

NICHOLAS ROERICH AND NEW AGE ART  
with a Consideration of  
his Poetry

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by  
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Many writers could be quoted on Professor Roerich's contribution to the art of the coming age, and perhaps, this would be very impressive. However, I prefer to give my own individual reactions to this great artist and seer. To begin with, it was he who first introduced me to those cosmic spiritual dimensions which are the hope of the world. When I was younger I read his REALM OF LIGHT and can truthfully say that it changed my entire life. Actually, it was my first contact with any type of unusual spiritual knowledge, and what an introduction it was! That is why I prefer to take the personal approach here.

Let me begin by reading a few poems which reflect my response to his paintings relative to concepts pertaining to new age art, first, the painting of the mountain KANCHENJUNGA, which seems to me to combine elements of spiritual striving and divine calm poised in future-light: Needless to see the original./ This painting will suffice/ with its epitome of a mountain/ and all it symbolizes/ of human height-longing./ Beneath an intensely blue sky/ above moving clouds of/ graded sapphire, mauve and white, stands/ the snow-tipped summit/ imparting an incredible joy-life'

Next, there is a painting which has always been especially dear to me, STAR OF THE HERO, in which Professor Roerich has depicted a boy dreaming of the brave deeds he will do in the future. While in this reverie, he looks up and sees a shooting star heralding the fulfillment of his dreams. This timeless proclamation of the hero appears to me to sum up the aspiration of the ages and cast it upon the sky-screen of the future. Here is my poetic tribute: Silhouetted dark against his warm campfire/ the boy gazes upward/ into a vast eastern sky expanse/ of star-interspersed sapphire/ surrounding indigo mountain peaks/ that suggest unknown challenges./ Suddenly his portent appears, slashing itself with indelible star-swoop across his/ outer and inner sight./ His heart fills with jubilation, for he has received/ that knightly accolade/ from which there is no turning back.

One feature of Professor Roerich's paintings which has been much admired is his employment of color, and to demonstrate the manner in which these bold colors portray the future, who better to quote than a cosmonaut? "It is April 12, 1961, and from his space capsule more than 200 miles above the earth's surface, Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin beholds earth and sky as no man ever has before. The sight so overwhelms him that he later writes in Road to the Stars, "...the horizon blazed in a bright orange which gradually changed into all the colors of the rainbow: to light blue, blue, violet, black. Words fail to describe the color range. It reminded me of the canvases of Nicholas Roerich." --- "Nicholas Roerich: Heroes, Myths, and Ageless Mountains," Shirley Meador, AMERICAN ARTIST, December, 1974, Page 32. In tribute to this magnificent use of color, I wrote the poem, FUTURISTIC:  
Orange energy/ Crimson courage/ Yellow brilliance/ Green harmony/  
Blue peace/ Indigo mystery/ Violet ethereal in vibration/ Dip  
the brush in the/ very central blood dyes of the cosmos./  
Paint boldly, broadly,/ that from this most pregnant of efforts,/ New colors may emerge/ electric with exciting potentials.

Now, as a poet myself, let me turn to an area of Professor Roerich's work which is all too seldom discussed, namely his glorious poetry. The poems mentioned and



quoted are all from FLAME IN CHALICE, translated by Mary Siegrist, Roerich Museum Press, New York, 1929. Like the paintings, they are so many vital expressions of the spirit animating his work. Perhaps one of the most outstanding features of this noble poetry is its use of nature with a cosmic sweep or scope similar to that found in the paintings. Here is a strong sample of images of this kind from the series, "Sacred Signs":

"Father--the peaceful. Son--the peaceful. Spirit--the peaceful./ The three equal. The three indivisible./ The blue sea--is their heart./ The stars--their eyes./ The night dawn--their mouth..."p.16. Again, in the poem, "How Shall I Strive?" p. 55: "You beautiful birds of Khomas,/You do not like the earth? You/ Will never descend/ Upon earth. Your birdlings/ Are being born in cloudy/ Nests. You are nearer to the sun."

Perhaps Nicholas Roerich's whole credo of beauty may be summed up in the expressive gem of a poem entitled "To Him", p. 41:

"Finally I found the hermit./ You know how difficult it is/ To find here on earth a hermit./ I asked him whether he would show me/ The path and would he accept/ Graciously my works?/ He gazed a long time and asked/ What is the most loved that I have./ 'The most beloved?' I answered./ 'Beauty it is./' 'The most beloved/ Thou must leave./' 'Who commands it?' I asked./ 'God,' answered the hermit./ 'Let God punish me-- I shall not leave the most beautiful/ That will lead us/ To Him.'"

As the author of a book of space poetry inspired by the Apollo missions, I can only pause in reverence before Roerich's poem, "The Hour", pp. 48-49:

"Awaken, O friend. A message has come./ Ended, thy rest./ Now I have learned where is guarded/ One of the Sacred Signs./ Think of the joy if/ One sign we shall find./ Before sunrise we shall have to go./ At night we must all prepare./ Look at the night sky..../ It is beautiful as never before;/ I do not remember/ Such another./ Only yesterday/ Cassiopeia was sad and misty,/ Aldebaran twinkled fearfully/ And Venus did not appear./ And now they are all ablaze./ Orion and Arcturus are shining./ Far behind Altair, New starry signs/ Are gleaming and the mistiness/ Of the constellations is clear and transparent./ Dost thou not see/ The path to that/ Which tomorrow we shall find?/ The starry masses have awakened./ Take thy fortune./ The armor we shall not need./ The shoes put tightly on,/ Tightly gird thyself,/ Our path will be stony./ The East is aflame./ For us/ Is the hour."

One of the most glorious aspects of poetry is its power to evoke qualities beyond all expression in words. Such a poem is "Light," p. 57, in which it seems to me that the poet summarizes his new age aspirations in a soaring flight to infinity. This poem is reminiscent of the answer given by the great Henri Matisse when asked about the future of art. He said only one word, "light."

"How shall we behold Thine Image?/  
The all-penetrating Image,/ Deeper than  
feeling and reason./ The intangible, the silent,/ The  
unseen. I summon/ The heart, wisdom and labor./ Who has  
apprehended that which has/ No form, no sound, no taste,/ Which has no end and no beginning?/ And the darkness when all shall cease?/ The thirst of the desert and the salt of the/ Ocean?/ I shall await Thy/ Glory./ Before Thine image/ The sun does not shine. The moon does not/ Shine. Nor the stars nor the flame/ Nor the lightning. The rainbow does not shine./ The Light of the North does not glimmer./ There shines Thine Image./ Everything gleams through Thy light./ In the darkness are shining/ Particles of Thy glory./ And in my closed eyes/ Dawns Thy wondrous light."