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Interview: Payson R. Stevens Dec. 1, 2009
Translation

Payson R. Stevens, former President of InterNetwork Media, is a scientist trained in molecular biology from New York City and oceanography from Scripps Institute of Oceanography. He is also in the field of arts and during the last 30 years has been successful as an artist, writer, designer and filmmaker. Endowed with this multi-dimensional personality, Payson has received various awards for his creativity, which includes the CINE Golden Eagle Film Award in 1980. In 1994, the former American President Bill Clinton also awarded InterNetwork the Presidential Design Award. In September 2009, his 'Dark Forest' painting series was on exhibition at the American Center/US Embassy in Delhi. The following are excerpts from a talk with him on the occasion of the exhibition's inauguration:

1. Tell us about your childhood.

I grew up in New York City: Manhattan and Brooklyn and was exposed to the incredible cultural life that great city offers. My parents, especially my mother, took the children to museums or concerts in the city almost every weekend and I still have very vivid memories of those experiences. Music was also an important part of my childhood and all three children learned to play the piano at very early ages, teaching us discipline as well as the love of music. Science too was part of our home and school education and going to the Museum of Natural History was an enormous introduction to the natural world. I feel quite blessed that my mother exposed me to so much and at a very early age.

2. Did you always want to enter in oceanography?

Not really. Science was a formal part of my education from the beginnings. I was pre-med in college but didn't feel a great affinity to the members of the profession. I did a graduate degree in molecular biology but did not like working in a laboratory all the time. Then a trip for 6 months to Europe and Greece took me out of my provincial New York City world view and exposed me to Nature with months traveling by small boats in the Aegean Sea. I decided to switch to the PhD program in oceanography and moved to San Diego California to study at Scripps Institution of Oceanography. This further opened me to Nature and studying the natural world.

3. When you started painting?

My first experiences of art were at around 7 years old when I took sculpture classes at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, which had a program for children and parents. I started painting in 1964 when I bought the loft of a New York artist and inherited all his painting supplies. A few years later I started art classes at the same time as I did my science studies at New York University.

4. Was there any painter in your family history that inspired you?

My mother was extremely talented. She was a world-renowned dental surgeon working in facial reconstruction and also studied sculpture at the well-known Art Institute of Chicago. She also designed and made her own jewelry in gold and silver working in the lost-wax technique (which she taught me). More importantly she inspired me to love art by taking us to the great museums of New York.

5. Who spotted your talent first?

Can't say. I've always been self-motivated and just kept doing my work whether I received recognition or not. At some points, especially my computer art, which was pioneering at the time (early 1980s), my work was well received, published in art history books on the subject and my work sold well.

6. How do you manage paintings in spite of your busy and demanding schedule?

Painting is the deeper part of my soul life. I've been fortunate to have a lot of energy and am very disciplined. I have a daily meditative and yoga practice which helps concentrate my shakti. It's all part of my dharma and my Maya and I just honor it as best I can.

7. Rate in order importance fame, money, power and why?

I don't consider these that important at this stage of my life. I've been blessed with a degree of recognition, ran my own successful businesses focusing on climate change working with the US science agencies, and had enough prosperity to know when I had accumulated enough. Fame for an artist (or anyone seeking to fulfill their desires) is a bit of drug and can have negative impacts on one's development. It takes constant diligence to look at one's development with an objective eye and really examine what's important, and that's an on-going practice until one checks out. The creative life is a gift that comes from the Great Beyond and in turn should be moved forward as a gift to those who come in contact with the work.

8. What is the theme behind your works and what about your chosen character?

The theme of my work for most of my 40+ years of artwork is the preoccupation with energy in it's different forms and how it flows in the Natural world: the water, the land, the mountains, the clouds are all in constant flux...as we are. Perhaps my own high/extreme levels of energy and focus are part of this process. When I paint, there is a total immersion in the process and the energies that I see and feel flow through me.

9. When and how did you realise that you are an artist?

Not something overtly conscious as much as realizing how I was part of a larger energy flow. When I was five years old laying on my back on the green lawn of our home watching the clouds sail by...realizing I was part of them and they were part of me.

10. Is there any difference between your earlier work and now?

Of course, one's work constantly evolves as does one's technique and skill. But the work always demands it's due...sometimes there are struggles with the painting wanting to go in one direction, me in another...and this is part of the process of evolving as a painter. You can see almost 40 years of work on my website: www.energylandscapes.com

11. If not an artist or oceanographer then what would you have been?

I don't think in those terms...I've been fortunate to express myself in with different parts of my brain and feel most grateful to have had these experiences.

12. What are your future projects?

Continuing to paint, sculpt, do videos and work on personal creative projects. In addition, I am committed to doing seva work in India both as a founding member, board advisor to the NGO, My Himachal (www.myhimachal.com) in Himachal Pradesh and as an advisor to the Great Himalayan National Park where I have been involved since 2000 (www.greathimalayannationalpark.com)