

Address given by Svetoslav Roerich well-known artist, to the Public Relations Society of India, Bangalore, on Friday, April 4, 1975.

TRANSCRIPTION.

Friends,

I am very happy to be here today to meet you all and tell you something of my thoughts on public relations and the role that art plays in these relations. First of all, I want to thank Mr. Balu for all his kind, very flattering words, perhaps which I do not all deserve, but any how I am grateful to him for them. I am happy we can (sort of) informally meet today and perhaps some of the things I will tell you may be of interest to you.

I always considered that art is one of the best mediums for public relations. This I have seen all over the world. There is something in art which attracts and holds people. And we know already through history, what an important role art has played in the past, how important the influence of art is in international relations. Now, when we look upon the international sphere, what do we see? Paintings by Leonardo da Vinci like the Mona Lisa or the great sculptors of Italy ... How people all over the world come to see them... That great Pieta of Michael Angelo has travelled all over the world and every where millions upon millions of people have come to see, admire it and pay their tribute. In other words, it has become a synonym of a great treasure, which belongs to the whole of humanity and transcends every border and limitation and whenever these things, paintings or sculptures, are shown to people, people forget all the divisions of time, race and language and all flock together to see and admire these masterpieces. Mona Lisa has recently been to Russia and hundreds of thousands of people everywhere paid homage to that painting because of its tremendous, transcendental values. True, the painting was somewhat isolated from the public because it was kept under heavy glass and under guards. But still there was a peculiar something about that painting, something which I cannot describe. Whenever I saw it in the Louvre many, many years ago and I visited it regularly, there was something about it that attracted you and held you

spellbound. It has become a symbol of something very beautiful, very precious, a symbol of something sublime. Art has the power of transcending all the limitations and of attracting and gathering people.

I myself just came back from the Soviet Union where my paintings were being exhibited and I must say one of my most precious experiences was the wonderful contacts I had with the people of the country every day... Every day I could speak, I could contact tens of thousands of people and get their immediate and living reactions, their searching questions, their tremendous interest and I should say their knowledge, their really extensive and deep knowledge not only of art but of many other subjects like for instance philosophy. I do not think many of you, have seen my paintings for they have not been exhibited here in Bangalore, but among the subjects I have, there were many subjects, on philosophy, subjects through which I wanted to give to the people something of my thoughts, because I believe that Art should convey and stimulate thought. That is where I disagree with abstract art. Though I accept abstract art as a sort of a branch of pictorial expression, I do not think it can reach very far, because it cannot convey concrete thought and thought after all is most essential. So when I saw hundreds of thousands of people at my exhibitions, I could see what a great impression non-abstract art has upon people. It is not only the actual pictorial, so to say, representation of something, but the eagerness of people to look for and read the thoughts of the artist. Hence I believe that there must be always that common medium of communication, because without a common medium of communication, we cannot converse with one another. That is why in my art I have never gone into the so-called abstract art. Though I think abstract art has done us some good by freeing us of certain redundant academisms and other "isms" perhaps, and it can serve a very good purpose too if it is wisely used as a background for concrete thought. Now for me to see how Art moves and attracts people is a very wonderful thing ... wonderful how it stimulates and how it unites. whenever people really come together and they come together to admire something, there you find a new link, a precious link, which brings them together and for that particular moment holds them as something unique, a living and pulsating unit. By being able to speak

directly to all these people at my exhibitions and so many other meetings, I saw how vital it is for people to contact thought - thought that gives them certain directions in life, holds out to them some new concepts and opens up new horizons. Obviously, in my exhibition, I had a lot of paintings on India and I must say that the interest of the people, the response of the people specifically to these Indian subjects, the searching questions and that friendly, very warm feeling which they had for India really moved me. In one of the books of opinions, I saw somebody wrote: "This exhibition has made the world much larger and brought India to us much, much closer". Some people have written to say that though they have read so many books on India, this pictorial experience has given them a direct contact, which was most precious and something which they wanted and needed. Now, to give you an example, my exhibition at Leningrad had more than four and a half lakhs of visitors. All these people had to buy tickets, had to pay a lot of money for the tickets, yet to get to these exhibitions they had to stand in frost and snow for five hours or more. These queues were going around the whole block, around whole building, around the streets and people had to stand and wait for long, long hours. Now this is just perhaps one example of how Art attracts people and how it moves them. People have given us wonderful write-ups and opinions in books and on sheets of paper hundreds and hundreds if not thousands of different opinions, what people experienced and what they wanted to see and know. That process of continuation of that which has been started by just seeing some paintings, and the new ideas they evoked may now enrich and fill their lives.

Now, we know well that Public Relations is certainly, specially now, one of the most important branches of our social life. There is absolute necessity for this work because it is a branch of science and art. To convey impressions, various feelings to people, and make them think about it. A great Russian scholar once told me that unless you suggest to people something, they will not notice it. You have to suggest and then people suddenly awaken. They begin to think about it. Now, the public relations people should always keep this in mind, that they must make a suggestion, they must knock at the inner door to open and then keep the attention of the people, once the door has been opened. We know in an advertisement, that it is not really necessary for a firm to sell the best

or to produce the best goods. All you have to do is to prove to the people that what you produce is what they really want. Once you persuade the people that your produce is just what they need and what they want, your problem is solved. It makes no difference what the produce may be. Now this you see is a very important factor. First trying to get the attention of the people, then suggesting something to them and then holding it. Most public relations are really based upon these few facts. Once you have mastered them you can do anything you want and if the person in question is clever, he can hold the people because people somehow are always eager to look for something new, something interesting, something different, something striking.

I have always noticed in life that at an exhibition of Art, that which strikes people first are the bright colours. The first impression is through some brilliant and unusual combination of colours. That will hold the attention and catch the eye. Then comes the secondary process - the analysis, when we begin to analyse our emotions and what the paintings really contain or really mean. But it is that first impact that is absolutely essential. I know from considerable experience that in a pictorial display it is the bright colours that strike you first once you catch the eye of the people, then later you can enlarge upon it. We know very well that in all diplomacies, in all the missions, public relations are most important. They are based upon them and without public relations nothing could really be achieved; in other words it is that wonderful sphere of life which welds people together and forges a wonderful bridge which helps people to communicate with each other. That is why I am very happy there is an organisation here that does that and will do it, ever enlarging its scope and will definitely exert a big influence upon people. An organisation of this sort is important because it is a living and very important branch of human endeavour, something that we must certainly cultivate by every means and try to breathe into it, as much as possible, of knowledge, understanding and of real interest. Every officer, I mean Public Relations Officer, must be first of all a knowledgeable person, then he must have the personality. He must know the subject, know all the related subjects, in order to really be a successful ambassador.

You know we have some French friends here and this reminds me of one pompous P.R.O. who went to France where he was to address some people at some function. He was asked by the host "How shall we address you?" "Well, I am P.R.O. so and so." The perplexed host mumbled how is it that Monsieur is a P.R.O.? What does it mean? In France Pierrot means a Harlequin or Jester. To avoid these misunderstandings the man in question must know whom he is going to meet, whom he is going to address and he should know the subject rather well.

Let us turn to life, after all what is it that is really precious? It is the goodwill and friendship. The Public Relations Officers can do a tremendous work in building up that goodwill, the friendship that we all need, all countries need and every one really wants and longs for. Everyone wants to find means and ways by which that goodwill may be obtained and strengthened. Very often we do not know how to get it, we go round in circles and we miss a great deal. When we think of the tremendous expenses in armaments, that are wasted by countries every hour, every day, every year, where hundreds of billions are sent down the drain because we distrust each other, because we are afraid of each other, because we cannot find a common language and a common bond of unity. Now, think of all the money that is really wasted in armaments, because armaments are a terrible waste, they go out of date very soon and become obsolete unless they are quickly sold to a less fortunate neighbour. It is something that really cripples humanity and really stifles humanity in a most awful way. In that respect I was very happy to notice that in the Soviet Union culture had the first place and the budgets allocated to education and culture were the biggest. In that there is hope, the hope that somewhere people are striving and struggling to build up those real riches and values which alone can solve our problems. Culture is after all that golden key which perhaps eventually will make armaments unnecessary and bring people together and open out new wonderful vistas for humanity, give riches to the people and make everybody happy.

I wanted to mention that I have not been to the Soviet Union for fourteen years, that is to say, my present visit was after a lapse of about fourteen years, and I am happy to say that I found really great progress,

progress in every walk of life. People were relaxed, they had much more money and people were much happier, looking for all the wonderful things of life, with a special emphasis on books. Books are being sold in millions of copies, the demand for books is really quite remarkable. Illustrated magazines are brought out in 11 million, 12 million copies. Books come out in Lakhs of copies and are sold out immediately. They brought out a number of books for the Centenary of my Father and these books were actually in lakhs of copies and they were sold out even before they came out. Sometimes it was not possible to get even a single copy of these books. Now that eagerness, that wish to study is a most remarkable feature which I have noticed there, especially among all those young students with whom I had contacts every day. The society there, the young people, struck me as a comparatively very healthy society. It is true you can also find some so-called modern trends, just one or two young people with a sort of slight interest in Hippyism but it is such a very small minority that they don't strike you at all. But the average person has a healthy, I should say virile outlook and healthy attitude. I am sorry to say that in the West I have found in the young people a certain decadence and that decadence expressing itself in so many ways. Whether it is decadence of frustration or decadence of satiation or something else I do not know. These young people who are inclined to take drugs do not know how to fit themselves, into the pattern of life, they feel convinced that they want to get rid of some absolute to them standards and at the same time they feel frustrated. That was a rather unhappy experience and I found it almost every where in one form or another. I hope that it is a temporary phase, as all this will lead to nothing.

Friends, since you are directly concerned and interested in Public Relations and it is a most important branch of human endeavour - I would like to again emphasise in conclusion how all important the Arts are in building up the contacts and for the establishment of friendly relations and understanding. Wherever Art is shown in any of its forms it is a nucleus around which people will gather, and we can use this peculiar magic of the Arts to build happy relations with the people we want to meet. In turn we must be attentive to Art and help the Arts to give their best and play their role. Every Public Relations Officer is an Ambassador whose mission may vary, but fundamentally they have one purpose

in common; to establish happy relations with men and women, gain their confidence and convey to them the specific purpose of their mission. Hence the responsibility is great, the field is vast and the means to carry out the work are infinite, but fundamentally it is Goodwill, Understanding and Knowledge.

I will close with a quaint Russian Legend which hails from the middle ages: When Christ was ascending to heaven, some minstrels approached him and asked, "Lord Christ, to whom are you leaving us? How can we exist without you?" and Christ answered, "My children, I shall give you the golden mountains and silver rivers and beautiful gardens and you shall be nourished and happy." But then St. John approached Christ and said, "Oh Lord, give them not golden mountains and silver rivers. They do not know how to guard them, and someone rich and powerful will attack them and take away the golden mountains. Give them only your name and your beautiful songs and give the command that all those who appreciate the songs and who care for and guard the singers shall find the gates open to Paradise." And Christ replied, "Yes, I shall give them not golden mountains, but my songs and all who appreciate them shall find the gates to Paradise open".

On this I close our talk and I thank you.

SVETOSLAV ROERICH.

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