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SPEECH AT THE PREVIEW OF THE ART IN STEEL
EXHIBITION AT BANGALORE

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by

SVETOSLAV ROERICH

I am grateful to Mr. Chandy, Mr. Mitra and Mr. Rao for having asked me to participate in the preview of this exhibition.

Since I am a guest here, I imagine I am expected to say a few words, but I do not know if you have ever heard the expression that: "Artists-Painters like children should be seen and not heard".

Another very old saying says: "It is better to see a thing ONCE than hear about it a HUNDRED TIMES". Under these circumstances I feel the quicker we turn to the exhibition before us, the better. But I also feel I would like to tell you why I think this event is important; why Art must be encouraged and helped; what is the function of Art?

Hindustan Steel and Mr. Chandy in particular deserve much credit for having commissioned leading artists to participate in the saga of Steel. Their impressions, their thoughts and interpretations are a very valuable contribution to our life and I hope it will be extended further and take deeper roots in the every day life of the great Steel and other plants of our country. We must beautify our life, we must carry Art to the people and make them participants in that great creative expression.

I hope Hindustan Steel will eventually have Schools of Art, Theatres, Libraries and Art Galleries where the workers will have the benefit of studying and cultivating the Arts themselves and enjoy works of great artists. It will immeasurably enrich their life and give it a new dimension, it will give them relaxation and interest. Sport is wonderful and essential, but sport in some way is wedded to the prime of our bodies whereas creative arts can be exercised at any time of our life and have an almost infinite scope. Art libraries, Art schools, Art clubs, Art Exhibitions, all this will give the workers a new incentive and perspective. Life can be made rich through new contacts and impressions. Poets, Artists interpret life and often open our eyes to something which we have never even suspected.

It is our duty to give that which can be most useful, something which can give true happiness and direction. The importance of Art, its vital place in our life can never be overestimated. An old Roman saying goes: "Ars Longa, Vita Brevis" - (Art is long, but life is short). To really master the Arts requires application, devotion, dedication. Yet even a general knowledge and familiarity will go a long way to enrich our life, open up new horizons and form new and precious contacts.

I would like to remind you of a few definitions of Art and its ultimate function as formulated by a few great men whose names are well familiar to all of us.

Rabindranath Tagore when speaking of Art said: "In Art the person in us sends his answer to the Supreme Person who reveals Himself to us in a world of endless beauty across a lightless world of facts".

Swami Vivekananda the Spiritual Leader said: "That person cannot be truly religious who has not the faculty of feeling the grandeur and beauty of Art."

The great Russian writer Dostoyevsky said: "Beauty will save the world", while Plato the Greek Philosopher almost two thousand five hundred years earlier pronounced: "He who contemplates the beautiful elevates himself".

How simple, yet beautiful are these statements, they all clearly define the importance of Art and its ultimate mission. Many years ago speaking on creative thought I said: "Violence will hesitate under the vaults of a lofty cathedral while it will thrive in an ugly den". We must beautify our surroundings our homes, our lives and they will in turn radiate their influence upon us and our children.

The Arts have always been known and appreciated as the great magnets of men, and religion freely made use of this great field of human expression. The best artists were engaged to build beautiful temples, erect great sculptures and images, depict subjects of spiritual significance and awaken and attract through them the masses which came in contact with these works of Art. This was done for the sake of religion and had to conform to the canons of the particular faith. But how great is the power of true Art! After long centuries,

even thousands of years when the religious sentiments that once moved mankind began gradually to wane, the great artistic merit of these temples and images has come to the fore recognised and appreciated by everybody regardless of their faith. These images, these edifices, these sculptures now attract us perhaps even more, but not so much through the appeal to our religious feelings, as through their great message of Art. It is indeed a great triumph of Art that these images are sought for all over the world, people are ready to pay fortunes to possess them and the entire world pays tribute to them and admires them.

Is this not the most eloquent evidence of the transcendental power that resides in true Art and in Beauty?

In many countries there was a practice to surround expectant mothers with beautiful images, beautiful inspiring symbols. The thought behind it was to influence through the medium of the mother the formation of the child.

It is of special interest and something that may have escaped our attention that hermitages, places which were chosen by hermits for meditation and retirement were almost invariably chosen amidst very beautiful surroundings, so that beauty could inspire and elevate the souls who attempted to transcend earthly life and rise above the every day.

These are some of the hidden powers residing in Art, in Beauty, the healing touch of more perfect combinations, harmony and the inspiration which fills greater Art.

I shall now give a few examples of the regenerative and happiness-giving power which resides in the appreciation of Beauty of which I was a witness.

I remember many years ago a well educated middle aged man who held an important post came to visit us in the Himalayas. My Father was then alive and in his conversation with this man he became aware that whenever this man referred to mountains he always said they were either black or light, apparently referring to shadow and the lit up portions.

My Father became interested and in the course of his conversation he found out that this man had apparently no sense of colour or rather was not using at all his colour discriminating faculty. My Father at great length and pain began to explain to him the differences of the shades,

the colours, the harmonies, the constant changes of the finest nuances that exist in the hills and mountains. After some time my Father's patience was rewarded, this man gradually began to discern the differences of colours and began to see the different shades. There was no end to his joy as a new rich world unfolded before him, he became aware of a new world of beauty which he never was conscious of all his life.

The other one is about a simple man from North India who worked for me as a driver for many years. Whenever there was no driving to be done he would happily attend to all sorts of other duties and work. One day I sent him into the distant mountains to collect for me from a great altitude a certain flower which was about to blossom then. He went and was away for quite some time. After his return he reported to me about all the work he did and then with sudden enthusiasm and eagerness turned to me and said: "How I wish Sahib was there with me, I have seen something most beautiful. At a great height there was a rapid mountain stream frozen over by a crust of ice, the water was rippling and running below the ice and the sun was shining from the side and the whole stream was sparkling with every conceivable colour, it was so beautiful I never saw anything like it." - Just think of the joy which was kindled in this simple man by the sight of beauty:

When I was in Moscow at the time of my exhibitions one day we went with my wife to a large Department Store - 'Children's Paradise' - where you can buy anything needed by and for children. As we were getting out of our car and crossing the pavement towards the entrance I suddenly heard behind me a little voice exclaiming: "Mamma, Mamma, how beautiful" and as I turned round I saw a little boy holding on with one hand to his mother's hand and pointing with the other towards the bright Kulu Shawl worn by my wife. The little boy must have been not more than four years old, but he was completely overcome by the emotion of beauty as he stood there with his eyes transfixed and little hand stretched out.

This somehow reminded me of an important event many, many years ago, in the last century, in Bengal, when a little boy whose name was Gadadhar was plunged into his first Samadhi upon seeing a flight of white Herons tracing their course across the dark blue sky. This boy was to become Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa:

Infinite are the examples, one could cite of the power of Beauty, one must only keep one's eyes and heart open and prepare to receive its Blessed Tidings.

Spectacular and breath taking modern discoveries and inventions are changing the pattern of human society, but we must be on guard watchfully and jealously to safeguard the great treasures of our inner life, lest an outer glitter weans us away from the human values. The mere abundance of physical possessions and facilities does not constitute or insure a happy life - There must be "something substantially more" and that "something more" lies deep within ourselves. It is this "something" which illumines our lives, and makes us steadfast and determined even in adversity. The great discoveries and invention of physical Science must be the humble servants of man and not enslave him in a mad rush for the evanescent mirage of prosperity. We must see that the many Frankenstein monsters which we are now evoking through our ignorance and wrong motivation do not turn on us and overpower us, or at best turn us into mere Robots. Remember always man has survived and can survive somehow without machines, but machines without man are useless.

Before I close I would like to narrate to you an old Russian legend which came down from the middle ages - it is quaint and naive like all Primitives are, but it breathes unalloyed faith and truth.

When Christ was ascending to Heaven, minstrels approached Him and said: "Lord, whom are you leaving us to, what will happen to us, how shall we live without you"? And Christ said: "Don't cry my children, I shall give you golden mountains and silver rivers, I shall give you spacious residences where you shall dwell in happiness." St. John who was present then said to Jesus: "Lord don't give them golden mountains and silver rivers, someone powerful and covetous may take it away from them and they may not know how to keep them, but give them the power of Your songs and command that he who will listen to these songs and appreciate them will find the doors of Paradise open" - and Christ answered: "Yes, I shall not give them golden mountains and silver rivers, but I shall give them My songs and command that everyone who will listen to them, everyone who appreciates them, will find the gates of Paradise wide open".

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