

Scientist, artist, philanthropist: a retrospective exhibition of local resident Payson Stevens' life at Southwestern College begins Jan. 28

By Lee Schoenbart

From NASA to India and back to San Diego, science, art and humanity come together in a retrospective exhibition of life's work – to this point in time – of Payson Stevens.

A fine artist who works in a series of atypical mediums, Stevens embraced what was known as the "new media art" of computer generation and animation and CDs. His vocation implored Stevens to utilize his science mind while his avocation explored the artistic side.

Added to the mix was his humanity and humaneness for the people of Himachal Pradesh, a state in northwest India surrounded by the Himalayas and bordered by Kashmir (north), Punjab (west) and China's Tibet region (east). Stevens became involved with My Himachal, a U.S. nonprofit and Indian nongovernmental organization dedicated to enriching the state's education, health care and employment as well as preserving its culture.

"It will really be looking at the scope of all of my work," Stevens said about *EnergyLandscapes*, his near month-long exhibition at Southwestern College from Jan. 28-Feb. 24.

"The main gallery will have my paintings and drawings going back 35-plus years, tracing the various periods in development of my work," he said, "and the smaller gallery will be focused on the work I did in science communication on the Earth and global change and global warming issues for 25 years through my two companies, which are InterNetwork and InterNetwork Media, working with science agencies NASA, the U.S. Geological Survey and NOAA."

Stevens stated that all net proceeds from the sale of his art work during the exhibition will be donated to My Himachal.

"There's a serious need for child healthcare, nutrition and education, as well as the conservation and protection of the environment of Himachal Pradesh," Stevens said. "It's a beautiful forested part of India with a lot of water and a lot of issues associated with protecting the environment."

Since it's formation in 2006, Stevens said, My Himachal has immunized 2,500 children against basic childhood illnesses including measles, mumps, rubella, diphtheria and typhoid. He explained that the Indian government only covers one or two of those basic diseases.

"Many of the others are not covered, so we're working with



Payson Stevens with his dog Tiger and finished and unfinished paintings in the Bardo Series.

Indian doctors who are very dedicated," he said. "We're taking that on as a way of helping the situation for children. We're also dealing with issues of childhood malnutrition and training village women to become nutritional health workers going into the surrounding villages to be a resource to help educate and raise awareness about childhood nutrition and what the mothers need to do."

In the far recesses of Himachal Pradesh, and perhaps wherever he traveled and worked in India, Stevens frequently depended on his creativity and local natural resources for art supplies. Among the more unusual mediums Stevens utilized oil on khadi paper, oil on clay-coated paper and original materials for his totem sculptures such as bone, feathers and porcupine quills.

"My work as a fine artist is primarily focused on imagery in traditional media like canvas and oil, canvas and acrylic," Stevens began, "but khadi paper is handmade paper in India. There are

places called Gandhi ashram shops where Gandhi, in the 1930s and '40s, set up livelihood work for the poor rural people and they started making beautiful handmade papers. Not only papers, but anything that related to handmade products, like paper or cloth, is called khadi in India.

"So I work a lot on these beautiful handmade papers," he said. "In addition, there are other papers that are clay-coated that have a very smooth, shiny surface and they have a different affect when you work with oil or pencil.

"It wasn't like there was a fine arts store that I could go to and just pick up whatever I wanted," he added. "I had to work with whatever was available. That was true also with my sculpture. I do a lot of hiking and the objects I found I would transform into sculptural objects and pieces of those objects we cast in bronze."

Eight thousand miles from India, Stevens and his art are forever linked by his love for the people and nature of that northwest state.

"All of the proceeds (from the retrospective) will be going towards furthering the projects to help the rural poor in Himachal Pradesh, that's a goal for me now," he stated. "I sell my work in India and I feel it's a gift to be able to create and I want to return that gift in whatever way I can, improving people's lives, who, in many ways, have a much harder material existence than we do here in the United States. My Himachal has been an all-volunteer effort with all of the resources to date going directly to help people that need it the most."

Upon reflection, Stevens concluded, "I've lived in San Diego County for over 40 years and this would be an opportunity for the community to see what one of their citizens is doing in two different areas.

"I think the thing that is kind of interesting about my career is that I've been trained and tried to use both the left and right brain for different kinds of work and also integrate them where I can with my awareness of seeing the world as both a scientist and as an artist."

His exhibit is on the campus of Southwestern College, 900 Otay Lakes Road in Chula Vista. Call the gallery at (619) 216-6605 for location and directions.

To learn more, visit www.energylandscapes.com and www.myhimachal.com.