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MASTER OF THE VIRGO INTER VIRGINES
IN THE CHICAGO ART INSTITUTE .

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With greatest interest I read the article by Mr. Daniel Catton Rich in the March issue of the Bulletin of the Chicago Art Institute. In his article Mr. Rich says: "Where so many paintings of this period have suffered drastically from wear or over-cleaning, this "Ecce Homo" has come down to us fresh in color and surface". This just remark has a special meaning for me. When in 1923 in Rome we were choosing this remarkable painting for the collection of the Roerich Institutions, I was attracted not only by the rare characteristic quality of this painting but also by its beautifully preserved condition. At first I attributed this unusually fine condition to the fact that this painting was a long time in possession of the San Luca monastery, where no retouching nor transportations harmed it. During the last conference of the Experts in Rome under the auspices of the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation of the League of Nations, I expressed my opinion, unani- mously approved by the conference, about the irreparable harm for paint- ings from frequent transportations. But in the case of "Ecce Homo" an- other very important factor was told to me which ascribes the excellent condition of the painting to the fact that for a long time "Ecce Homo" was covered by another subject painted on it in a later period. The dif- ference in time permitted the upper layer to be taken off later on with- out any harm for the painting itself. With similar conditions I often met during my collecting and more than once I smiled witnessing how such act of vandalism as using the surface of old paintings for new ones preserved for one time many originals, for the old vernis constituted an impenetrable shield against intruding new layers of colors. I remember similar cases

in my collection with the painting by Barnard Orley, which was covered by a horrible portrait of an old man, also with the painting of Abraham Bloemard "Adoration of Shepherds" where the entire sky was covered by evidently later painted over heavy clouds, under which appeared to be an untouched colorful choir of cherubs. A similar vandal over-painting preserved also a very fine painting by Roeland Savery "Noah's Arc", which was hidden by a castle, huge trees and ugly rounds of bacchanal dancing. Another painting still remains in a similar hidden condition but it was overpainted by Correggio himself with a subject "Ecce Homo". Through the colors of Correggio you can quite clearly distinguish the outlines of a man's portrait sitting in an armchair. It could be a portrait of a Pope, or Cardinal, but the Ecce Homo of Correggio's brush is so remarkable, that the hidden painting, perhaps still more beautiful, remains inaccessible. These occurrences remind us once more of the meaning of the passing fashion which is the cause that even the most outstanding Masterpieces had to go through exile, being often veiled even by ugly stratas. However this unjust exile served but for their glorification bringing to us the unspoiled creations. Certainly to our regret the hand of the vandal did not always have mercy with that which in self-conceit he overpainted. We can see how sometimes for overpainting they scratched off the original and it is but the burnt in signet of Saint Lucas Guild on the back of the pannel which reminds us of the destroyed masterpiece. But one can rejoice that in the case of the "Ecce Homo" which through the generosity of Mr. Ryerson now joined the Chicago Art Institute, the temporary veil of the painting preserved for us the intact Beauty of this Masterpiece.

Nicholas Roerich.

Himalayas,
1931.