

# Artists Rediscover Spirit of Roerich's Himalayas

By Ellen Barry  
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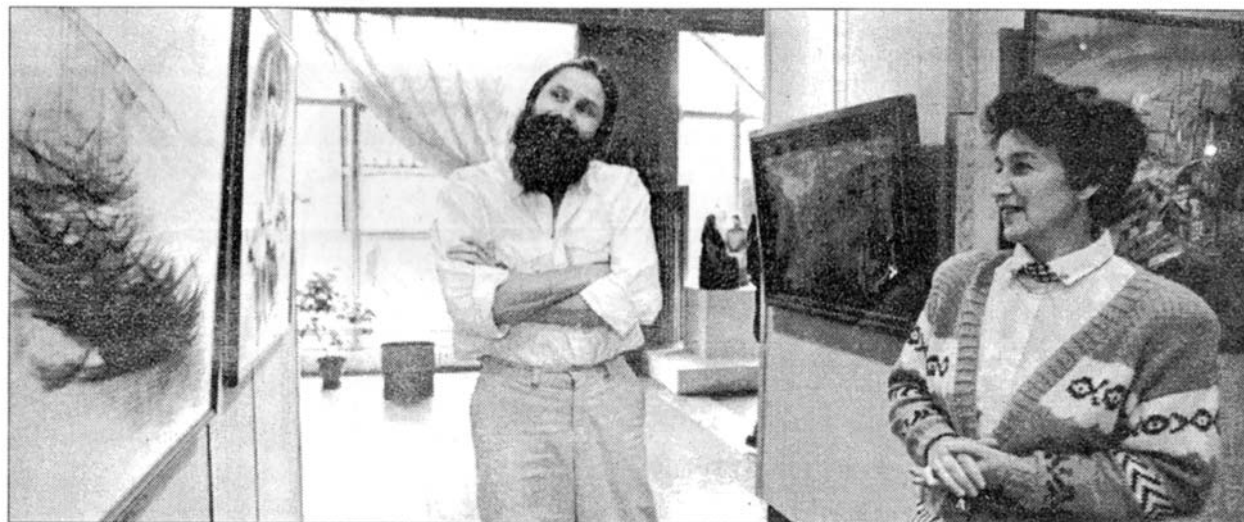
When Nikolai Roerich died in 1947, his home in the Himalayas was sealed and abandoned.

Dust began collecting in the studio where Roerich painted "The Master of the World," the library where he made himself into a Buddhist, and the laboratory where he researched Tibet's flora and fauna. His 1904 Dodge rusted and his garden went to seed.

Deep in northern India's Kulu Valley, Roerich found the landscape that transformed him as an artist — the paintings that have earned him a place in history are, without exception, his dazzling craggy Himalayan cliffs. He had never intended to stay in Kulu, which he first sighted on a 1927 expedition, but 20 years later he would be buried there.

Forty years after that, Vladimir Anisimov arrived.

"When I first set eyes on Roerich's house, all I could think was, 'How did it happen that this man — an artist, a scholar, an explorer, a philosopher — could be so forgotten in his own country? How did that happen?'" said Anisimov, a Moscow textile artist. "For 40 years, life has continued on this planet, while Roerich's home perished, while his institute crumbled into the mountains."



Vladimir Anisimov, left, whose Russian-Indo Roerich Art Club follows the physical and spiritual footsteps of artist Nikolai Roerich, who painted "Kulluta," below. L. NIPP / MT

Along with his fellow pilgrims, who would later become the Russian-Indo Roerich Art Club, Anisimov undertook to restore the estate and Roerich's Institute of Himalayan Research. During the course of the next year, despite eight cases of typhoid and daytime temperatures climbing to 40 degrees

Celsius, the group completed 700 new works of art.

The artists are back in Moscow this fall for the opening of "Moree Flowers," an exhibit of their Indian works. About 40 paintings, tapestries and sculptures are on display at the Russian Federation Artists' Union gallery on

Ulitsa Tverskaya until Sept. 25, when the artists will pack up and begin the trek back as the third Kulu expedition.

The influence of India and of Roerich himself suffuses the work in various ways, integrating Eastern themes and techniques into the work of artists who formed their style and reputations in Russia. The works of Vitaly Popov, for instance, are realistic landscapes and street scenes that evoke the heat and light of India. Andrei Madekin's rich tapestries draw from the apocalyptic images of Hindu legend. Yury Leonov's expressive ceramics are experiments with Indian yellow clay, a new medium for him.

None of the artists follows Roerich stylistically — a conscious decision, Anisimov said. To all the artists, Roerich is a model of philosophy, of lifestyle, of method. Certainly they are tracing Roerich's artistic development, but none of them is copying.

"Like all artists, we are all deeply individualistic, and that's the way it should be," said Anisimov, whose delicate batiks draw from Indonesian, Indian and Mexican work. "It's better not to do what has already been done."

Popov, who has joined Anisimov on two expeditions, said living in the Himalayas had enriched his work through isolation and discipline.

"As an artist, I was already formed by the time I went there," he said. But the Roerich Art Club offered "a whole different lifestyle — an organic and

spiritual way of working.

"If anything, we became ourselves," Popov said.

He added that he had watched many of his colleagues grow phenomenally as artists during their time in the Himalayas. In that sense, the group has a direct inheritance from Roerich, he said.

"When he first saw the place, Roerich obviously felt that his inner world had been awakened by what appeared before him," Popov said.

Anisimov and his fellow artists hope to maintain their workshop indefinitely, with new groups setting out for Kulu every year. The Indian Foreign Ministry and the Russian Embassy in New Delhi, as well as several corporate sponsors, have been encouraging and helpful, he said. But the size of the expeditions remains limited, and the group is acutely conscious of the hazards of unchecked development.

"As Nikolai Konstantinovich wished, this will never be a museum. It should not be refurbished and people should not stand there and gape at the way we live," Anisimov said. "In our house, we should just live and work. And so we live and work."

"Moree Flowers," an exhibit of Russian artists working in the Himalayas, is on display until Sept. 25 at the Russian Federation Artists' Union gallery at 25 Ulitsa Tverskaya. Open daily 11 A.M. to 7 P.M., closed Monday. Tel. 299-2289. Nearest metro: Pushkinskaya.

