

Nicholas Roerich (1874–1947), a traveller, archaeologist, writer, philosopher and public figure, was well known internationally in the 1920s–1940s. He was the author of the first document in the world concerned with the protection of cultural monuments; it has been adopted by the United Nations and UNESCO, and is called the Roerich Pact.

Roerich dedicated his entire life to a search for proof of the close links between the history, culture and religions of different peoples. He was not the only person at that time to have such a concept of the common roots of mankind, and similarly many philosophers and writers of the end of the 19th and start of the 20th centuries were convinced of the commonality of terrestrial and cosmic civilisations.

Following on from the Western, Eastern and Russian philosophers who were his predecessors, Roerich genuinely believed in the existence of higher, non-terrestrial powers that nobody could see, and who revealed themselves only to their selected emissaries on Earth. Like others, Roerich called this wonder “Shambhala”, and it would become for him the source of hope for a better future for all of mankind that had common roots in the past.

As a historian and archaeologist Roerich had from his young days spent a lot of time at excavations in ancient Russian towns. The objects found during these expeditions did not just confirm the ideas about mutual connections and influence among different peoples, but they also awakened the imagination of the artist Roerich, who painted pictures devoted to Russia’s ancient history (Foreign Guests, 1901; Overseas Guests, 1902, and others) in the 1900s–1910s.

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LA CASA NATAL DE PABLO RUÍZ PICASSO
Y OTROS EQUIPAMIENTOS MUSEÍSTICOS
Y CULTURALES



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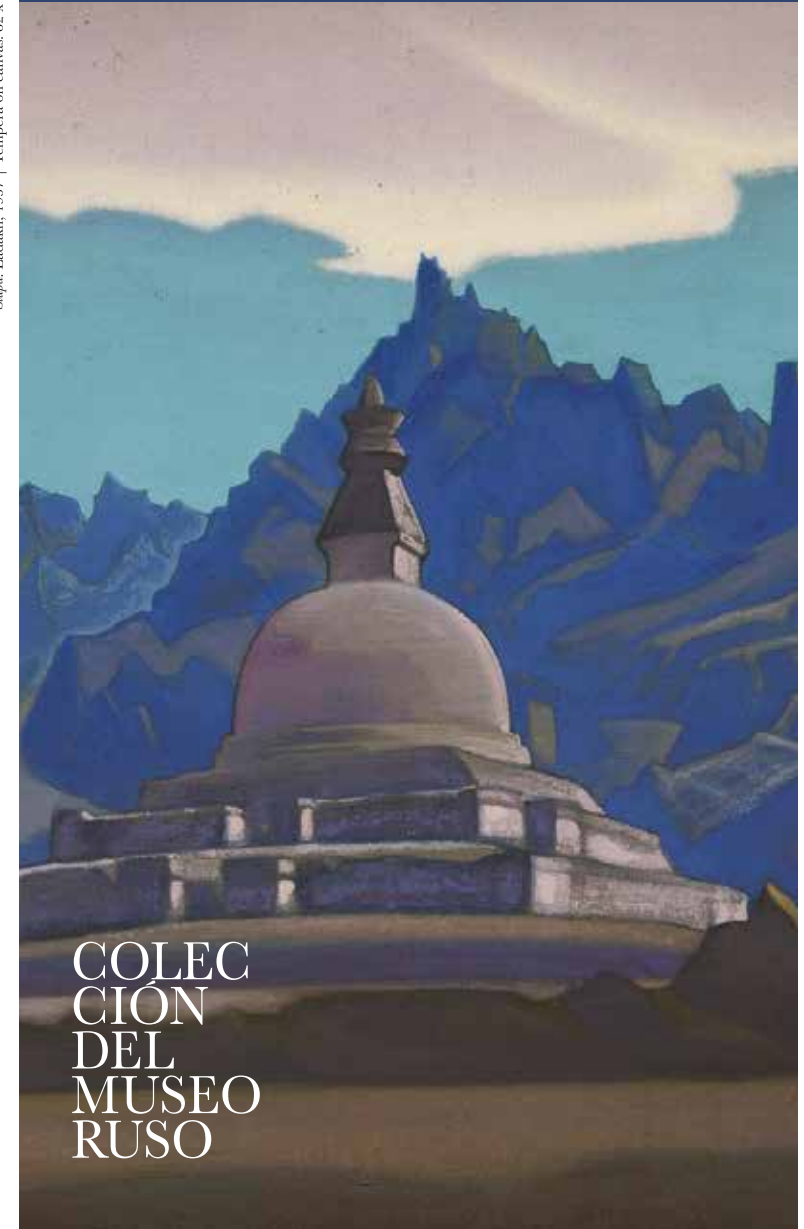


Shyba, Ladakh, 1937 | Tempera on canvas, 82 x 123 cm | State Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg

NICHOLAS ROERICH

IN SEARCH FOR SHAMBHALA

September 2019 - February 2020



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However, it was not the reproduction of subjects that interested Roerich: his main aim, then and later, was the emotional effect that the stories, myths and legends which he painted had on viewers.

The savage customs of the Ancient Slavs (*Idols*, 1901) or strange rituals that were incomprehensible in the 20th century (*Earthly Spell*, 1907) were, together with other motifs in Roerich's early works, devoted to mankind's remote past.

It was these themes that Roerich introduced into set designs in 1909 when, for the first time, he was invited by Sergei Diaghilev to participate in a production of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's opera *The Snow Maiden*. The main purpose of Roerich's life in the 1920s–1940s was to search for traces of the movement of peoples from the East to the West and for proof of the immense role that India, China and Siberia had played in civilisation. He lived mainly in India during these decades, and died there in 1947. He organised several expeditions, travelling hundreds



Midnight Time. 1940
Tempera on canvas
76x123 cm
State Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg



“Remember!”. 1947
Tempera on canvas
92x153 cm
State Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg

of kilometres on them along extremely difficult routes in order to meet religious figures and ordinary people who lived far from towns. Roerich brought back archaeological finds from each expedition, as well as records of talks with lamas and stories recounted by the inhabitants of monasteries and villages.

Something that was just as important in Roerich's expeditions, and perhaps more so, was his paintings. The artist created a multiplicity of mountain landscapes that are not repetitive. He recorded something eternal, unshakeable and mysterious in these pictures.

In the 1930s–1940s Roerich painted hardly anything apart from mountains. A few canvases on subjects from Russian history and mythology (*Igor's Campaign*, 1942; *The Battle of Mstislav and Rededya*, 1943) were exceptions that he produced during the Second World War, as well as *Guerrillas* (1943), based on a genuine subject from Soviet wartime reality that the artist could only have known about from newspapers. After the victory in 1945 Roerich painted the symbolical canvas *“Remember!”* (1947). There is nothing in it

that recalls war: mountains rise up into the sky, and a traveller on horseback looks towards a house where some people are standing. White snow-clad peaks stand in the distance, with some sort of structure just distinguishable on one of them. Does it metaphorically represent Shambhala, the country that Roerich, like many others before and after him, was searching for in the hope of help for mankind in its future?

The exhibition includes works by Roerich from the collection of the Russian Museum. A considerable number of the paintings on display were given to the museum by the artist himself or by his sons, George and Svetoslav.



Idols. 1901
Sketch. Gouache on cardboard
49x58 cm
State Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg