathered; Dr. E.D. Merrill, the director of the Botanical Gardens in New York and the Associates of the Museum of Natural History in Paris, under the direction of Prof. P. Lemoine, likewise took part in this work. The Institute also planned to study the cosmic rays in high mountain regions. Prof. Benade of Forman College in Lahore devoted an article to these studies in the Institute's journal – "Urusvati." A rich collection of Tibetan pharmacopoeia was gathered and for some years the Tibetan lama-physicians

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\*1 The ensuing data was taken from "Memorial Leaves," an article by Dr. George N. Roerich.

shared in this work. An index of Tibetan medicinal herbs was prepared by the members of the Institute, thus laying the necessary foundation for further research in this field.

"In linguistics the Institute made a special study of Tibetan dialects of the Himalayan mountain belt and of the adjacent districts of the Tibetan highlands. The Institute published the work of Dr. George N. Roerich concerning the Tibetan dialect Garja-Lahoul, which belongs to the group of Western-Tibetan dialects.

"In the same way were gathered ethnographical collections which illustrated the culture and way of life of the various tribes of the Himalayan mountain region and of Tibet. Thus, the Institute directed by Prof. Roerich has greatly enlarged our knowledge of the Himalayas."

Roerich's paintings of the Himalayan range, together with his writings, awakened great interest in these mountains and many expeditions began to turn toward them.

New honors were conferred on the artist who was elected Honorary President of Maha-Bodhi Society of America, a member of the Yugoslavian Academy of Art and Science, and Vice-President of the Archaeological Institute of America. Musee de Luxembourg in Paris acquired his painting "Castles of Maitreya;" the League of Composers produced, at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, "Sacre du Printemps" with Martha Graham and Leonid Massine, with Leopold Stokowski conducting, of which the stage settings and costumes were designed by Roerich. After a great success in New York, the "Sacre du Printemps" was repeated in Philadelphia. After visiting later America, France and England, Professor Roerich returned to India.

In 1931 he carried out excavations in Pondicherry; this year marks also the start of the "Urusvati Journal," the official organ of the Himalayan Research Institute.

In the same year the First International Convention dedicated to the Roerich Pact and Banner of Peace was held at Bruges in Belgium. This unique project of Professor Roerich, launched by him in 1929 in New York, stipulated that all educational, artistic, scientific and religious institutions, and all sites of cultural and historic significance and value should be recognized as inviolate and respected by all nations in times of war and peace. \*1

For this purpose a treaty was drawn up to be signed by all nations and a special Banner was designed by Roerich, to fly over all buildings and sites to be protected. This Pact was endorsed by the International Museums' Office at the League of Nations. Committees and numerous cultural organizations were formed all over the world for its acceptance and endorsement under the name of Roerich Pact and Banner of Peace Societies.

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\*1 It was actually conceived in 1904 in Russia, when N.K. Roerich proposed this plan to the Society of Architects. In 1914 it was again proposed to the state authorities.

The first International Convention in Bruges, Belgium, held in 1931 attracted the interest of many governments in Europe. It was followed by the second International Convention, also in Bruges, in 1932. As a result, the "Roerich Foundation pro pace, arte, scientiae et labore" was founded in Bruges after the session of the International Convention. Representatives of governments, civic military and cultural leaders, dignitaries of the church, scientific and art societies participated in both conventions, advocating the adoption of the Roerich Pact and Banner of Peace.

1933 saw the Third Convention held on November 17th and 18th in Washington, in which the representatives of 35 nations took part. Statesmen, religious leaders, well known personalities in art, science and education, endorsed the Roerich Peace Pact and Banner. The Convention passed a resolution to recommend the adoption of this humanitarian measure to the governments of all nations. \*1

The seventh Conference of the Pan-American Union at Montevideo, held a month later, passed a unanimous resolution to accept the above and to urge their participants – the 21 governments of North, Central and South America – to sign the Pact and thus apply its great principles in life.

The Roerich Pact and Peace Banner Committees were actively functioning during this period in America, Europe and Asia.

On April 14, 1935, in the office of President Roosevelt, at the White House in Washington, the official representatives of the United States of America and all the twenty Latin-American countries signed the Treaty of the Pact. After the signing of the Pact, President Roosevelt delivered the following message in an international broadcast: "It is most appropriate that on this day, designated as Pan-American Day by the chief executives of all the republics of the American continent, the governments – members of the Pan-American Union – should sign a treaty which marks a step forward in the preservation of the cultural achievements of the nations of this hemisphere. In opening this Pact to the adherence of the nations of the world, we are endeavoring to make of universal application one of the principles vital to the preservation of modern civilization. This treaty possesses a spiritual significance far deeper than the text of the instrument itself. Let us bring renewed allegiance to those high principles of international cooperation and helpfulness, which, I feel assured, will be a great contribution to civilization by the Americas."

In October of 1937 the Congress of Roerich Baltic Societies convened in Riga, Latvia. The same year the Banner of Peace was unfurled in Karachi, India.

In 1946 the Sixth All-India Cultural Unity Conference met in Calcutta, and the Chairman, Pandit Amarnath Jha, proposed the adoption

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\*1 The proceedings of the Washington Convention as well as those of the First and Second Bruges Conventions, were published in New York and Paris.

of the Roerich Pact, which was unanimously voted. In 1948 the government of India made a declaration adhering to and adopting the Roerich Pact and Banner of Peace. In 1950 the Roerich Pact Committee sent to Dr. Torres Bode, chief director of UNESCO a copy of the Pact with the complete documentation of the history of this movement.

In 1954, with the Roerich Pact and Banner of Peace as its foundation, a conclusive act of Inter-Governmental Conference for the defence of cultural property in the event of armed conflict was signed at the Hague and subsequently ratified in Paris in 1955, by the 39 member states who were signatories to the Conclusive Act of the Hague Conference.

The Roerich Banner of Peace has the following design: three red spheres on a white background, encircled by a red circle. This sign of the triad is interpreted by some as a symbol of past, present and future, enclosed in the ring of Eternity. Others consider that it refers to religion, science and art, held together in the circle of culture. \*1

Roerich's calls for the highest principles of ethics and for the defence of culture found solution in his Peace Pact and Banner. From his high outpost in the Himalayas he called untiringly to all parts of the world – his was the voice of humanity for humanity's sake.

Roerich the artist found in the nature of India the sonorous scale of colors for which he had been long in search. Inwardly prepared for this new vividness of color, his language became more stirring, creating a deep spiritual mood in his paintings. In his mastery of the technique of tempera, the tones are deep and velvety, there is fluidity, but also strength.

Roerich was actually the first great artist to "discover" the beauty of the Himalayas and depict them in painting. The nature of this immense mountain range was revealed by him in all its cosmic greatness. He was particularly impressed by the strangeness of the Tibetan landscape. Such paintings as "Nanda-Devi" (one of the sacred peaks of the central Himalayas) and "Remember" are full of pathos. The small figure of the rider, the flags rising on poles from the roof of the hut – all stress the gradiose scale of the mountain world. In his many paintings of that period it is not only the beauty but also the amazing architecture of the country which he depicts. His sketches and small paintings from the series "Strongholds of Tibet," are in this respect remarkable. The monasteries, perched upon the inaccessible towering mountain cliffs reveal the boldness and stupendous mastery of those ancient architects. These simple architectural forms blend harmoniously with the mountain tops and create a feeling of unity. Stupas, strongholds and palaces are striking against the lofty background of the mountains, by the effect of their lighting, colors and decorative quality, and reflecting a romantic and stirring mood.

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\*1 "The Roerich Pact and the Banner of Peace" published by the Roerich Pact Committee, New York, 1947.



PORTRAIT BY SVETOSLAV ROERICH





Roerich was always deeply interested in the imagery of folk-lore and especially attached to the hero of the Mongolo-Tibetan epic "Gessar Khan." "The Sword of Gessar" and "The Signs of Gessar" reflect by their primitive animal style a sense of remote antiquity. Rarely does Roerich paint the people. Nature in his canvasses is sufficient in itself although it never eliminates the presence of man. At the basis of all his art there is a feeling of admiration, reverence and rapture before the grandeur of nature. Roerich, in his contemplation of nature, does not present her in a limited, subjective way, but with a wide panoramic vision that shows her in all her grandeur. Even in his small sketches this monumental style is apparent.

In his early life the artist was always linked with the northern lands, austere, tragic and simple, and from the ancient north his path led him to India. True, it is difficult to name any artist who could "change" more frequently than Roerich. He is one of those few who does not stop on a creative path. With him each new canvas is a surprise. Not satisfied with his vast experience and not wishing to repeat himself, he always sought to renew and perfect his form of expression.

His spiritual life was closely linked with the realm of mystic quests, so that he makes us believe in the eternal return through new incarnations. Many of his themes are taken from visions and dreams – his creativity cannot be generalised since it is in itself a *synthesis*. In his literary works and in all his cultural pursuits, there is an ever-flowing fertility.

In his early period one discerns two categories – realistic and metaphysical paintings. He becomes, as it were, a part of all he sees – stones, clouds, sea or forest, and his spirit yearns for the remote past. "A man who does not understand the past, cannot think of the future" says Roerich. His landscapes are rich and vivid in color. In his second period he evokes the life in the Stone Age and the times of the Vikings. In the veiled fantasy are born distant images which the artist transposes on the canvas. He loves the far-off where there is a greater sweep for flights and solitude. "Roerich is all mystery" a fellow artist writes about him.

From his earliest years India had always attracted Roerich. In one of his articles, "The Indian Pathway," he wrote, "Because of Byzantium we dreamt of India and we wend our way toward her... Beauty abides in India. Beckoning it the great Indian way."

Roerich's trip to India and life there were organic, as it were, for the artist. If in his early work he sought beauty in the ancient past of Russia, he found all the beauty in India in the majestic landscapes of the Himalayas. A great number of his paintings are dedicated to this stupendous mountain world. His "Himalayan Series" are the loftiest expression of his genius. To his many friends and admirers in India he was known as Himalaya-putra – the son of the Himalayas. And the people addressed him as Maharshi and Gurudev.

Exhibitions of his paintings were periodically shown all over India – Bombay, Hyderabad, New Delhi, Madras, Indore, Baroda, Lahore, Ahmedabad, Mysore, Calcutta and other centers. His art was widely acclaimed throughout India, while he lived and worked in his beloved Himalayas. Special Roerich Halls are dedicated to his paintings in the museums in Allahabad, Benares, Trivandrum and Baroda. His warm friendships with Tagore, Jagadis Bose and Nehru show how intimately he knew and loved India.

The second World War found him in the Himalayas profoundly affected by this great holocaust during which he wrote and spoke untiringly, sending out appeals to all parts of the world, summoning the support of the progressive forces, fighting the great battle for freedom.

In his last paintings he returned to his ancient Russian themes, painting the Novgorod monuments destroyed by acts of enemy vandalism. In these epic canvases, grandiose in style, he evoked the history of ancient Russia.

Toward the end of his life Roerich revealed the greatness of his spirit by his dedication to the safeguarding of world peace and the treasures of the human spirit. In this battle he foresaw a powerful, cultural union between all the nations of the world.

His motherland, Russia, honored its greatest contemporary artist by dedicating to his art several halls at the State Russian Museum in Leningrad. Many important Roerich paintings are also to be seen in the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, in the museums in Novosibirsk, Gorki, Kiev, Odessa, and in private collections, in all near to one thousand paintings.

In the United States, besides the paintings in the Nicholas Roerich Museum in New York and Oakland Art Museum in Oakland, California, there are a number of private collections which contain paintings belonging to the different periods of his creativeness. There is hardly a country in Europe where one cannot find Roerich paintings in the museums and private collections. During his lifetime he painted over 7,000 paintings.

Roerich died on December 13, 1947, in his beloved Himalayas, and all India paid homage to him. A simple large stone – at the spot where he was cremated, near the house where he lived – is at present a center of pilgrimage in India. Young and old, simple people and intellectuals flock to this part of the Himalayas from everywhere. His son, Svetoslav Roerich, a renowned artist, and his wife, Devika Rani, a great Indian actress, are building a Roerich Museum in Naggar, Kulu, where Nicholas Roerich lived and worked during the last 18 years of his life.

It is fitting to quote his own words which speak of that future which he envisaged, and which humanity, if it shall survive, should manifest as its protective armor:

**\*1 "Real Peace, Real Unity is desired by the human heart. It strives to labor creatively and actively. For its labor is a source of joy. It wants to love and expand in the realization of Sublime Beauty. In the highest perception of Beauty and Knowledge all conventional divisions disappear. The heart speaks its own language; it wants to rejoice at that which is common for all, uplifts all and leads to the radiant Future. All symbols and tablets of humanity contain one hieroglyph, the sacred prayer – Peace and Unity."**

**Sina Fosdick  
New York**

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**\*1 "Cultural Unity," article by N. Roerich.**

Materials for the short biography of Professor N.K. Roerich were taken from several books and monographs published in America, India, France, Latvia, and the Soviet Union; also from articles by: Dr. George Roerich, U. Baltrushaitis, A. Benois, A. Gidoni, S. Yaremich, K. Youon, A. Mantel, E. Gollerbach, A. Rostislavov, S. Makovsky, M. Voloshin, E. Jouravleva, N. Dmitrieva, L. Andreyev and B. Conlan.

