

घना जंगल DARK FOREST

RECENT WORKS BY PAYSON R. STEVENS

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ARTIST'S STATEMENT

The primordial dark forest, both a mythic and geographic space, has been a part of our collective and personal subconscious since the beginnings. It is an object and symbol of complex and layered realities and in Indian mythology a locale and metaphor of retreat for the purpose of spiritual growth and awareness. Siddhartha Gautama sits under the peepul tree, waiting/working for enlightenment that transforms him into the Buddha. In the *Mahabharata*, the Pandavas retreat into the forest for 12 years and patiently wait to live out their dharma. The composer of the *Ramayana*, Valmiki, spends a 1,000 years meditating without moving. Ants cover him completely, turning him into the ant hill of his name (Valmika=son of ant hill). And in Valmiki's *Ramayana*, Ram and his devoted wife and brother are forced into exile in the forest.

Dark Forest, like my previous Indian exhibits (*Flux & Flow/Pravah*, 2006; *Energy Flows/Shakti Pravah*, 2007), have focused on my preoccupation with the energy flow of the natural world that has deeply entranced me for the last 40 years. Since 2000 I have trekked over 1,400 km in the wondrous mountains and forests of Himachal Pradesh (primarily as an advisor to the Great Himalayan National Park). What always impresses me is the constant shifting focus: from the small details of leaves, ferns and mosses, stones and vines and water rippling, to the majestic tectonic thrust of the jagged peaks and the layered, disappearing Himalayan mountain ranges. The Dark Forest paintings are my personal interpretations of the alternating micro and macrocosms that envelope us all.

In this Age of Climate Change and global warming, our planet's forests take on an even greater role than they have played in our past. They are the lungs of our Earth taking up the ever-increasing greenhouse gas, carbon dioxide, thus helping to slow down its warming effects. Through photosynthesis trees pump out oxygen so vital for our respiration.

Our forests, from the coniferous and broadleaf of the temperate zones to the tropical equatorial regions, embrace complex ecosystems with great biological diversity and genetic treasures: some of value to man but more importantly to the functioning interrelationships of the Great Web that embraces us all. For 25 years my company was involved with NASA's efforts to raise awareness about the impending impacts of global change and warming. Each year more satellite data painted an increasingly disturbing picture: ozone depletion, sea surface temperature rise, sea ice melting at both poles, more deserts, and terrestrial temperatures rising. These images had their alarming power but it took a long time for the world at large to respond and in some quarters there is still resistance and disbelief.

In this series of paintings, I have been little concerned with the vegetal green aspect of the forest: the fluttering light and myriad greens of the canopy are missing. The branching dark umbers, rusts, and siennas and the blue-green-black backgrounds, along with the swirling vortex Mandala motif hopefully draw the viewer's vision into the forest mystery. The viewer is in the undergrowth, the ground level where trunks, thick limbs, branches and vines—all powerful symbols of our unconscious, our DNA, our neural net, and our sinewy bodies—swirl in their interpenetrating dance as they strive for higher levels of illumination. And this quest is the journey into the symbolic dark forest we each carry within... and then beyond into the clearings ahead, where the light vibrates...drawing us on.