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In the history of the fine arts, certain individuals have appeared from time to time whose work has a unique, profound and indeed a mystical quality which differentiates them from their contemporaries, making it impossible to classify them in any known category or to ally them with any school, because they resemble themselves only—and one another, like some spaceless and timeless order of initiates. Such were Leonardo, Rembrandt, Dürer, Blake, and, in other fields, Beethoven and Balzac; such also, in our own times and in a lesser way, were Rodin, Ryder and Burne Jones, for their work shows flashes of that daemonic and eerie beauty which is the sign whereby they may be identified as belonging to that mythical mystic brotherhood.

Nicholas Roerich, in his life, in his character and in his art reveals himself as a member of this fraternity. For thirty-five years—since the time of his first exhibition in Russia—he has been going up and down the world—Europe, America, Asia—absorbing the auras of diverse peoples, making pilgrimages to remote places, and always and everywhere scattering wisdom, planting seeds of beauty, some of which have sprung up, flowered, and scattered seeds of their own.

In Russia, as secretary of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, and later as director of the school of that society, he was an important agent in organizing and coördinating that native, new and powerful impulse which in painting, in music, in the drama and in the dance later spread throughout the civilized world: for it is not too much to say that everything which now goes by the name of modernism had Russia for its cradle. It is significant in this connection that Stanislavsky enlisted Roerich's aid in the Moscow Art Theatre, that Stravinsky dedicated to him the *Sacre du Printemps*, for which Roerich designed the original *mise-en-scène*, and that Andriev, Gorky, Mestrovic, Zuloaga, Tagore and others throughout the world who represent the *newness*, have paid him the tribute of their homage and their praise.

Coming to America with an exhibition of his paintings, at the invitation of the Chicago Art Institute, Roerich immediately took steps to resume and repeat the work he had inaugurated in Russia, that of uniting the arts, and thus uniting men through beauty, for he believed, as many others are coming to believe, that beauty is the universal and true solvent whereby racial and national animosities...
AND WE ARE OPENING THE GATES.—Nicholas Roerich
may be dissolved. To this end he founded, with the help of friends, a school in which all of the fine arts were to be taught, under the title of Master Institute of United Arts, and a year later he established Corona Mundi, an International Art Center. The school passed through those vicissitudes which usually beset enterprises of this character in a civilization such as ours, the best image of which would be a rush-light in a windswept darkness—but it survived, and has to-day a permanent home on Riverside Drive, New York. Other vast outlines, sketched by Roerich at this time, have not been filled in: they include Cor Ardens, an affiliation of the creators of beauty everywhere throughout the world, and Alatas, an international, non-commercial publishing association for the interchange and dissemination of new and constructive ideas through the mediumship of the "art preservative."

I mention these enterprises, realized, partially realized and unrealized, to show the vast sweep of Roerich's vision, to indicate his function as a prophet and a pioneer, clearly foreseeing and quietly planning a better order in a world still in the grip of its so recent terrible nightmare, not yet risen from a bed drenched with blood and stained by tears.

Should his prophecies come true, and should his dreams of binding humanity into a brotherhood through beauty materialize, it is for this that he will doubtless be most honored and longest remembered, but to us, his contemporaries, he is naturally best known as a painter of hauntingly beautiful pictures. These are of all kinds and on a vast variety of subjects, but in general they represent nature strained through a mystical consciousness—the light that is on sea and land translated, by some potent magic, into the light that never was on sea or land. Roerich satisfies the idealist without affronting the realist. Mukerji, the Hindu novelist and poet, remarked to a friend that if he wanted to know how the Himalayas impressed a beholder, he should see Roerich's paintings of them, because along with a true rendering of their form and color, something of their spirit was communicated too.

It is characteristic of the man that he should have journeyed to that roof of the world, Thibet, the sacred imperishable land. After a brief sojourn in America, in obedience to some inner monition of the spirit, he forsook the ordered and easy life of cities, and unappalled by the rigors, dangers and difficulties of such a quest, he set out for the Himalayan plateau, "trailing clouds of glory" as he went, so to speak, in the shape of paintings of the Grand Canyon, the Santa Fe country, the Pacific, India and the Far East. The culmination of his life work, up to the present, is in those groups of paintings named by him the Thibetan Path, Himalaya, and Banners of the East. These are freighted with mystical meanings which, even though unintelligible to all save the initiated, yet act upon the unenlightened consciousness as does perfume upon the senses, or as music upon the emotions. It is not that Roerich attempts to be deliberately cryptic—on the contrary, a great deal of his symbolism is almost naive in its simplicity—but the average mind so resents the very idea of esotericism, that it closes itself to a certain extent.

Roerich's symbolism, as I say, requires no glossary, possessing the characteristics of directness and universality. An example of his general method is seen in that painting of what he names the Messiah series, entitled, "The Miracle." It represents a titanic valley, not unlike the Grand Canyon, a world primeval, stark, rock-strewn, without visible flora or fauna. Prominent in the foreground is a natural bridge, and over this bridge passes a road. On the near side of the bridge are a few human figures, prostrate before the miracle of a great radiance coming from behind the bridge, the aura of some supernatural presence whose figure is not yet visible. Here is a simple, natural symbology subject perhaps to different interpretations, but none of them contradictory. Considered objectively, the picture is simply a dramatization of that expectancy of a messiah which is so general nowadays, and it holds forth the healing promise, that though his presence is not seen, his aura brightens the darkness, his influence is
already felt. Considered from the standpoint of subjectivity, the denuded valley might symbolize the condition of the soul after trials and purgations; the road, the "small old path" to freedom and perfection; the bridge, that stage on that path where the transit is effected between the lower and the higher consciousness; the prostrate figures, those "qualities" which must be redeemed and "carried over," awe-struck at the miracle of the felt approach of the "golden person" bringing release from bondage through the shining of the inward light.

But the great merit of this picture, freighted as it is with meaning (and that of others of its class), lies in its beauty of color and composition. The mystic and metaphysician in Roerich never submerge the artist, with the result that when he permits himself the use of symbols he is still lyrical and not literary: his pictures are not sermons, but songs. "The Miracle," despite the fact that it conveys a message, is not a morality so much as a delight to the visual sense, abounding in spatial rhythms and color harmonies as fine and subtle as those of some priceless old yellow Chinese rug. The "story" is there, but the final indelible impression is one of beauty, and this is as it should be, for in the hierarchy of trades and talents the creative artist is nearest to the throne of God.

Of Roerich’s archaeological pictures I shall not speak, nor of his-pioneer work in the theatre, important as that has been, because I feel that these things, which at one time absorbed his mind and dominated his consciousness have since become far less important to him than what I shall call his mystical quest. One has the feeling that in everything he does he is seeking the hidden truth, the unrevealed beauty, the Lost Word, in point of fact. Like some mighty indefatigable hunter, armed not with a gun, but with his brushes and paints, he stalks his quarry across oceans, rivers, mountains, though knowing all the while that the thing he is seeking is in himself. He permits us to participate in this adventure, and thus draw nearer to that truth which is beauty, and that beauty which is truth.
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