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PROFESSOR NICHOLAS ROERICH

On October 10th the Russian painter and decorative artist Nicholas Roerich celebrated his seventieth birthday. The jubilee of this world-famed artist brings back to the Czechoslovakians pleasant memories of Professor Roerich's exhibition held in the Prague artistic society "Menes". It reminds them, too, of the warm personal relations which existed between Roerich and the Prague artistic world for some forty years.

Professor Roerich can look back to a full and eventful life. He studied art at the Academy in what was then Petersburg, and later on under Carmon and Puvis de Chavannes in Paris. His inclinations and the general artistic trend of the time brought him together with the great inspirer and organiser of creative forces — the Russian Fire Bird Diaghileff. At Diaghileff's invitation Roerich ~~and~~ entered his artistic group "Mir Iskusstva", which, in the first decade of this century, revolutionised not only Russian Art but also extended its influence upon all Europe. This was a select group, and one can judge what weight Roerich bore in it by the fact that in 1910 he became its president.

It is interesting to note that Roerich is not only a renowned artist but also an archeologist. In his early years he took part in many excavations in Southern Russia, and this determined his artistic outlook. The simplicity of the conception of his work and the way he interpreted his subjects gave to his pictures a fairytale, mystical and prehistoric character. Thus he created an original style of his own. Broadly speaking, these inclinations of the artist are typical of the time of his youth. Another great artist — Igor Stravinski — drew inspiration from Slavonic prehistory, and this trend culminated in his "Sacre du Printemps". But Roerich's interests and gifts were manifold. He designed one of the great Moscow railway stations. He was the author of many world-famed theatrical designs, such as Lope de Vega's "Fuente Ovejuna", "Princess Malaine," and "Prince Igor". His influence upon the great artistic work of the Russian ballet of this period was decisive.

As a painter he also became soon known to the world. Roerich exhibited in Vienna, and Berlin, in Paris, London and Rome. But he got the greatest following and admiration from the United States, whence he went after the Russian revolution. The Roerich Museum in New York owns over one thousand of his pictures. Soon Roerich Halls and Roerich Museums were established all over the world. Prague possessed one of these.

Roerich's paintings adorn the walls of the greatest art collections. They are in the Louvre and the Victoria and Albert Museum. He has received innumerable artistic and academic honours, and a pact for the protection of cultural treasures, signed by twenty one Governments of America, bears his name. Yet the artist

himself withdrew from the world. He is now living in the Punjab. A new life interest drew him to India. He became a student and admirer of Indian religion and mystical teaching. So there he lives now, studying the philosophy of Northern India and Tibet. I hear that his paintings bear the mark of the painter's new interests. Their subjects are influenced by Indian nature, life and legends.

In conversations with friends the great artist often recalls memories of Prague, of his friendship with President T.G. Masaryk, and with his son, and exclaims: "How close to my heart is the golden Prague and the brave Czechoslovak nation." He will be gratefully remembered by his numerous friends as a great and original painter, and as a symbol of that exquisite movement of Russian artists which swept and conquered the world at the beginning of our generation.

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