

# Gagarin's Tribute to Svetoslav Roerich

—VIVEK BHATTACHARYA

ONLY he can be a truly great artist who has intuitive experience of spiritual reality. For "the true work of art" says Michael Angelo, "is but a shadow of the divine perfection". A true artist always draws his inspiration from a serene divine source. Goethe says, "the highest problem of any art is to cause by appearance the illusion of a higher reality". "Art" also says Dante, "as far as it has the ability, follows nature, as a pupil imitates his master, so that art must be, as it were, a descendant of God".

One is completely captivated by these thoughts of art when one goes through the description of the cosmos by the first man in the cosmos, Yuri Alekseevich Gagarin comparing them with Svetoslav Roerich's paintings. Recently the Moscow newspaper "*Pravda*" (dated April 23, 1961) published a long article on the basis of an interview by N. Denisov and S. Borzenko in which it is said that the state of weightlessness did not preclude Gagarin from comparing the extraordinary beauty of the colour gradations of the sky over our planet with the harmonies of colour in Svetoslav's canvases. In his exclusive interview to "*Pravda*" Gagarin says, "Roerich paintings reflect the beauty of the cosmos". The first cosmonaut compares the wonderful colours he saw in the cosmos to the colours he

had seen in the Roerich paintings, exhibited recently in the U.S.S.R.

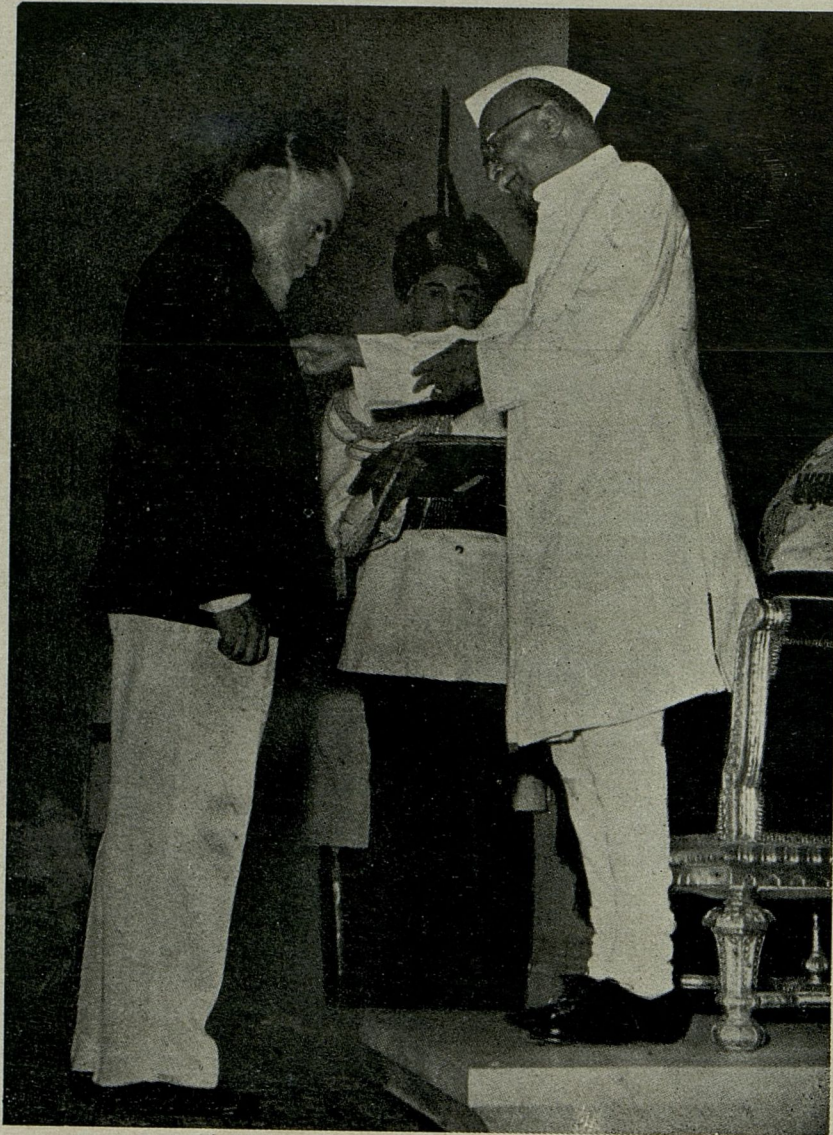
This is a unique tribute to Svetoslav's paintings of which any artist in the world could feel justly proud. There was not yet any cosmic opinion about modern art and except Svetoslav no artist in the world can possess it.

In this connection it is interesting to record that when he visited the Svetoslav Roerich exhibition in Delhi, Mr. Khrushchev remarked, "Some people may ask you 'do such colours exist? But I have seen them with my own eyes—There is such Beauty in nature one must only feel it, understand it, and portray it in a masterly manner'".

Some of the art critics, while appreciating his masterly painting both in oil and tempera advanced the criticism that Svetoslav, unlike other artists gave too much importance to "blue". But it was not unmixed pure blue, it was azure blended with a touch of ultra violet, the colour of the mountains and the sky at higher altitudes.

Svetoslav's paintings mirror a deep spiritual insight. It is perhaps the influence of his saintly father Maharsi Nicholas Roerich, and long meditation in the Himalayas that gave Svetoslav a unique power to portray not only





*The President bestowing the "Padma Bhusan" to Dr. Svetoslav Roerich*

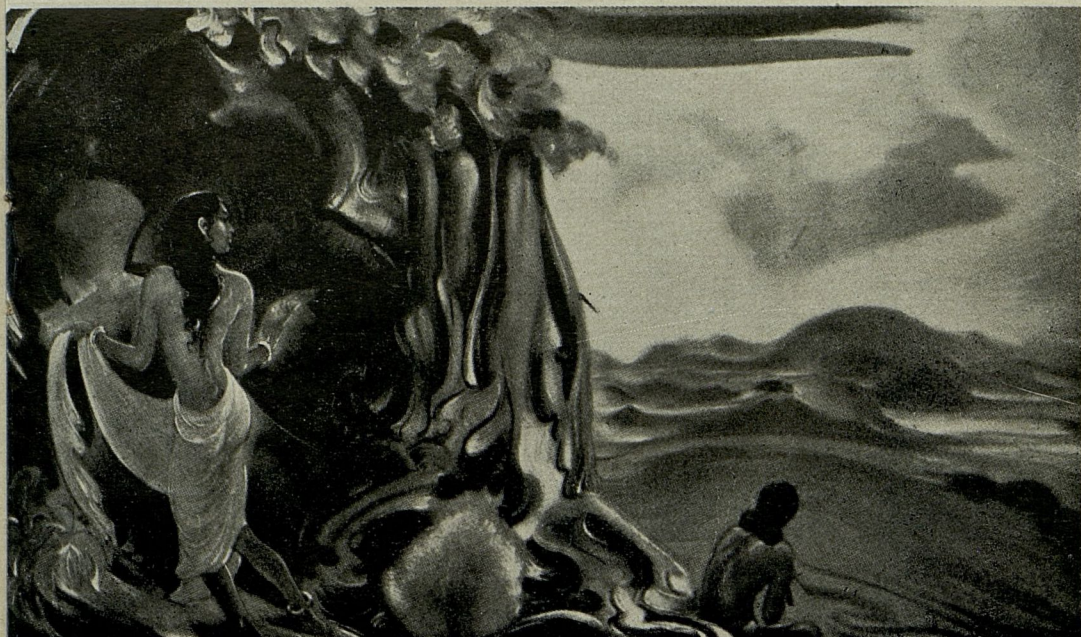
the seen things of beauty, but also to project his vision into the realm of the unseen world.

In an exclusive interview he explained to me in brief the extraordinary power of a man's 'intuition'. When I asked him how he could visualise the harmonies of colour beyond the

sky, the cosmos, he smiled and said how could science conquer it? Was it also not the human mind behind the discovery?

I interrupted and said, would you call it 'imagination' or 'intuition'? Svetoslav gave a modest smile but no reply. While talking of





*The call (1955)*  
—By Svetoslav Roerich



*Daughters of the sea (1956)*  
—By Svetoslav Roerich



intuition I was reminded of this mystic state of mind of Svetoslav's parents about which I heard a lot from Svetoslav. Both had intuitive visions just like Bibhuti Bhushan Bandhyopadhyay's (author of *Pather Panchali*) *Drishti Pradeen*. And no wonder the illustrious son also inherited the same which he portrays on canvas. Some people might have hesitated to believe that such colours could exist but it is wonderful to think that the young cosmonaut has now found them to be a reality.

Tracing back to the origin of this great spiritual power I recalled Svetoslav's description of spiritual powers of the ancient saints of Hindustan in the Himalayas where I had the good fortune to accompany him. "The spirit of the Himalayas inspired India for ages to search for Truth and to that great search many saints dedicated their lives. It is this spiritual force that is enriching Indian culture—its Art, Literature and Thought and will continue to do so for years to come", observed Svetoslav in a meditative mood.

I was happy I received a reply to my question and immediately a serene picture flashed into my mind. I shall never forget that. It was about six years ago. We were on the foothill of the Himalayas at Dehradun. The whole day I spent in the forests. I had to complete my work and I was busy till late at night. Before I put off the light my eyes wandered to the next room. There I saw a figure in full meditation. For minutes together I looked at him. There was a glow on his face. I put off the light and went to bed. I never told anybody about it. It was Svetoslav Nikolaievich Roerich. Gagarin knows that Svetoslav's paintings carry the colours of the cosmos and through "*Pravada*" this has been made known to the world. But how many persons know the real source of that intuition



*Whither Humanity (1942)*  
—By Svetoslav Roerich

which inspires him to give to the world his masterly poems in colour? The statement of Bacon that "The best part of beauty is that which no picture can express", has, to my mind, been belied by Gagarin's, the brave young cosmonaut's comparison of Svetoslav's paintings with the colours he saw in the cosmos.



# *Treasure House of Ancient Civilizations*

—THEOPHIL IVANOV

**A**MID the new and monumental building in the centre of Sofia, stands a big 16th century building which draws the eyes of passersby. It houses the Archaeological Museum of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, one of the oldest research and cultural institutions in Bulgaria, created immediately after the country's liberation from Ottoman domination in 1877-78. Last year was the 80th anniversary of its foundation. Great credit goes to many Russian public figures and cultural workers for laying the foundation of the the museum collection at the National Library in Sofia, and a little later turning the museum into an independent institute; equal credit goes to four Czechs—the well-known historian, Professor K. Irecek, Vaclav Dobruski, Director of the Archaeological Museum, and the brothers Hermengild and Karel Skorpil. The pioneers in the field of museum work in Bulgaria contributed a lot to enriching the new museum. Their work was taken up at once by Bulgarian scholars and scientists, who organized excavations at a number of pre-historic, antique and medieval settlements, thus steadily adding to the museum collections. Today the Archaeological Museum in Sofia is known as a treasure-house of interesting artefacts, the relics of thousands of years of civilization, created by tribes known and

unknown, who inhabited the country from time immemorial. The museum contains a great variety of tools and implements of different periods, articles for everyday use, and exquisite master-pieces of art, some of which are unique and of international importance.

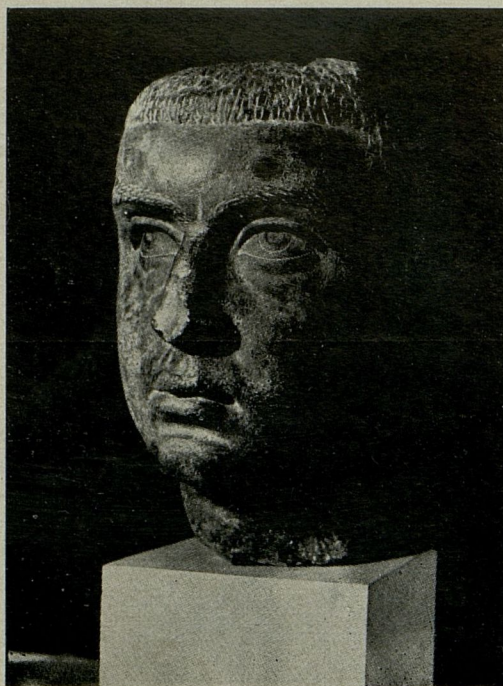
Exhibits in the pre-historic department take the visitor back to the Paleolithic or Stone Age, about 50,000 years B.C., when man lived in caves and fought the wild animals around him, and struggled against nature to survive. His implements were stone and flint scrapers. Civilization was richer and far more varied in the Neolithic or New Stone Age, and the Eneolithic Age. In this period the population was engaged in agriculture and cattle-breeding. Excavations in the settlement mound at the village of Karanovo, Nova Zagora district (South Bulgaria), recently carried out by the Archaeological Institute and the Archaeological Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, have cast light upon the architecture of the dwellings and the life and culture of the people who inhabited the country from the 4th to the 2nd century B.C. Beautiful ornamented clay pots, the oldest known so far in Bulgaria, finely polished stone implements, bone sickles with flint teeth inserted on the inside, carbonified wheat, the bones of domestic and wild



animals, the first artefacts of copper, bone ornaments and so on from this site are all to be found in the show cases. The cultural stratum is 12 metres thick. The valuable finds brought to light have made it possible to establish an exact chronology of culture and to describe life as it was lived a thousand years ago. Karanovo is the Bulgarian Troy.

The exhibits of the Bronze Age are most varied and interesting ; this was the period in which man made a great advance in his economic and cultural development. The stone implements were replaced by copper ones. The bronze swords of the so-called Mycenaean type deserve special mention, as do the bronze axes of the so-called Hungarian type.

The Iron Age is represented by numerous finds, artefacts of the ancient Thracians, described in Homer's *Iliad*. The poet writes with enthusiasm of the Thracian King Rhesus, who drove along in his chariot ornamented with gold and silver plaques. The gold Treasure of Vulchi Trun (a small village in the Pleven district), accidentally discovered 35 years ago, and weighing 12.5 kilograms, occupies a place of honour in this room. It consists of



Emperor Fordian III. Bronze

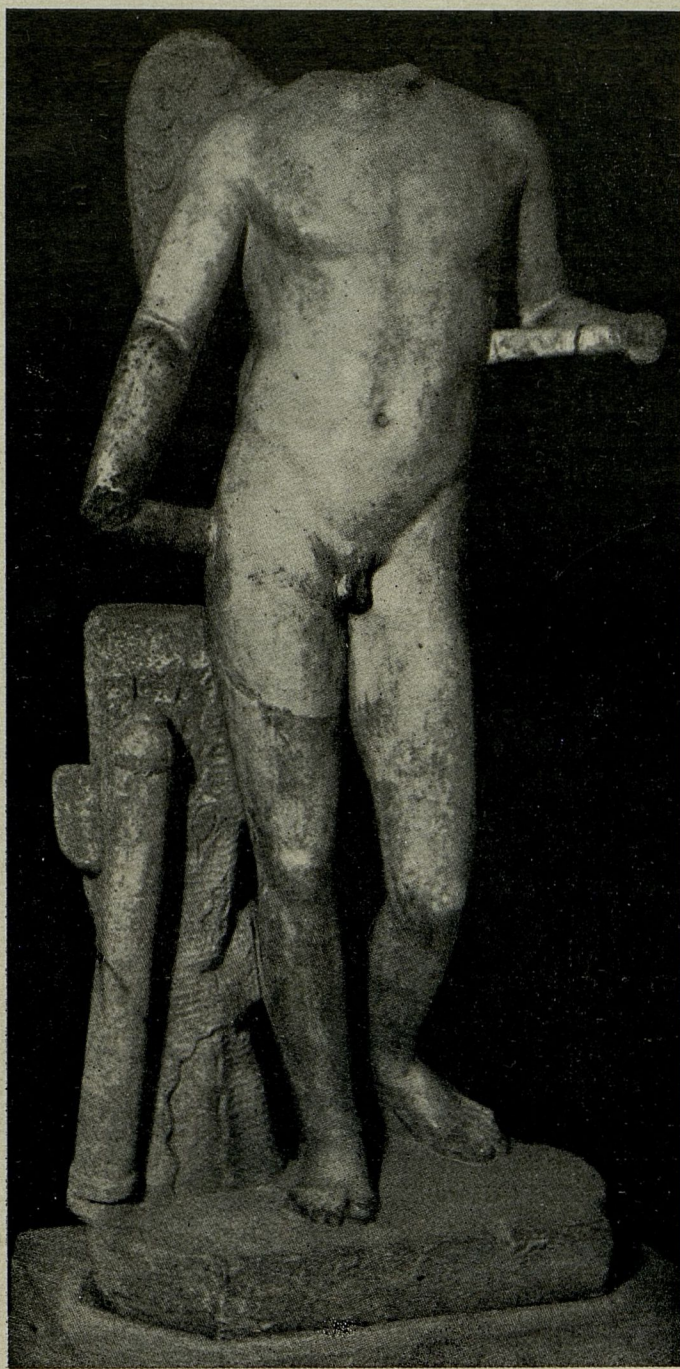
vessels used in ceremonial processions and ritual festivals which were probably the property of an unknown ruler. The treasure dates back to the 8th century B.C.



The Vulchi Trun Treasure, 8th century B.C.

The museum rooms contain marble and bronze sculptures of the ancient Greek and Roman Ages as well as exquisite Attic, Ionian and Corinthian painted vases, brought to Thrace in the way of trade, to please the taste of the wealthy slave-owning class. The skillfully made gold and silver jewellery which was worn by the noble ladies of antique society and placed beside their bodies or in the urns which held their burnt ashes today delight thousands of visitors. The marble tombstone of Anaxander, an eminent citizen of Apollonia on the Black Sea (6th to 5th century B.C.) deserves mention, as do the Roman copies





Statue of Eros, 2nd century



of originals by Praxiteles : the Eros found at Nicopolis ad Istrum (2nd century A.D.), the Resting Satyr from the village of Riben, Pleven district, and so on. In the Roman section we find a big statue of a goddess from Oescus, a Roman copy of a Greek original ; a head of the Emperor Gordian III (238-244) made of bronze, and found at Nicopolis ad Istrum ; a fine collection of bronze statuettes of deities, terracottas, glass vessels, metal plaques in the animal style.

Thrace was known for its mints. Extremely valuable moulds for minting money are preserved in the Museum, as well as a big collection of coins ; there are quite a number of duplicates and some of the coins are in excellent condition. Among these the derroni, minted in the 5th to 6th centuries by the Macedono-Thracian tribe of the Derroni, are of special interest. Other interesting coins are those from the city of Kizik, made of electron, an alloy of gold and silver, and gold coins of the Greek and Roman cities of the ancient world and of Thrace. There is also a fine collection of Byzantine, Bulgarian and foreign coins, from the most ancient times up to the 18th century.

In the medieval rooms we find artefacts and the products of the art crafts found in the Bulgarian capitals of Pliska, Preslav and Turnovo (from the 9th to the 14th centuries), and elsewhere. The Museum also possesses a valuable and rich collection of icons, frescoes, and prints. A place of honour has been given

to the recently discovered tombstone of Mostich, a high court official, who served the Kings Simeon and Peter (9th to 10th century.) For the present it is the oldest dated epigraphic monument of the early Bulgarian kingdom.

Excavations of Preslav yielded valuable finds of ceramics, made in Bulgaria, and the kilns in which they were baked were also discovered there. It was formerly thought that this pottery was imported from Constantinople.

The Archaeological Museum also has rich collections of gems, cameos, rings, ear-rings, necklaces, torques fibulae and other products of the jeweller's and goldsmith's art, which reveal the extensive trade existing between ancient Thrace and Greece, Asia Minor and Rome.

The treasures of our country are exhibited in pleasant rooms, arranged according to the latest requirements of scientific exhibition. The growing number of visitors, not only from our country but from abroad as well, evidences the great interest they arouse. Bulgaria is a country, which was in direct touch with ancient Greece, the cradle of antique culture and civilization. The visitor leaves the museum enriched by many impressions of a culture that is indeed great, carefully collected, preserved and exhibited, in order to delight him and increase his historical knowledge of the fundamental laws regulating the development of society, throughout the primitive, communal slave-owning and feudal systems.