

# AN AMERICAN ARTIST'S TRIBUTE TO ROERICH

*By Vandana Shukla TIMES NEWS NETWORK*

Chandigarh: It's not every day that an American artist offers an artistic tribute to a Russian painter. It's a different matter though that the spirituality of this Russian painter had turned him almost into an Indian sage. For Indians, particularly for the Himachalis, Nicholas Roerich does not sound like a foreign name.

American artist Payson R. Stevens, who has been an admirer of Roerich for many years, having grown up in New York City where a gallery is devoted to his work, had exhibited his recent works at Roerich Museum in Naggar, HP. Stevens says Roerich contributed a lot to the inspiration of his work, especially his multidimensional pursuits influenced him. Stevens has dedicated 'Flux and Flow/Pravah', as the exhibition's title goes, to the memory of Roerich's remarkable life and to all those working to protect and preserve the unique beauty of the Kullu valley. Stevens' works are exhibited at Roerich Museum's Modern Art Exhibition Hall at Naggar, and will remain on display till October 26. The exhibition opened on October 9, the birthday of Roerich.

Stevens, an oceanographer by profession, had been deeply involved in the environmental and earth sciences. His interests as an artist grew in the 1960s when he became a member of New York City's Bread and Puppet Theatre and later studied at the Arts Students League and the School of Visual Arts.

"My move to California in 1968 offered a new approach to nature for the first time. My observations of natural forms transformed my life, both as a scientist and artist. I have traveled extensively since from Antarctica to the South Pacific Islands; Baja, Mexico to the Bering Glacier, Alaska; the American Southwest to the Himalayan ranges of Nepal and India and nature has never stopped surprising me," says Stevens. While the artist in him influenced his scientific pursuits, his art carried reflection of the scientist's observations in nature. However, a conflict lurked at the back of his mind as to what was his true calling?

Soon, the answer came as a blessing in the form a spiritual guru. "In 1989, while trekking in Solu-Khumbu, the Everest region in Nepal, I had the good fortune to have an audience with Rimpoche Tulshig ('tulshig' means destroyer of illusions), a revered Tibetan high lama of the Buddhist Nyingmapa sect. The dilemma of my life had been doing science versus doing art. The Rimpoche kindly provided me with an answer: "There are enough scientists in the world, it needs more artists to paint!" he said, informs Stevens. However, it took him a while before he fully committed himself to his advice. Now, for Stevens, painting is his daily work.

Over the past 30 years Stevens has painted abstract land and seascapes, preoccupied by their energy and power. "These images represent my attempt to honour our home planet and engender a sense of beauty and contemplative respect in the viewer."

Steven's exhibition – 'Pravah' was inaugurated by the Russian ambassador to India VI Trubnikov and the executive director of the Roerich International Roerich Memorial Trust, Dr Alena Adamkova, on October 9. The works exhibited in Pravah capture the energy and beauty of the nullahs of the Kullu valley and have been

rendered on khadi paper that Stevens feels has its own special qualities. The mixed-media drawings combine oil crayons, pastels, pencil and natural pigments from local plants.

They not only reflect the deeper, mysterious movements and levels in nature, but also the larger spiritual dimension that Stevens feels is embracing us all.



Russian ambassador to India VI Trubnikov with Payson R Stevens, (below) the exhibition at Naggar