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" N i c h o l a s a n d S v e t o s l a v R o e r i c h -
Prophets of a N e w A r t "

Slides Lecture held by LEOBRAND in German at Linz/Austria
on July 3, 1965.

Among painters as among other creative men of culture and civilization, there are certain outstanding personalities widely excelling the average. It is that category of artists and Geniuses who decisively determine the cultural evolution.

These pioneers of culture whose unique creative work differentiates them from their contemporaries cannot be placed in any known category of art since they themselves are founders of new directions of art.

Among these great pioneers of art there were, i.a., Phidias, Leonardo da Vinci, Rembrandt, Michelangelo, Raffael Santi, Dürer and others. In recent times, Nicholas and Svetoslav R o e r i c h associated themselves with this fraternity of creative Geniuses.

Usually, our contemporaries are not in a position to render a correct and authoritative judgement on artists and other pioneers of culture during their lifetime. Only future generations will be able to appreciate the character and true art of a creative man.

In our slides lecture let us turn to the work of Professor Nicholas Roerich and that of his son, Dr. Svetoslav Roerich, as far as material has been made accessible to us through publications and reproductions of paintings issued. It represents but a small part of the extensive creative work of both these great Painters. The colour and black-white reproductions do not show or show only quite insufficiently the colour splendour of the original paintings. Yet it is to be hoped that the slides material comprising 150 pictures will give an adequate insight into the grand lifework of both these Artists.

Nicholas K. Roerich was born in St. Petersburg, now Leningrad, on October 9, 1874. He passed his childhood on his parents' estate "Isvara", among great northern forests. From his earliest years he was greatly attracted to art. The legendary Russian past impressed him powerfully. Already at an early age, he had an opportunity, with a spade in his hands, to carry on practical archaeology, taking part in excavating prehistoric tumuli.

At the same time his talent for drawing was developing. The well-known sculptor, M.O. Mikeschin, to whom he had shown his first drawings, guided him and so he could make a further rapid progress.

Roerich's father, a noted attorney, wished him to follow the same career, and so Nicholas entered the University of St. Petersburg in the faculty of law in 1893. At the same time, the young Roerich passed the entrance examination for the Academy of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg.

Nicholas Roerich was an extremely many-sided, diligent man. Already the first phases of his creative work showed him to be not only an artist but also a scientist, writer and creator of cultural values, and so through his exceptional talent and diligence he obtained excellent results and thus became one of the most remarkable upholders of culture of our epoch.

An important role in his creative development was played by his teacher at the Academy of Fine Arts, A.I. Kuindji. This renowned artist knew to guide and instruct Nicholas Roerich in an excellent way. Kuindji never imposed any constraint upon his pupils, he allowed them complete freedom, yet arousing their zeal and enthusiasm enabling them to fully develop their talents. Nicholas 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 acquired for the well-known Tretyakov Gallery, and thus the name of the young artist entered the history of Russian art.

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.

In his further development, his archaeological researches were of great importance to Roerich. They influenced his style. Many paintings of his first period are of monumental grandeur.

The later paintings: "Guests from Beyond the Sea", "The Slavs", "The Elders are Meeting", "Idols", "Building the Ships", and others reveal a special freshness of colour and the heroic strength of the subject matter. The man in his paintings is ever strong in body, tempered in labour and battle, and always surrounded by the majestic scenes of the Russian north.

Roerich's paintings evince his particular liking for historic sources. With great emphasis and ingenious intuition he penetrated into the spirit of the past and his pictures tell us of man's ideas and struggles with the dark powers of nature. With a vibrant emotion and great abundance of details he describes the customs and habits of our forefathers.

With advancing maturity, the effect of Roerich's paintings became more and more dramatic. Thus, for instance, "The Battle" (1906) attracted great attention. This picture is a wonderful combination of coppery-yellow, red and dense blues and brings to the looker-on the feeling of tumult and agitation.

It is characteristic of Roerich that the battle is not only conducted by the Viking galleys, but that he included also the elements. The waves of the foaming sea and the stormy onrush of phantastic clouds underline in a high degree the action of the battle. An important side of Roerich's art is that in many of his paintings he not only animates the water but also the air, even stones, the whole nature indeed, making her the accomplice of man.

The desire to grasp the great beauty of the Russian landscape and the treasure of Russia's past artistically, caused him to make trips to many ancient Russian cities in 1903-1905. So he visited Yaroslavl, Rostov, Vladimir, Suzdal, Novgorod, Pskov,

Isborsk, Pechory, Uglich and many other ancient centres of Russian art and culture, above all various monasteries.

With his 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. Due to a strange destiny most of his architectural sketches of city walls and towers, churches, cathedrals and monasteries came later to America.

Shortly after his graduation from the Academy of Fine Arts, Roerich organized exhibitions of his paintings in Prague, Berlin, Vienna, Dusseldorf, Milan, Venice and Rome, which brought him success and fame. His name became widely known in art centres and many European museums and private collections acquired his paintings.

The summers of 1909 and 1910 Roerich spent in Italy, Germany, Holland and England. At that time he painted his famous stage settings. The society "MIR ISKUSSTVA" elected him President of this organization of Russian artists.

As the Director of the "School for the Encouragement of Arts" in St. Petersburg, he brought to that institution of 2000 students a reputation of the most progressive school in Europe. This renown was gained through the many reforms he introduced. Roerich believed that students should not only receive theoretical knowledge but must develop also practical abilities in the entire scope of all living, active parts of art. A new museum of Russian art was founded and special workshops of ikon-painting and handicrafts were organized by Roerich.

At that period Roerich showed also great interest in the theatre, as evident in a series of remarkable stage settings. He did excellent 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 Roerich's liking for history, combined with emotional power. This opera by Borodin, 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 Theatre, and "Tristan and

Isolde" for the Zimin Opera in Moscow, along with several operas by Rimsky-Korsakoff.

The art critic, Barnett Conlan, described the "Sacre du Printemps" settings by Roerich as follows: "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 colours 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."

New exhibitions in Malmo, Stockholm, Copenhagen and Helsingfors, spread his fame in Scandinavian countries.

In May, 1917, Roerich was living in Finland, on the north shore of Lake Ladoga. There he painted "Finland-Heroica Series".

A further exhibition entitled "Spells of Russia" was held by Roerich in London at the Gupil Gallery in 1920. Herbert Root, Director of the London Public Gallery calls him "the strongest personality in modern art." The Victoria Albert Museum acquired two Roerich paintings. A number of his paintings were purchased by private collections in England.

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, 1920. Through his exhibition of nearly 400 paintings at the Kingore Gallery in New York he became quickly renowned also in America. The press and public in the USA gave him an enthusiastic reception. 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 also the International Society of Artists - "Cor Ardens". In North America, he travelled widely, and gave lectures at the University of California, Santa Fe Museum, Chicago Art Institute, and other art centres. At the same time he continued writing and his articles appeared in art magazines and publications in America and elsewhere.

At that time he founded also the "Master School of United Arts" embodying his belief that "all arts should be united under one roof". A group of renowned artists, musicians and teachers, joined Roerich in this cultural enterprise.

On November 17, 1923 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 "Sniegourootchka", besides much else.

Along with this, Roerich continued also his literary activities. His books "Adamant", "Path of Blessings", and "Flame in Chalice" appeared in English and other languages.

Through his lectures, exhibitions and books Roerich gained a great influence on renowned carriers of culture and artists. Groups were formed which later took on the name of Roerich Societies, proclaiming his ideals for Beauty and Knowledge and spreading his precepts for protecting culture in times of war and peace. Many artists and people interested in culture were drawn to Roerich as a great humanitarian and spiritual leader, not only as a famous artist.

His art and writings had a profound influence on both renowned and simple people. Those who met him left spiritually enriched, and inspired by his ideals, began a new life of service for the Common Good.

Roerich became of great importance to art emphasizing, as an essential feature of art, the concept of "Beauty" and thus creating a counterweight to the nihilism in art which set in

at that time. Apart from the mastery of technique and his brilliant colours, it was just Roerich's concept of beauty that produced a special aesthetical effect. Along with that, also his themes and power to translate art into spiritual and visionary language attracted special attention.

In 1923, Roerich came to Europe and on 3rd May of the same year he left for India where he equipped an expedition to Central Asia. Thus in the creative work of the artist began a new period which led him more and more into the mystics and occultism or esoterics.

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 centres of Indian Buddhist culture. His wife, Helena, the Mother of Agni Yoga, and both his sons, George and Svetoslav, accompanied Prof. Roerich on this great expedition.

In India, he began the new series of paintings "Signs of Maitreya" - a reflection of the world of legend and showing the austere nature of Tibetan highlands.

In over 500 magnificent works there arose a panorama of Asia of majestic beauty which no other 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 colours reflected the vivid aspects of nature.

On his returning from the expedition to Darjeeling at the end of 1928, he finally settled in Naggar, Kulu, in the western Himalayas, thus realizing the dream of his life. Many new paintings - "Pearls of Striving", "Signs of Maitreya", "Banners of the East", "Remember", "Tibetan Strongholds" - belong to this period.

His books 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.

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.

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 these activities.

The Himalayan Research Institute had two departments: botanical and ethnological-linguistic. The latter was also concerned with exploring archaeological sites. Each year, 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.

In linguistic the Institute made a special study of Tibetan dialects of the Himalayan mountain belt and of the adjacent districts of the Tibetan highlands. Dr. George N. Roerich, the eldest son of the Roerich family, especially distinguished himself in these works since he was one of the most important experts on Tibetan dialects. Dr. George Roerich died in Moscow on May 21, 1960 where he was given a state funeral.

Prof. Roerich's paintings of the Himalayan range, together with his writings, awakened a great interest both in India and the Occident, and many expeditions asked for his advice. Many honours were conferred on the artist. He 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.

After visiting later America, France and England, Prof. Roerich returned again 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.

Nicholas Roerich's interests embraced not only art and archaeology but also politics of cultural nature. Above all he wished his pact for the protection of cultural values in times of war and peace, similarly as that of the Geneva Convention of the Red Cross, be adopted all over the world.

For this purpose the First International Convention dedicated to the Roerich Pact and Banner of Peace was held at Bruges in Belgium, in 1931. 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. 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, unfortunately in vain.

A treaty was drawn up to be signed by all nations and a special Banner was designed by N.K. Roerich, to fly over all buildings and sites to be protected. This Pact was endorsed by the International Museum's 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.

Thereafter, the Roerich Pact and Peace Banner Committees were functioning actively mainly in America, Europe and Asia.

On April 14, 1935, in the office of President Roosevelt, at the White House at Washington, the official representatives of the United States of America and all the 20 Latin-American countries signed the Treaty of the Pact.

The Roerich Banner of Peace has the following design: 3 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. Others consider that it refers to religion, science and art, held together in the circle of culture.

Unfortunately, during the second world war, Roerich's calls for the defence of culture, found no hearing. From his high

outpost in the Himalayas he called untiringly to all parts of the world for the protection of culture.

In conclusion it may be said that Roerich actually was 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.

In his many paintings of that period it is not only the beauty but also the amazing architecture of the country that 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. 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. Their colours and decorative quality reflect a romantic and stirring mood.

Roerich was also deeply interested in the hero of the Mongolo-Tibetan epic "Gessar". "The Sword of Gessar" and "The Signs of Gessar" reflect by their primitive animal style a sense of remote antiquity. Rarely did 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 and his paintings show an austere, tragic, simple land. From the 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, so that he makes us believe in the repeated 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 overflowing fertility.

Toward the end of his life Roerich revealed the greatness of his spirit by his dedication to the safeguarding of the 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, honoured 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 of 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, a gigantic lifework.

Roerich died on December 13, 1947, in his beloved Himalayas, and all India paid homage to him. A simple large stone, near the house where he lived, marks the spot where he was cremated and which at present is a centre of pilgrimage for people from India and the remaining world of culture.

Roerich's second son, Svetoslav, also a renowned painter, and his wife, Devika Rani, a great Indian actress, are going to build a Roerich Museum in Naggar, Kulu, where Nicholas Roerich lived and worked during the last 18 years of his life.

At the end, let us remember his spiritual testament which speaks of that future peace and unity which humanity for its salvation should accept in its heart: -

"Art will unify all Humanity. Art is one - indivisible. Art has its many branches, yet all are one. Art is the manifestation of the coming synthesis. Art is for all. Everyone will enjoy true art. The Gates of the 'Sacred Source' must be wide open for everybody, and the light of art will influence numerous hearts with a new love. At first this feeling will be unconscious, but after all it will purify human consciousness, and how many young hearts are searching for something real and beautiful! So, give it to them. Bring art to the people where it belongs. We should have not only Museums, Theatres, Universities, Public Libraries, Railway Stations and Hospitals, but even Prisons decorated and beautiful. Then we shall have no more prisons!"

This is the way to real good deeds.

"Real Peace, Real Unity is desired by the human heart. It strives to labour creatively and actively. For its labour 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."

SOURCES: " NICHOLAS ROERICH - In Commemoration of the 90th Anniversary of His Birth, October 9, 1964" by Sina Fosdick.

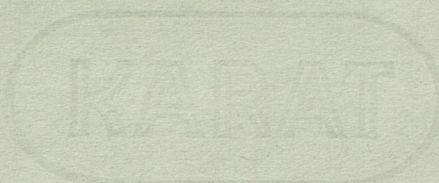
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