

CHAGALL

Masterpieces 1908 - 1922

15 November 2006 – 18 February 2007

Facts & Figures

Curators:	Evelyn Benesch, Ingried Brugger, Heike Eipeldauer	
Organisation:	Angelika Scholz	
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Opening times:	Daily 10 am – 7 pm, Friday 10 am – 9 pm	
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Admission:	Adults	€ 8.70
	School pupils, students, senior citizens, national and civilian service	€ 7.30
	ÖBB-Vorteilscard, Club Ö1 members, Club Suxess	€ 5.80
	One for me member	€ 5.80
	Family ticket	€ 16.00
	Groups	€ 7.30
	Children up to 6 years of age, Art Historian Association, Friends of the Fine Arts, ICOM, Unemployed persons	<i>free</i>
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Press release

Chagall: Masterpieces 1908 – 1922

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In autumn 2006, the BA-CA Kunstforum is showing an exhibition devoted to the most important phase in the work of Marc Chagall, the years up until 1922, when he made his inimitable mark on the art of the classical modern era. Chagall's work unites the formal-aesthetic achievements of the Paris avant-garde with the wild, tenderly poetic exultation in narrative of his native Russian. The exhibition gathers together more than a hundred works of an artist who is probably the most renowned representative of the flamboyant and the exotic in the history of art.

Chagall – Masterpieces 1908-1922 takes as its theme the most significant and permanently telling years of this great painter. It is Chagall's early work that most deeply affected artists and public: the stories from the Shtetl, the magical-rhapsodic world of Mother Russia, captured in thrillingly expressive painting that casts a spell over his contemporaries and their descendants alike. A special highpoint will be the unique, extremely fragile and monumental murals made in 1920 for the Moscow Jewish Theatre - a multi-layered composition on several canvases, which combines motifs from Jewish and Russian folk art and synagogue painting to unfold an astonishing spectrum of the Yiddisher world. The combination of a rich art of narrative with Chagall's characteristically unorthodox compositional structure, his audacious use of colour and his own special poetic sensibility makes this work into one of the icons of classical modern painting.

This, the exhibition's main work, is accompanied by important paintings, water colours and drawings from the period between 1908 and 1922. Besides rarely shown pictures from the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, the exhibition is presenting the complete Chagall collection of the State Russian Museum in St. Petersburg: it will be the very first opportunity to see the holdings of these major collections of Russian art together in Austria. The selection is augmented by significant loans from the Guggenheim Museum and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, and other international museums and private collections.

Biography

Marc Chagall

- 1887 Marc Chagall is born on 7 July as Moshe Segal in the Jewish ghetto of the small White Russian town of Vitebsk.
- 1906 Chagall goes to St. Petersburg to study painting with Yehuda Pen, a genre and portrait painter in the salon style of around 1900.
- 1907-1909 Studies at the school of the Imperial Society for the Promotion of the Arts in St. Petersburg and at the Svaneva School; it has Léon Bakst as principal and is famous for its openness to artistic creativity. Contacts to Jewish intellectuals, collectors and art lovers.
- 1910 A scholarship enables Chagall to travel to Paris for the first time. He attends the “La Palette” and “La Grande Chaumière” academies. Meets the poets Max Jacob, Blaise Cendrars, Guillaume Apollinaire and the painters Fernand Léger, Amadeo Modigliani, Albert G. Gleizes and Robert Delaunay.
- 1911-1913 Chagall moves into the studio house “La Ruche” in the colony of avant-garde artists on Montparnasse. Takes part in several major exhibitions: in 1912 at the *Salon des Indépendants* and the *Salon d’Automne* in Paris and in 1913 at the *Erste Deutsche Herbstsalon* in Berlin, organised by the German gallery owner Herwarth Walden.
- 1914 First solo exhibition in Walden’s gallery, “Der Sturm (The Storm)” with 200 works, which brings him overnight fame. Chagall travels to Vitebsk to visit his family. The outbreak of the First World War prevents his return to Paris.
- 1915-1917 In 1915, he marries his childhood sweetheart Bella Rosenfeld and moves to Petrograd, the name of St. Petersburg since the outbreak of the First World War. Their daughter Ida is born in 1916.

- 1918 After returning to his home town of Vitebsk, Chagall, as representative official for the fine arts for the Vitebsk administration, organises the festivities on the first anniversary of the 1917 October Revolution.
- 1919 Chagall founds the State School of Fine Arts in Vitebsk, and engages El Lissitzky, Ivan Puni and Kasimir Malevich as teachers.
- 1920-1921 Chagall leaves the art school after artistic differences with Malevich and moves to Moscow. Here he designs stage sets, costumes and the murals for the State Jewish Studio Theatre. Works on the sets for Nikolai W. Gogol's *The Auditor and for three short pieces by Sholem Aleykhem*. Teaches drawing in the war orphan colony of Malachovka near Moscow.
- 1922 Marc Chagall, Bella and Ida manage to emigrate to Berlin. Lawsuit against Herwarth Walden on account of 150 paintings left in Berlin before the outbreak of the war, which Walden had meanwhile sold. The high inflation rate had frittered away the revenue from the sales. An agreement is first reached in 1926 after some pictures were restored to Chagall as compensation. On commission of the publisher Paul Cassirer Chagall designs his first work of printed graphics – the illustrations to his autobiography *My Life*. The book was first published by Chagall's wife Bella in 1931 in French translation.
- 1923-1929 Moves to Paris in 1923; gets his first retrospective there in the following year. On commission of Ambroise Vollard, he produces illustrations for Nicolai Gogol's *Dead Souls*, La Fonatine's *Fables* and the *Cirque Vollard*.
- 1930s Travels to Holland, Spain, Poland and Palestine. Works on the illustrations of the *Bible*. In 1937, Chagall becomes a French citizen. The Nazi regime has Chagall's works confiscated in German museums. Several of his works are shown in the exhibition *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art). After the outbreak of the Second World War, Chagall moves to the Loire, later to Gordes in unoccupied Provence.
- 1940s On 23 June 1941, the day the Germans march into Russia, Chagall arrives in New York at the invitation of the Museum of Modern Art. Regular exhibitions in the "Pierre Matisse" gallery. The death of Bella in 1944 throws Chagall into a deep depression. From 1945, work on murals, sculptures and ballet design. In 1946,

retrospectives in the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Art Institute in Chicago. Return to Paris in 1948.

1950s Settles in Venice. Produces his first ceramic works. Numerous exhibitions in Europe. In 1952, marries Valentina (Vava) Brodsky. Stained glass designs for Metz Cathedral. In 1957, opening of the Chagall House in Haifa.

1960s Works increasingly on stained-glass windows and wall decoration, including for the New York Lincoln Center, the Paris Opera and the Israeli Parliament in Jerusalem. Many exhibitions world wide.

1970-1980s

Numerous commissions, including a mosaic for the First National Bank in Chicago, glass windows for Rheims Cathedral and the parish church of St. Stephen in Mainz. Many exhibitions and retrospectives world wide.

1985 Marc Chagall dies on 28 March in Saint-Paul-de-Vence.

Quotations

Marc Chagall

“We all know that a good person can also be a bad artist. But no one will ever be a real artist who is not a great person and thus not a good person.”

“The fundamental thing is art, painting, a kind of painting that is quite different from what everyone else does.”

“For me painting was never a profession. If you are a painter, you can stand on your head and still be a painter. To create good painting and good ceramics all you need is a good character. As the people, so the king, as the saying goes. As the character, so the painting.”

*“One day, a friend of mine visited me who, on looking at our room, noticed my drawings on the walls and exclaimed: ‘Hey, you’re a real artist!’ I then remembered actually having read a large sign in our town somewhere, like a shop sign: *Painting and Drawing School of the Painter Pen*. I thought: the die is cast. There’s no question about doing anything else; I have to go to this school and then become an artist.”*

“My name is Marc, I have a highly sensitised inner life and no money, but they say I’m talented.”

“I realised at the time that I had to go to Paris. The soil that had nourished the roots of my art was Vitebsk; but my art needed Paris as a tree needs water. I had no other reason to leave my home country, and I think I have always remained true to it in my painting.”

“With my 27 roubles in my pocket – the only money I ever got in my life from my father for the journey – still rosy-cheeked and curly-locked, I set off to St. Petersburg accompanied by my comrades. The decision has been made.”

“Paris, my second Vitebsk!”

“I came to Paris to find the colour blue.”

“During this time I was introduced to a whole constellation of patrons. Everywhere I went in their salons I felt like someone who had just got out of a steam bath, red and hot in the face.”

“But maybe my art, I thought, is the art of a madman, flashing mercury, a blue soul, that bursts in all over my pictures.”

“Down with naturalism, impressionism and realistic cubism ... let’s surrender ourselves to our madness! A cleansing bloodbath is needed, a revolution in the depths, not on the surface.”

“Picasso changes his style as often as his socks.”

“But the word artist, such a fantastic, literary word, a word as if from another world, yes, perhaps I heard it before, but no one ever uttered it in my home town. That really was another world for us!”

“I thought this is the right moment to scupper the old Jewish Theatre with its realism, its naturalism, its psychology and its false beards.”

“These walls belong to you, said Efros, as he led me into a dark hall, do what you like with them. It was an apartment, in a very sorry state, which had been abandoned by fleeing citizens. You see, he continued, this is where the public banquets will be held; there the stage. Quite honestly, I only saw something that reminded me of a kitchen, and here ... down with the old theatre that smells of sweat and garlic! Long live the ... and I went full pelt at the walls.” ... Here, at least on the walls, I will let out everything in my heart and freely create what seems essential to me for the revival of the national theatre.”

I remember the impression made on me by Chagall's pictures that were exhibited in the Autumn Salon between the cubist paintings of Le Fauconnier and Delaunay. Their intellectual constructions demonstrated an analytical way of thinking, while Chagall astonished us with his child-like, instinctive and uninhibited freshness. You had the impression that the wild and fantastical pictures of a child had been hung by mistake between the works of grown-ups." (Abram Efros, Jakob Tugendhold, Moscow 1918)

"Chagall has remained true to himself, true to the way of seeing, of feeling and of inventing that has been his very own since his youth; from the West he only borrowed what he needed." (Lionello Venturi, 1966)

"The dream of flying has always been a familiar a motif in art. Marc Chagall raised it to become a living feeling." (Nikolai Aaron, 2003)