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American earth scientist on an artistic mission

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It sometimes takes a guest to remind you of the beauty of your own house. So, when a renowned US-based earth scientist travels all the way to India and reminds its people the forgotten Himalayan splendours, one can only say - "Thank God for small mercies".

For Payson R. Stevens, involved with global warming research across the planet - Alaska to Antarctica, the upper Banjar Valley in Kullu has become a sort of reference point for the energy flows within nature.

But a few years ago, when he made Kullu his home, he had no idea these flows would inspire a striking show of artworks, wherein the Indian concept of Shakti will find easy expression and meaning.

On the face of it, Payson's 'energy flows', that went up for display at the Government Art Gallery, Sec-

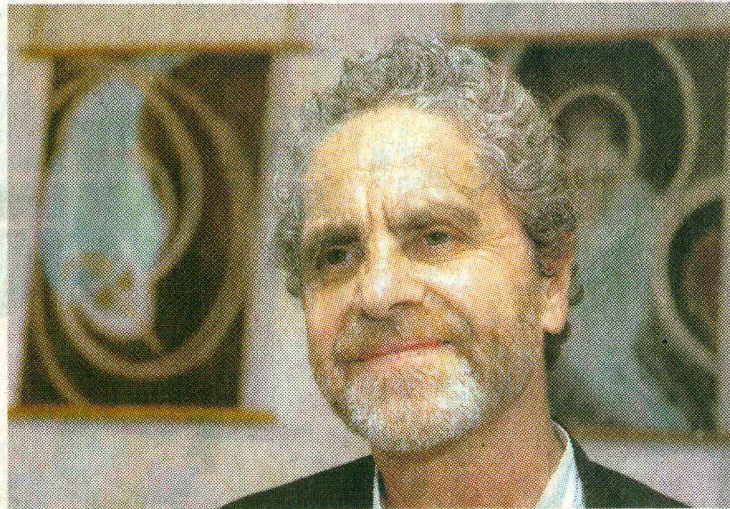
tor 10, Chandigarh, today might seem like a routine exercise in art. But, in fact, it is a reflection of a scientist's preoccupation with energy flows going back over 30 years.

"I have two lives- one as a scientist observing the earth in satellite images and researching the melting glaciers, the other as an artist smit-

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ten by nature and the vividness of its energy forms. This exhibition is a result of my Indian experience," Payson told TNS.

No surprise that his works celebrate the magnificence of the Himalayas and inspire people to love their surroundings. It begins with what Payson calls the 'stream suite' featuring the Himalayan wealth of streams that lend the area its unique edge. Unfortunately, the state's fragile ecology is now battling for survival with its water resources facing overexploitation to



Payson Stevens, the scientist, who makes art.
— A Tribune photograph

meet India's energy needs. This is just one of the challenges Payson helps the locals meet.

Second in line is the 'bardo' series featuring paintings inspired by Tibetan Buddhism. "These

works were catalysed by the death of my close relative in 2007. As I watched his body go up in smoke, I was deeply affected by the fact that within the larger drama of nature, each one of us has our own

round of death and rebirth," says Payson, who seals the show with 'moksha' series.

Works in the final segment visualise energy flows from a spiritual perspective. They remind us of our earthly passage, says Payson, whose inspiration for the exhibition came from the 1,200-km trek in the Great Himalayan Park, where he visited all the four river sources.

Back in the USA, he has won the Presidential Design Award for Excellence from Bill Clinton for the CD-ROM science-journal prototype, Arctic Data InterActive. He was also lead author of 'Embracing earth: New views of our changing planet' and contributing author to the award winning college textbooks. In art, he trained from the School of Visual Arts, New York City.

But with his many laurels, Payson remains an observer at heart, trying to see reason in nature's wondrous patterns that baffle scientists and artists alike.