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Philosophy and Semiotics of Colour and Light in the Artistic Legacy of the Roerich Family

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Abstract

The Roerich family is a remarkable phenomenon in the cultural history of Russia and India of the 20th century. Nicholas Roerich was a great artist, thinker, traveller, and the founder of the international Agreement on the Protection of Artistic and Scientific Institutions and Historical Monuments signed by the 22 countries of Northern and Southern Americas in 1935. Helena Roerich was a unique philosopher of cosmism who contributed to the creation of Living Ethics philosophical system. Elder son George was a well-known Orientalist, and younger brother Svetoslav was an artist and an art theorist. The art of this family a shared heritage of Russia and India. Although the artistic legacy of the Roerichs has been investigated from a variety of angles for the past almost one hundred years of Roerichology, it is rather surprising that the question of the philosophy of colour has been neglected. In the given article the question of the philosophy of colour will be considered primarily from the point of view of Living Ethics as well as from the point of view of the literary legacy of Nicholas and Svetoslav Roerichs. And, of course, we take into account the paintings of the Roerichs, both the father and the son, as their paintings speak for themselves.

Key words: artistic legacy of the Roerichs, “Living Ethics”, philosophy, semiotics, colour, light.

1. Introduction.

The family of Roerich forms an outstanding constellation whose legacy is immensely valued in Russia and in India. Nicholas Roerich (1874–1947) was a great artist and a philosopher, a traveller, a public figure, as well as an author of the international Agreement on the Protection of Artistic and Scientific Institutions and Historical Monuments also known as The Roerich Pact. Nikolai's wife, Helena (1879–1955) was of aristocratic descent. She was a unique philosopher whose work was in tune with the tendency of the philosophical thought at the beginning of the 20th century, which later referred to as “Russian cosmism”. Their eldest son George Nicolas de Roerich (1902 – 1960) was a well-known Orientalist, and his work became a milestone in European Orientalism of the first half of the 20th century. For instance, his “Studies in the Kālacakra” (Roerich 1932) were a turning point that drew attention of the European scholars to tantric Buddhism. The youngest son of the couple, Svetoslav (1904–1993) was a famous artist and a public figure who spent his second half of his life in India; he was married to an actress Devika Rani, and his artistic legacy by right forms an indispensable part of both countries, Russia and India.

Artistic legacy of the Roerichs is multifaceted. The unique character of this family of that these four members were working in complete unison and coordination, and that is precisely why one could view their heritage as an integral phenomenon permeated by shared ideas and world views.

In this particular article we will consider one of the facts of their legacy, that is: the philosophy of colour and light. Such a choice has its logic because when we talk about “the legacy of the Roerichs”, shining paintings of the father and the youngest son are the first that come to mind. Since their works are always conceptual and contain a deep philosophical message, one cannot avoid raising a question of the place that colour takes in this conceptuality.

When it comes to research in the philosophy of colour, it would be particularly interesting to acquaint oneself with the philosophical work of “Living Ethics” which synthesizes Eastern and Western wisdom and which Helena and George (to a lesser extent) contributed to; literary essays by Nicholas Roerich and art work by Svetoslav Roerich, as well as paintings by the father and the youngest son. The eldest son, George Roerich, a famous orientalist, refrained from drawing his own conclusions about colour but he wrote his famous work “Tibetan Painting” where he offers a thorough description of the palette of ritual colours of Buddhist images, however, without

mentioning their semantics in this religious and philosophical system. For these reasons, we will not include this work in our study.



Fig. 1 — Nicholas, Helena, George, and Svetoslav Roerichs in Kullu, India. 1930s.

https://cdnstatic.rg.ru/uploads/images/2024/02/13/foto2_169.jpg

2. Related work

Works relevant for our investigation fall into two categories: (1) those which touch upon the topic of the philosophical and artistic legacy of the Roerichs; (2) contemporary articles on the influence of colour of a human being.

2.1. Roerichology

It is rather remarkable that despite numerous works written in Russian and dedicated to the subject of the Roerich's legacy, hardly any attention has been paid to the matters of colour and light. One of the most reputable roerichologists who was also interested in the philosophy of Roerich's art was Lyudmila Shaposhnikova (1926–2015). Her main work dedicated to art is called “The Thorny Road of Beauty” (Shaposhnikova 2001). However, it mainly touches upon the questions of the

subject of painting, of the prophetic character of the artist's gift, of the harmony and beauty in the works of art as a reflection of a more perfect world of ideas, using Plato's terminology. Nevertheless, the only article that specifically discusses the matters of colour is written by Vladimir Kozar, a Ukrainian artist, art theorist, and a public figure. The above-mentioned work will be cited further on in our article (Kozar 2005). Kozar's work explores the art only of one Roerich, Svetoslav. Most articles and books about the Roerichs mainly discuss philosophical concepts which find their reflection in the art of the father and of the son. There are considerably fewer publications about the Roerich family in the English language than in Russian, and most of them are devoted to the art, life, and peacekeeping of the Roerichs (Rajamannar 1974; Fletcher 1975; Decter 1989). One should point out that recently some works, primarily those published in English, have been treating Roerichs' public work from the geopolitical angle (McCannon 2002), which in fact contradicts work and statements made by the Roerich family.

2.2. Chromatics

The most respectable source which touches upon the philosophy of colour in the work by various authors as well as in fiction is a joint monograph titled "Colour Design" (Best 2012). We have also analysed a number of applied works on the psychology of colour perception and the semantics of colour that is connected with it (Jonaskaite et al 2019a; Sutton & Altarriba 2016; Griber, Mylonas & Paramei 2018; Mohr, Jonaskaite, Dan-Glauser, Uuskula & Dael 2018); and one must note that these works demonstrate evidence of the ideas first expressed by the Roerichs on the role of colour in the life of a human being. We should also draw attention to the fact that the Roerichs wrote about it in the first half of the 20th century: in "Living Ethics" and in the letters of Helena Roerich one may find mentioning of the motivating and healing impact of colour on the human mind, whereas the main corpus of the applied research belongs to the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries.

Numerous contemporary studies are contributing significantly to our comprehension of the semiotics of colour within culture. Noteworthy among these is Michel Pastoureau's extensive project (Pastoureau 2008, 2013, 2017, 2019), a classic work on colour and culture by John Gage (1999), and the most recent publication, a six-volume series titled "A Cultural History of Color" (Biggam 2021), which delves into the history, theory, and practical application of colour from Antiquity to the present day. Works on the semiotics of colour by Bulgarian scholar Mony Almalech (2016) and Russian academics Leonid Tchertov (2019), Yulia Griber (2023, 2024), and Olga

Lavrenova (2023) are also of notable interest. The most comprehensive works on the semiotics of colour within culture are the writings of the renowned English researcher Carole Biggam in “The Semantics of Colour” (2012) and Theo van Leeuwen in “The Language of Colour” (2011). Additionally, Andrew Elliott’s contemporary research (2015, 2018) on the psychology of colour holds significance.

3. Philosophy of “Living Ethics”

3.1. Colour

Legacy of the four Roerichs can be viewed as in its integrity precisely because that it is filled with the ideas of Living Ethics. This text appeared as a result of the collaboration between a Russian woman Helena Roerich and the spiritual teachers of the East which are usually called mahatmas, Great Souls. This philosophical system is currently seen as mystic teachings (Andreyev 2014) while the Roerichs saw themselves as realists.

This philosophy essentially expresses the idea of the close interaction of a human being and Cosmos, not only physically but also spiritually. According to Lyudmila Shaposhnikova, “Living Ethics, which appeared in the spiritual and cultural field of planet Earth in the 20-ies of the last century, lends itself well to the scientific analysis, to the definition of its epistemological roots, methodology, and the cosmic attitude that it conveys in its texts, in its main postulates and, lastly, in its system of cognition. The question arises as to why the Roerichs, Nicholas Roerich and Helena, became a part of the creation of this philosophical system. <...> Their art possessed those skills and abilities that forms the main directions of the epistemology of the Living Ethics itself. Beauty, thought, art, science all merged creating a harmonious synthesis, in the joint work of these two people ideally complementing each other. Both has that expanded awareness, which enables that to go deep into the most complex processes of cosmic evolution and use the method of testimony in contact with a real spiritual source. High spirituality of both Roerichs made it possible to convey the information they received from this source in an undistorted and unperverted form” (Shaposhnikova 2005).

The year 2020 marks 100 years since the beginning of the formation of the philosophical texts of “Living Ethics”, or Agni Yoga. It understood colour as the wavelength of human emanation and all objects in the Universe. Beyond the realm of semiotic discourse, “the current controversy

around color is symptomatic of a more-or-less modern anxiety about the status of sensory awareness in an austere, materialistic universe". The modern semantic theory of colour posits that "color experience represents or denotes color properties, and attributes these properties to visual objects. On such a theory, color experience informs us about the external world by means of a semantic relationship, representation or denotation, that it bears to external world properties". Consequently, the perception of colours possesses a semiotic nature, giving rise to symbolic and conventional meanings of colour. But the philosophical legacy of the Roerichs transcends the dichotomy between sensory perception and symbolic meaning, asserting that the semantics of colour is rooted in its energetic essence and spiritual optics, accessible to enlightened souls. This represents a distinct level of materiality. In physical optics, light is understood as electromagnetic emanation perceived by the human eye, and it also includes emanation perceived through the so-called "sixth sense" (spiritual vision, rather than physical eyes). According to "Living Ethics", human emanation, or aura, can have a certain basic colour and vary depending on the state of the soul and spirit. Consequently, the colour semantics in this particular case depends on the so-called "spiritual physiology", while the colour of the same spiritual manifestation may be different depending on its aspects.

In this respect Roerichs' philosophical legacy is congruent with the classic and early Christian writings, as well as with the applied research of their contemporaries. As for the former, we should mention the work of Plutarch, and the works written by the pagan and Christian authors of the 2nd and 3rd centuries, who use the notion of the colour of the soul in the theological and eschatological context, not only symbolically but also physiologically. "God or Jesus provides human beings with a range of colours whereby they should paint their souls during their earthy existence. <...> These colours represent the virtues" (Muñoz Gallarte 2012). On the one hand, it illustrated God's creative activity and shaping of the human soul; on the other, it provided the parameters by means of which the soul's ethical behaviour might be established since the colours that the soul acquired during this life determined reward or punishment in the afterlife. Within this purpose, authors resorted to physiological and psychological conceptions widespread in the Greco-Roman worldview, in which Platonism exerted a special influence (Muñoz Gallarte 2012). As for the latter case, one should mention the book titled "The Human Atmosphere (The Aura)" written by an English doctor Walter John Kilner (1847-1920) and published in 1920. This is a pioneering work in the field of study of human emanation with the help of unsophisticated gadget. This empirical study also made note of

the colour of emanations, although due to the specifics of author's profession, they were linked only to health condition.

More than that, *Living Ethics* is closely connected with the Buddhist and Vedic spiritual traditions, and it is written with the reference to their precedent texts (Lavrenova 2020), using corresponding terminology and conceptual ideas about the energy structure of a human being. Here we can recall ancient depictions of human chakras, each with its unique color and a specific number of “petals” — beams. On the one hand, these depictions carry a symbolic essence, with the colors representing various stages of an enlightened spirit. On the other hand, Vedic and Buddhist sources allude to the firsthand experience of these colors by spiritual practitioners of antiquity.

In *Living Ethics* on various occasions one can encounter paragraphs describing the colour of the human emanations in connection with the qualities and states of the soul. Similarly, the symbolic significance of color, its reference to specific qualities, arises from the spiritual revelations of the authors, thus possessing a form of objectification.

For instance, “Attainment, synthesis, and vigilance are expressed by the tri-coloured flame. Attainment is silver; synthesis is green; vigilance is yellow. This triad is developed by training one's consciousness in the many conditions of life. One can point to this triad as the sign of one's having mastered the necessary conditions for self-sacrifice” (*Living Ethics*, *Agni Yoga*, paragraph 461)¹; “among the components of developed auras it is especially rare to see the emerald green and the noble ruby colours, which stand in contrast to each other. The first denotes synthesis and the second, the self-sacrifice of attainment” (*Agni Yoga*, 535).

For the interaction of people, it is important to take into account the chromatics mode of their emanations as if a mosaic picture united by the talent and visionary abilities of a leader. “Harmony of auras does not require sameness of colour. Thus, a violet aura can be in harmony with one that is green, and a pink aura can make a blue one more visible. In such combinations can be found currents of special intensity. It is even desirable to combine colours, as a guarantee of the future rainbow” (*Agni Yoga*, 89).

¹ Henceforward we will include the number of the paragraphs as it will allow us to refer to any edition of this text made in any of more than twenty languages it was translated into.



Fig. 2 — Nicholas Roerich. Fiat Rex. 1931.

https://icr.su/upload/iblock/e49/001_full.jpg

Colour is also used metaphorically and symbolically, for example, for highlighting the variety of negative qualities of fear: “We throw to the wind all the many-coloured feathers of fear: blue feathers of frozen terror, green feathers of trembling betrayal, yellow feathers of secret crawling away, red “feathers of frenzied heart-beat, white feathers of reticence, black feathers of fall into the abyss. It is needful to repeat about the multiformity of fear, otherwise there remains somewhere a small grey feather of complaisant mumbling or even some fluff of hurried bustle, but behind these will be the same idol of fear. Each wing of fear bears one downwards. The Blessed “Lion”², garbed in fearlessness, ordained to teach the manifestation of courage” (Living Ethics, New Era Commune, Part 1, paragraph 8). Moreover, it can be used to outline the idea of universality and the unification of people: “Precisely, the manifestation of universality must be assimilated. Only one blood flows, and the external world will no more be divided into races of

² One of Buddha’s epithets.

primitive formation. One channel, one banner—Maitreya, Mother, Matter!” (New Era CommunePart 8, paragraph 3). Colour red symbolizes the firm decision to destroy the differences between races.



Fig. 3 — Nicholas Roerich. The Coming (sketch for Red Horseman). 1927.

<http://www.mongolnow.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/graduschie.jpg>

3.2. Light and Colour

Light and colour are closely connected. “Light is the substance in motion”, wrote Helena Roerich (Roerich 2003). With a successful combination of inert matter of dyes creates not only the effect of the presence of light that occurs in the viewer’s mind, but also light as emanation.

To express luminescence both in Living Ethics and in the letters of Helena Roerich, which in fact can be viewed as an extended commentary to Living Ethics, use metaphors connected with the archaic colour symbolism of the Russian language. For example, the word “ardent” (yariy in Russian): “There are many wonders in this world, and a pure and ardent striving leads to victory” (Living Ethics, Leaves of Morya’s Garden. The Call, paragraph 87). One of the most reputable dictionaries of the Russian language, Ozhegov’s dictionary, defines the word yariy as “passionately committed”, “convinced and bright”, “sparkling as bright sun”, “furious” (literary), as well as “light, white, bright, sparkling” (Ozhegov, Shedova, 1993). This way the quality of luminescence

refers to different qualities of a person both metaphorically and directly, to maximum tension of their spirit and resilience.

Since Living Ethics views a human being in close interaction with the physical and spiritual Cosmos, with the rays of the distant celestial bodies and planets, one can encounter the descriptions of the cosmic emanations. The Vedas describe space as an ocean of fire, and in Living Ethics we find the clarification: “The spatial Fire varies in intensity and in the quality of colour of the ray” (Living Ethics. Infinity I, paragraph 332).

Cosmic rays are given special qualities of colour and light but to explain what one cannot see with the bare eye is done through appealing to well-known realia and everyday practices. “The spatial Fire varies in intensity and in the quality of colour of the ray” (Agni Yoga, 89). “In addition to Fohat, the earthly surface is reached by the outflow of radiant matter, *Materia Lucida*. To a certain eyesight it will be perceptible as radiant currents and spots of light in space. These manifestations may be taken for a peculiarity of sight, or even for defective sight. But knowledge will reveal the deep significance they have for the organism. <...> The manifestations of the fiery element can be compared to the most intense colours of electrical discharges; but the electrical light-scale is limited, whereas the variegations of the light-sparks of Fohat are beyond imagination. The light of Fohat is comparable to that emanating from precious crystals” (Agni Yoga, 144).

According to Living Ethics, different iridescent optical phenomena, or “coloured stars”, appear as a result of the contact between external energies with the emanations of a human being. A person attracts to themselves rays of certain quality and length of the waves as psychic energy just like electric energy has magnetic qualities. Chakras, energy centres of a human being, have their own colour, and in this sense Living Ethics follows Vedas and Buddhist traditions in understanding the structure of a human body. “The emanations of the approaching waves surround one and colour with their chemism the attracted particles of energy. This is the chemical basis of so-called coloured stars. The planetary bodies radiate with different lights. Scientists will see the sparks of psychic energy. The fires of the human body’s centres also radiate differently depending upon the chemism of the metals in the human body” (Agni Yoga, 535).

The hues of these energetic expressions, as well as the colours of human auras in Living Ethics, are not classified along a semantic spectrum of “bad-good”. The sole hue carrying a negative connotation is black; the significance of other colours hinges on their purity. Pure hues of spiritual energies signify diverse traits of elevated spirit, while murky shades indicate earthly desires.

4. Colour in the Literary Legacy of Nicholas Roerich

Nicholas Roerich was an artist of the word. His literary legacy consists of several books which include over a thousand of essays many of which were published in a three-volume edition “Leaves of the Diary” (1995-2002). The subject matter is highly diverse but with an evitable consistency there appear essays in the vocation of an artist, their mission to create Beauty and the harmony of everyday life.

Nicholas Roerich started his artistic journey from touring Russian towns (1902-1903) where he was drawing ancient churches and the walls of the Kremlin. Many years later he reminisced one of the episodes of this tour: “In the labyrinth of the church passages in Rostov, each of the tiny doors surprises you with the unexpectedly beautiful colour chord. Softly outlined images shine through the strikingly transparent pallor of the ash-grey walls. In some places, you suddenly feel the ardent heat of incandescent red and brown tones; in others, it spreads peace of the bluish green; and then suddenly you stop, as if because of the strict word of the Scripture, bumping into the ghostly image coloured in ochre” (Roerich 1995). Each described colour has its emotional tinge, associations, and additional imagery.

Nicholas Roerich’s literary heritage includes travel diaries on the route of the Central Asian expedition “Altai – Himalayas” and many philosophical essays united into different books. The artist does not talk about colour but it seems to be constantly present as an integral part of any description of the outside world. The thinker/artist describes the colour of the clothes, Buddhist icons, and different elements of the landscape. Constrained by the convention of words, he tries to convey shades that he could have easily drawn, had if he taken a brush and paints in his hands. For example, the purple in his book can be opal-purple, purple-grey, etc. He actively uses verbal forms meaning “to turn violet”, “to turn blue”, etc. “In the evening, the mountains turn unusually transparently purple and the sandy slopes glow under the setting sun. In the morning, the sun shone literally red and all the hills and mountains turned white, pink and blue in this unexpected snow cover” (Roerich 1995a). In other words, colour turns into action that flowers, mountains, and steppe undertake.



Fig. 4 — Nicholas Roerich. Way to Shambala. 1933.

<https://i.pining.com/originals/6c/2b/e9/6c2be93f5d2fb75d9ad567557cbd74be.jpg>

Nicholas Roerich explains creativity through giving priority to the spiritual intuition, suggesting that the right colour comes instinctively. “Once Bryullov made a joke that art is extremely simple: “You just need to take the right paint and then put it back to its place”. In fact, a master, a great expert, was right. It is by using the colour that one should do the way it should be, and then something will whisper where it is “right the way it should be”” (Roerich 1995).

5. Chromatics of Svetoslav Roerich in the context of the modern theories of colour perception

Svetoslav Roerich was not only an artist but also a historian and an art theorist; his main work where one can find his thoughts in colour and light is his book “Art and Life”. In this book, the artist shares how on a three-dimensional space of the canvas one can create a new dimension of luminescence. “The scintillating quality of light can be achieved by what is called broken colour or broken stroke, and by building up a series of surfaces of broken colour one can create an illusion of light. Tempera is by far the best medium for the rendering of light. <...> Yellow is the brightest colour we have for light. White has not got the same quality of light though as a colour it is lighter. Southern Semiotic Review Issue 20 2024 (ii)

White and the lightest of lemon yellows used over each other in broken colours achieves an effect of a scintillating surface” (Roerich 2004).

A special place that the yellow colour takes place in the artist’s palette is not a coincidence, as various applied studies show that yellow is associated with happiness (Jonaskaite et al 2019).

Modern works dedicated to the psychology of perception of colour state that “while there are studies showing that colour matters in terms of the capture of covert attention by emotional stimuli, the impact of colour on fixation patterns, reflecting overt attention, is unresolved. Studies on the role of colour in evoking emotional response have also produced mixed results” (Pilarczyk et al. 2020). As the same time, the plot is undoubtedly very important for a painting since “the pupil reacts to the congruence of colour and content, rather than to colour on its own. This effect is further modulated by emotional content” (Pilarczyk et al. 2020).

Psychological qualities of the colour are intensified as a result of its interaction with the neighbouring colours: “spatially, colours influence each other through the process called simultaneous contrast” (Hanson 2012), and Svetoslav Roerich often uses this technique in his art to enhance brightness and saturation.

According to Svetoslav Roerich, the space of the painting is not confined to the two-dimensional surface of the canvas, it has its depth: “Through a series of superimposed, differently distributed strokes, it is possible to achieve an effect of depth and life, which manifests itself as our gaze penetrates through successive layers of strokes. And if these are strokes of different colors, then you can expect an unusually rich effect” (Roerich 2004). This depth is literal as there are layers of paint which has different optical characteristics, and this depth is intensified in the mind of the viewer, as the microns of the matter thanks to the layers shining from under the layers our imagination adds “air”, volume, pulsation of the matter to it.

“Colouration is a geographical notion. Our sense of sight and tastes are formed by the land and nature, and an artist need nature in the first place” (Kozar 2005), states Vladimir Kozar, a modern Ukrainian artist, a Roerich scholar, and an art theorist.

Later periods of Svetoslav Roerich’s art were dedicated to India. These painting were written with practically open colours borrowed from the nature of South India where the artist used to live with his wife Devika Rani. However, these colours were intensified by the mastery and the bravery of the artist. That same colour yellow which symbolizes the light and its factual interpretation on the canvas is used for painting the skies. This is how memorable landscapes are

created, and, in some way, they send back the archaic memory of the viewer to Russian icon painting where the background (usually braided gold) which symbolizes light spiritual Sky.

On Indian landscapes by Svetoslav Roerich colour red is one of the main colours. On the one hand, this is the colour of red soil, the soil of South India. On the other hand, being an expert in the history of Indian art, Svetoslav uses traditional colour semantics. “In Mudiyyettu, a folk performance in Southern Kerala, the two characters Kali (mother goddess) and Kooli (evil) are coloured with red and black respectively. <...> ... red colour is a symbol of beauty, and black is a symbol of ugliness in South Indian tradition. It is common to name people as manikyam which means sapphire, a red coloured precious stone, in South India. Colour is also frequently used in linguistic metaphors to describe concepts across varying levels of abstraction, including those that lack direct visible referents” (Balaganapathi 2015).



Fig. 5 — Svetoslav Roerich. Red Earth. 1954.

https://papik.pro/izobr/uploads/posts/2023-03/1680126792_papik-pro-p-zhivopis-svyatoslav-rerikha-12.jpg

One may mention the symbolism of colour in the art of Svetoslav Roerich. The gold of sky is Russian spiritual tradition, and red soil, the essence and the beauty of Indian land, are pieced

together in his canvases as a result of the interaction of cultures in the artist's individual soul and his creative beliefs. However, one can also imagine all this incredible range as a tribute to spiritual realism, the ability of some artists to see and display the invisible. Indeed, according to the contemporary artist Kozar, "in India one feels how the space is filled with natural phenomena in a very special way. Their beauty is astonishing. Nowhere like in India one perceives a force a nature as some spatial matter which sparks with a beautiful radiance, spreads its scent, waves of vibrations, and has a tangible density" (Kozar, 2005).

6. Luminescence of the canvases of Nicholas and Svetoslav Roerich as philosophy of light

In accordance with Living Ethics, Nicholas Roerich spoke of culture as the veneration of Light, thus emphasizing its sacred essence. The philosophy of the divine Light which fills and nourished all living things, correlates with the understanding of self-luminescence of a higher human spirit of saints, heroes, and hermits.

The idea of understanding spiritual Light was often discussed by Russian philosophers of cosmism of the first half of the 20th century. For instance, Father Pavel Florensky tried to find correlation between the divine Light and the physical light that defines the passage of time. He "created his unique image of the Universe. The spirit becomes the reason why light appears, and a thought flies faster across the Universe faster than anything else. The limits of the Earth are outlined by the radius of the ray of light which makes its way in a second. <...> It appears that physically we exist here with the limits of the speed of light, and mentally we penetrate into all dimensions of the universe, our earthly time has curled up into a ball, containing the past, future and present. This is what real eternity is like" (Kedrov 2001).

According to Lyudmila Shaposhnikova, a Roerichologist, a philosopher and a historian, an artist is on the borderline of "that" other-being Light and this worldly light, and brings reflections of the alien light to the everyday world through art (Shaposhnikova 2001). And one can apply this to the art of the Roerichs, the father and the son.

Luminescence is the protagonist of many subject paintings by Nicholas Roerich, for example, canvases "Christ in the Desert", "Issa and Giant's Head", "Fiat Rex", "Chintamani", etc.



Fig. 6 — Nicholas Roerich. Christ in the Desert. 1933

https://icr.su/upload/iblock/b42/006_full.jpg

They depict spiritual light, and not symbolically, as in Christian and Buddhist icons. The artist tries to convey the sensation of a light wave by combining colours. This spiritual light is different in colour: light yellow, light blue, intense blue (cobalt blue), rose gold. And the dry brush technique used by the artist gives this glow a literal corpuscularity. The tops of the mountains also glow in some of the paintings, this is especially noticeable in the absence of overhead lighting in the museum halls. The incident light or filter changes the perception of colour (Mikellides 2012), in this case, we see that some colour combinations in the twilight have the effect of “self-luminescence” as they do not emit light in the literal sense but they seem to attract some sunlight to themselves. Nicholas Roerich used the usual Lefranc tempera, but there were legends among his employees that

he added minerals collected in the Himalayas, where he lived the last years of his life. Perhaps these legends are just a tribute to the artist's skill, just like the famous painting by Nikolai Roerich's teacher, Russian artist Arkhip Kuindzhi, "Night on the Dnieper" (1880), that caused speculation about a special lamp allegedly hidden behind it to create the effect of moonlight.

Luminescence is also a characteristic of Svetoslav Roerich, especially his later works dedicated to India, as well as the few surviving works dedicated to his vision of the spiritual world. Christ in his paintings is surrounded by blue radiance. In the canvases of the Indian series, there is often a double outline, which, as "... an optical reception solved the problem of the most powerful meeting of Light and Darkness as a spatial phenomenon, creation of depth not by the method of perspective, but by applying the optical law of the dynamics of internal light and shadow" (Kozar 2004). It is interesting that, revealing the secrets of craftsmanship, Svetoslav Roerich himself wrote that "almost any shade can be used to depict light and can be considered as the colour of light, but not all colours have the same value in terms of light transmission" (Roerich 2004). That is, as an artist, he quite specifically set himself such a task, being inspired by the philosophy of colour and light of Living Ethics.

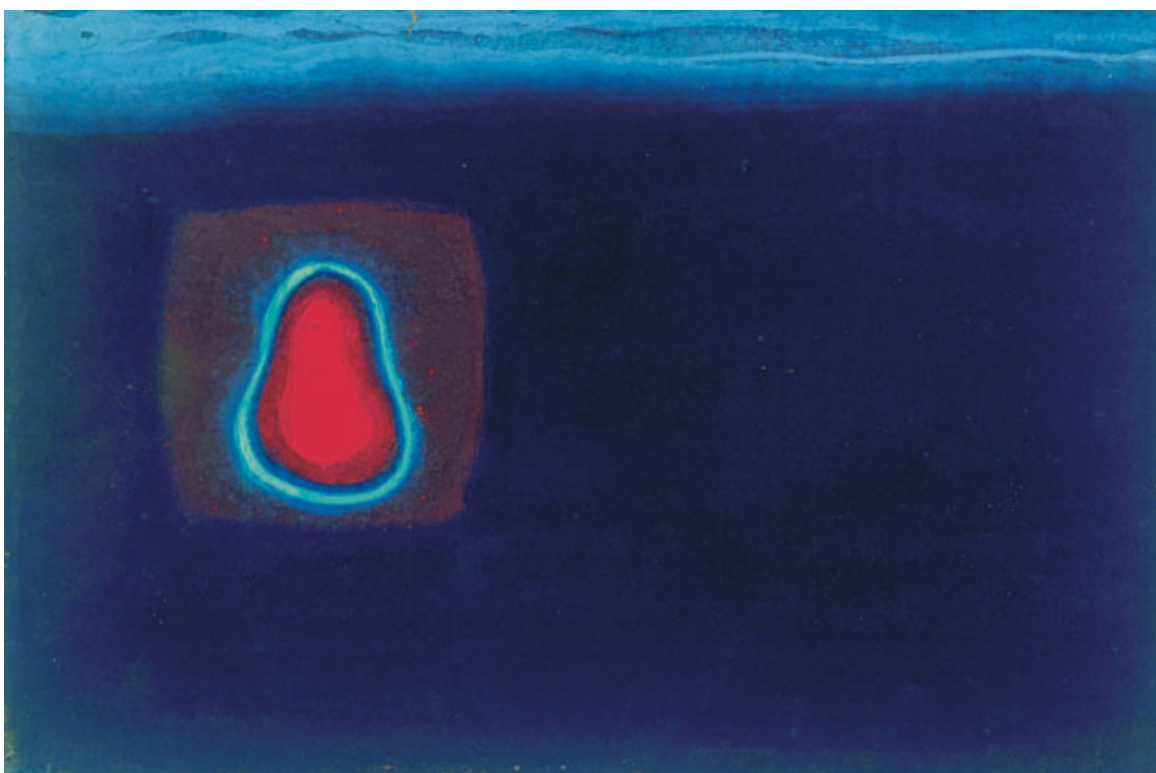


Fig. 7 — Svetoslav Roerich. Subtle World. 1980s.

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7. Conclusion

Undoubtedly, the philosophical basis of the picturesque and literary creativity of Nicholas and Svetoslav Roerichs was the teaching of Living Ethics, which mainly issued from the pen of Helena Roerich, who was inspired by the innermost spiritual tradition of the East.

Speaking about painting and about the literary work of the father and son of the Roerichs, one should recall the words of Svetoslav Nikolaevich: “We learn to think in terms of pigment ...” (Roerich 2004). Both of them really not only see more than ordinary people, but also think in other categories, in which colour represents a qualitative characteristic of all manifestations of the material and spiritual world. Within the legacy of the Roerichs lies its distinctive semiotics of colour, intricately woven with the cultural tapestries of both the West and the East, yet existing with a notable degree of autonomy. In their works there is undoubtedly a “miracle-working in the arrangement of colours and lines”, which Nicholas Roerich contrasted with the “formal filling of the canvas” (Roerich 1995a). That is, a successful combination of colours creates an increment of meaning and changes the quality of matter.

The philosophy of colour and light of the Roerichs’ creative heritage implies their inseparable essential unity in a variety of their manifestations. Colour and light characterize the phenomena of the spiritual world, their quality and nuances. Colour and light are the ACTION of the objects of the material world, it’s a category of thinking, tectonic matter for the creation of Beauty in its highest, salutary sense. The works of Nicholas and Svetoslav Roerich contain profound philosophy. On the one hand, it is the matter worked out by the spirit (as defined by Father Pavel Florensky in his doctrine of the pneumatosphere). On the other hand, it is the spirit embodied in the matter, where the colour manifests itself as love of the multidimensional Universe embodied by the artist’s soul and captured on the three-dimensional space of the canvas.

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