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Roerich Remembered In Space Flight

By A Staff Reporter

WHO could have imagined that, while in space, the first cosmonaut, Yuri Gagarin, would think of works of art? A tough and wiry flier like Gagarin is not usually associated with painting. And yet it is a fact that he compared the beauty of cosmos to the paintings of Svetoslav Roerich.

As he was flying 109 miles above the earth's surface, the first spaceman, overwhelmed by the enchanting beauty before his eyes exclaimed: "What marvellous beauty! How extraordinary! Like Roerich's paintings." These remarks by Gagarin were heard on the earth through the wireless radio and Mr. Roerich became the first painter in the world to have a cosmic opinion about his art.

When Mr. Roerich returned to Delhi some days ago from a visit to Kulu, a surprise packet awaited him. The packet, sent by a journalist friend in Moscow, contained the clipping of an article in "Pravda" of April 23, and a letter and a picture postcard. On one side of the picture postcard was a photograph of Gagarin and on the other a brief communication to Mrs. Roerich which read: "This man has recalled the pictures of your husband in space. He is Yuri Gagarin."

It appears that the long article, which was written jointly by two Soviet journalists, dealt with Gagarin's great achievements and also referred to a press conference he held on his return to earth. The letter to Mr. Roerich from Moscow said: "The state of weightlessness did not prevent him (Gagarin) from comparing the marvellous beauty of the colour transitions of the sky over our planet with the combinations of colours in your canvases. I am sure there had not yet been a cosmic opinion about your art. No artist in the world possesses one."

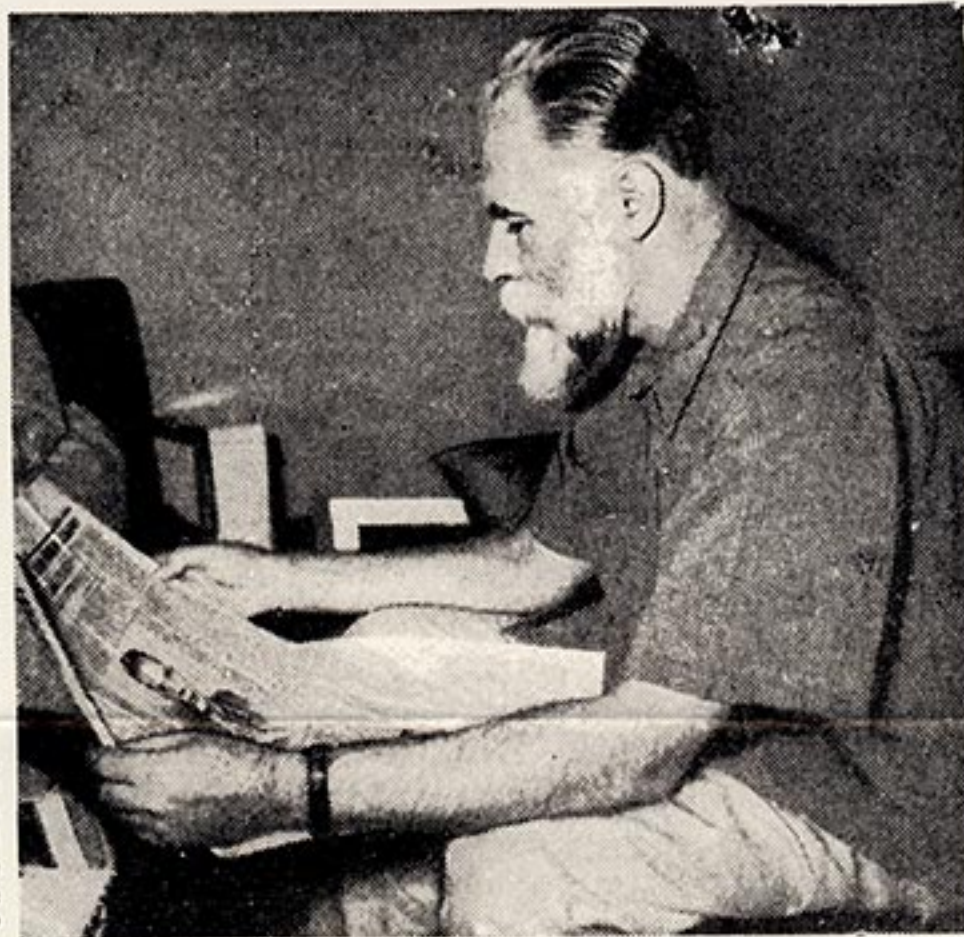
When I met Mr. Roerich in Delhi this week I asked him whether he could guess which of his paintings Gagarin had in mind. "I think the one about the Himalayas," Mr. Roerich replied. "The

atmosphere in the Himalayas is intense. It is extremely vivid. The view is not obscured by dust. You see brilliant colours and shadows, the sun and the snow and the clouds."

The use of bright colours is a characteristic of Mr. Roerich's art. He recalled the remarks made by Mr. Khrushchev after the Soviet leader had seen his paintings. This

people visited the exhibition in the two cities in six weeks last year. Gagarin must have been one of them. He was not so well known then. Like other visitors, he must have paid an admission fee of three roubles.

As I left the hotel suite in which Mr. and Mrs. Roerich were staying in Delhi I wondered what the incident proved. Did it mean



Mr. Svetoslav Roerich with the "Pravda" article which referred to Yuri Gagarin's remarks during his flight.

is what he is reported to have said: "Some people may say that the colours are too bright. But I have seen them. They exist. It needs the right eye to see them and a great artist to portray them." And now Gagarin had confirmed the view.

Where had Gagarin seen Mr. Roerich's paintings? Perhaps in Moscow or Leningrad, said Mr. Roerich. As many as 4,20,000

that Gagarin has a sensitive, artistic mind on which Mr. Roerich's paintings have made a great impact? Or did it mean that Mr. Roerich has succeeded in translating a part of cosmic reality into paint? Perhaps both answers are correct. As space travel develops, we may see further evidence of the transcendental streak in the thought processes of poets and painters.