

New York City
July 5, 1938

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

Returning recently from an absence of several months, during which I had heard of changes being made at the Roerich Museum, I was anxious to investigate since for many years I have always looked forward to a visit to this institution every time I came to New York. I considered it a shrine.

I was told that the name had been changed to the Riverside Museum and that it was open on Saturdays and Sundays. On Saturday afternoon, July 2nd, 1938, I got off the bus at the familiar corner of 103rd St. and Riverside Drive. As I approached the building, observing the changed lettering above the entrance, a man walked up to me and inquired whether I knew which building was "the museum". I indicated the building just before us but I was not surprised at his question because we were looking straight at a conspicuous sign on the corner of the building proclaiming it to be an "Apartment Hotel". The man evidently was not satisfied with my gesture and stepped over to speak to a uniformed member of the Municipal Department of Parks who was working on the grass across from the museum entrance. The man asked, "Can you tell me where the Riverside Museum is?" And the uniformed worker looked blank and said, "I never heard of it, - Riverside Museum?" -, and shook his head. The inquirer then said, "I think it used to be the Roerich Museum". Whereupon the worker immediately pointed to the entrance, saying, "That's it." As the man disappeared inside I approached the grass attendant, who was joined at the same time by a fellow worker, and, explaining that I had chanced to over-hear the inquiry, and that I was a friend of Roerich Museum, I asked him his name. His friend spoke up, "It's Timothy Lyons, - and mine is Michael Gilrooney." I thanked them, saying, "They are trying to change the name of the Museum." Mr. Lyons said, "Well, that's the Roerich Museum, - always was."

As I entered the Museum I noticed that the door to the Hall of the East, containing the Tibetan Library and various exhibits belonging to the Urusvati Himalayan Research Institute was closed and apparently locked. On the second floor where formerly had hung the magnificent collection of Roerich paintings, including the Himalayan Series and the entire panorama of Asia, I found a number of paintings such as one might see in any art gallery in any city in the United States at any time, all labeled as having been either "Lent by the artist," or "Lent" by some New York Gallery. Out of about sixty paintings only three were marked "Permanent Collection", and there was not one Roerich painting, although this space formerly held one thousand paintings by Nicholas Roerich. The majority of the rooms, however, contained no paintings at all, but instead housed the Tibetan Tankas and various art objects which I recognized as the property of Urusvati Himalayan Research Institute. One room was devoted to sculpture. It appeared that about two dozen or so unsuspecting and hopeful sculptors had "Lent" one piece each.

As I went back down stairs I passed through the special exhibition as quickly as possible - some rather Greenwich Village type temporary display - , picked up a catalogue, and inquired of the lone attendant whether a catalogue of the contents of the second floor galleries was available. He answered in the negative and I then asked him whether I might visit the gallery on the third floor, which also had formerly contained Roerich paintings.

He said this gallery was not open, and I asked him then where I could view the Roerich Paintings. He made this astounding reply: "You can't see them anyplace, - there is no more Roerich Museum!" I said, "What happened to the paintings?" He answered, "They have been put in storage, the policy is changed, the name is changed the paintings are all changed, etc."

I walked into the adjoining hotel lobby and asked the elevator boy if there were any classes being conducted in the former quarters of the Master Institute on the third floor. He answered evasively and vaguely in the affirmative, but when I asked about a summer session he said he doubted if there was much going on right now. I asked if I might see for myself and he said I would have to get permission from the desk clerk first. This I did, and the elevator boy took me to the third floor, held the elevator while I glanced around a very deserted scene and walked to a table to pick up a W.P.A. pamphlet from a pile, and then brought me back down to the lobby.

The next day, July 3rd, I telephoned to resume my inquiry. First I consulted the telephone directory. There were several listings under Roerich Museum, and two addresses. The first read: "Roerich Museum, 310 Riverside Drive, - Academy 4 - 1700." Dialing this number I inquired of the answering voice whether this was Roerich Museum. Being assured that it was, I asked, then, where and when I might view the Roerich paintings. I was again told that there was no more Roerich Museum, that the name had been changed, etc. I said, "But I just now looked up Roerich Museum in the telephone book and found this number listed, how do you account for that?" The answer was that that was "just for those who still think that this building is Roerich Museum." I then demanded to know what had been done with the paintings and was told that I must call on Tuesday morning or later and ask for Mrs. Horch or for her secretary, Mrs. Tinnin, and that Mrs. Horch would tell me what had happened to the paintings. Later in the day I again called and asked for either Mrs. or Mr. Horch. I was told that they were both out of the city. I then asked to speak to any of the other officers or trustees of Roerich Museum, - first securing affirmation that Mr. Horch was President and his wife Secretary of the institution. I said, "I should like to speak, for instance, to the 1st Vice-President, M.M. Lichtmann, or Sina Lichtmann, Vice-President or Miss Grant, Vice-President." After some delay I was told that they did not answer and that apparently everyone was away for the week end. I said, "Will either Mr. or Mrs. Lichtmann or Miss Grant also be able to tell me where the paintings are?" And the answer was, "Oh, of course!" I was again told that everyone was away for the week end, and was advised to telephone on Tuesday and ask for Mrs. Tinnin.

On Tuesday morning, July 5th, I telephoned again, asking for Mrs. Tinnin. When she answered I asked where the Roerich paintings were. She said that they had been put in storage. I said, "Who put them in storage?" She answered, "Why, the man that owns them." I asked who that was and she answered, "Louis Horch." - and began demanding to know to whom she was speaking. I told her that she was speaking to a friend of Roerich Museum and asked her whether she was a secretary of Roerich Museum. She said no, in some confusion, adding that she was a secretary of Master Institute. I said, "Are you a secretary of Master Institute of United Arts, Inc.?" She first said, "Yes", and then said, "Oh, I have nothing to do with the incorporation, - I'm just an office secretary." I again asked to speak to Mr. or Mrs. Horch or any other officer of Roerich Museum, or Trustee, and was told that no one was in, that Mr. and Mrs. Horch were out of town.