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NICHOLAS ROERICH

(1874-1947)

On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the death of Nicholas Roerich we have reason to pause and take note of the significance of this great man at this time. Roerich has left much work and art for us to examine and admire, and it constitutes an awe-inspiring memorial to a great spirit who from earliest childhood was oriented towards a life of service in art and science.

Born in Russia, Roerich grew up in an atmosphere already steeped in an interest in the Far East, in India in particular. Even the name of his father's estate was Indian - ISWARA - and many of the objects surrounding him were of Indian influence including a large painting of majestic mountains that he had admired since early childhood, it was in fact -- the lofty Kanchenjunga of the Himalayas.

Ultimately, Roerich's training as a painter and archeologist and his spiritual inclinations combined to send him on his now famous expeditions to the Heart of Asia and caused him to settle in his final home in the Kulu Valley in the foothills of the Himalayas. These expeditions resulted in a huge body of work, paintings that depict the country through which the expedition progressed as it travelled through Sikkim, Darjeeling, Kashmir, Ladak, Chinese Turkestan, Altai, Mongolia, and Tibet. It is in the paintings of the Himalayas that one finds reflected the loftiness of spirit and purpose that guided Roerich throughout his life to accomplish the many and varied tasks he set himself. At the same time these paintings are timeless symbols of the highest and most abstract of human concepts. They speak in the language of the spirit.

In particular, they speak of the "path" taken by all those who would seek Truth. The hidden passes become the passage to Shambhala; rocks become personified as the sentinels of an almost forbidden trail; amidst billowing cloud formations, the messenger on horseback bears the proclamation of a New Era. From time immemorial mountains have represented to mankind more than just physical phenomena, they have symbolized for him a place of holiness, the Abode of the Gods - ultimately, the direction that his striving will take him. In Roerich's paintings of the Himalayas this idea finds expression.

At the Nicholas Roerich Museum we are commemorating this anniversary with a special exhibition of paintings from the Himalayan series, selected to demonstrate the theme that the artist labored so long to render - THE HIMALAYAS - SACRED IMAGE OF THE EAST. He rendered it with consummate skill and wisdom, imparted to it his spirituality, and expressed it in beauty. In the words of Roerich:

"There is no other way, Oh friends scattered! May my call penetrate to you. Let us join ourselves by the invisible threads of the Beautiful! I turn to you, I call to you in the name of beauty, and wisdom, let us combine for struggle and work. During the days of Armageddon, let us ponder on Eternal Values, which are the cornerstone of Evolution."

In Roerich's paintings of the Himalayas we find symbolized the Eternal Values of which he speaks.

Edgar Lansbury
Curator

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