

Hindustan Times

Science of impermanence

Energy Flows, the exhibition displaying the works of American artist and earth scientist Payson R Stevens, opens at Government Art Gallery-10

Pooja Vashisht Alexander

Spiraling flux to rippling free flow: Earth scientist and artist Payson R. Stevens's canvas arrests the onlooker in its infinite possibilities. *Energy Flows* (also the title of exhibition inaugurated by theatre person Nee-lam Mansingh Chowdhary) and ceases to ebb in and around this man, who deposited its first gust in painting in 1964.

Soaked in four-decade-old skill and experience—both scientifically and artistically—he dismisses it in a vapour-like whimper: "It's pure energy. I do not want to take full credit for these paintings because these are the gift of a moment. The moment when one trusts movement, lets sweeping strokes of energy take over. I'm a vessel. Empty."

Though this American came to India only in 1996, he gratefully admits to having been introduced to the Eastern tradition in New York by a friend when he was 14. It was Zen Buddhism—eventually working with a Zen Master—and the ancient Indian mythology and philosophy that shaped his idea of 'energy transformation' that he has been stringing, bead-like, in his layered repertoire (he paints, plays piano, pens verse, has been involved with traditional and new media as an artist, designer, writer and filmmaker, is an advisor on environmental issues, has advised on environmental sustainability and ecotourism issues for the Great Himalayan National Park, works with NGOs in America and in Himachal Pradesh).

But his sphere—geological, spiritual or metaphysical—only unfolds the folds of 'impermanence'. That nothing is permanent, reminding us of earthly passage, finds an expression in his *Bardo* and *Moksha* series exhibited in the City.

"Earth science is about constant energy transformations in earth's crust that are responsible for every geological and meteorological process. As a scientist I can appreciate and let the life force, which is the depiction of continual creation and destruction, stimulate me. It reflects the deeper movements in



Keshav Singh

Payson with writer wife Kamla, who'll have her book reading session in City shortly.

Nature and the larger spiritual dimension that embraces all," speaks the scientist—trained in molecular biology and oceanography—who closed his two companies (science/consulting groups with clients in government, industry and academia in the United States - InterNetwork Inc. in 1999 and InterNewtwork Media, Inc. in 2004 respectively) to commit himself completely to art.

"Now I have been blessed with freedom," he sits calmly in his chair at the

Government Museum and Art Gallery, surrounded by his 'oil on canvas' and 'oil on clay-coated paper' works overwhelming in their black-blue-violet density. "It's important to still the mind to feel the energy. And that comes with practice; the practice that could stem from any philosophy or faith if one is sensitive to it. The purpose will be achieved if only one student from the adjacent Arts College pauses to take a look at the paintings, goes back, sits in his room and lets the energy flow," the loner lumbers from thoughts to let in more: "I like to work in complete isolation and only the urge to share artistic pursuit brings me to a city."

However, his halved life (six months in Ghyagi village in the Kullu Valley and the rest in California) keeps him afloat the sea of global citizens. And he with wife Kamla K Kapur—a poet, author and playwright, who taught creative writing in the US till recently—waits in tranquil transparency to let "the" energy use him as a medium, letting not even a spec of it to be wasted.

"It's sad to see environmental energy wasting away without any scientific explanation. There is so much waste everywhere, of resources and potential. The world is a victim of human folly. But one can't be depressed about it. One has the power to do one's best. We have shadow and light in us. It needs the only a channel," Payson punctuates, allowing the mind's roving eye return a meditative gaze, just like the torrentially damp yet crisp-in-moment frames lined up on the creamy walls of the gallery.

On till October 14.
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