

# Marc Chagall

(1887 - 1985)

Marc Chagall is a painter known for his fusion of brilliant colors, dreamlike imagery, and religious qualities. His childhood served as a great inspiration for much of his subjects – Jewish life and folklore. The themes portrayed in his art alienated him from the modernist movements taking place in the early 20th century.

Born in Vitebsk, Russia, in 1887, Marc Chagall belonged to a poor family of Hasidic Jew descent. He was the eldest of nine children.

In 1907, at the age of 20, the young Chagall pursued his love of art by studying painting under teacher Pen. That same year, he also attended the Imperial Society for the Encouragement of Arts in St. Petersburg.

In 1909, he met his future wife, Bella Rosenfeld

Like many artists of his time, Chagall decided to move to Paris in 1910 to pursue his career. Upon his arrival into the city, he was immediately drawn into a circle of contemporary poets and painters.

Chagall is well known for having distanced himself from the popular avant-garde movements of his time. The first instance of this was seen in 1911, when refused to formally align himself with the Cubists in Paris.

In 1913, Chagall opened his own studio, and exhibited for the first time at the Independents.

One year later, Chagall had his first personal show, organized by Walden, in Berlin. He called Berlin home for some time during 1914. He eventually returned to his childhood home of Vitebsk in 1915 at the outbreak of the Russian Revolution.

After the war ended, Chagall remained in Russia as he was named director of the Art Academy in Vitbsk, until he resigned in 1920 to move to Moscow. There he designed the décor for the State Jewish Theater in Moscow.

In 1923, Chagall resumed his travels by moving to France. There he meets Eluard, Ernst, and Gala who invite him to join the Surrealist movement. However, disliking the avant-garde movements, Chagall refused. He believed the artist was a messenger that hailed from a superior and more spiritual world, and did not want to limit himself to a particular movement.

Chagall concentrated on his illustrations, such as the ones he completed for Gogol's *Dead Souls* in 1925, his series of etchings for the *Fables of La Fontaine* in 1926. He also completed etchings for the Bible, and went to Palestine to seek inspiration for these illustrations.

In 1939, Chagall received his first honor of recognition with the Carnegie Prize.

Chagall finally left France in 1942 because of ongoing racial discrimination. He embarked for the United States, where he had been invited to settle.

After his wife's death in 1944, he retired from his painting in order to publish his late wife's writings in a book entitled *Lighted Lamps*.

He began his own work again one year later as he created the scenery and costumes for Stravinsky's *Firebird*, presented by the Ballet Theater of New York.

In 1946, he had his own prestigious exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

His stay in America, however, only lasted until 1948 when he settled in the south of France.

For the next twenty years, following his return to France, Chagall accomplished the creation of many high-scale commissioned works, such as stone sculptures, mosaics, book illustrations, panel paintings for concert halls, and set and costume designs for the ballet and opera. These creations were seen throughout Europe and America.

In the process of his busy career, Chagall's work continued to gain recognition. His illustrations for *Odyssey* and lithographs to *Storm* were awarded with the Honorable Legion in 1975.

Marc Chagall's long and prosperous career ended on March 28, 1985. He died in Sen-Pol de Vence, France. His work, however, reflects the personal inspiration of his emotional and spiritual life – a subject that has surely transcended the boundaries of time.

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