



Chagall

Page 4 : *Self-Portrait*, 1909
oil on canvas, 57 x 48 cm
Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf

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“The dignity of the artist lies in his duty of keeping awake the sense of wonder in the world. In this long vigil he often has to vary his methods of stimulation; but in this long vigil he is also himself striving against a continual tendency to sleep.”

– Marc Chagall

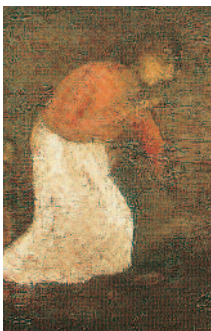


Biography

- 7 July 1887 Marc Zakharovich Chagall, the son of a fish vendor, was born in Vitebsk.
- 1906 Studied at the art school of Yuri Pen in Vitebsk, leaving for St. Petersburg in the winter.
- 1907-1910 Studied at the Drawing School of the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts, St. Petersburg (then directed by Nicholas Roerich) and the private school of S. Saidenberg; entered the private art school of Yelizaveta Zvantseva, where he studied under Léon Bakst and Matislav Dobuzhinsky. Showed his works at the school exhibition held in the office of the magazine Apollon.
- 1910-1914 Lived in Paris, on the Impasse du Maine. In 1911, moved to La Ruche. Met Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, Fernand Léger, Amedeo Modigliani, Alexander Arkhipenko, Guillaume Apollinaire, Max Jacob, Blaise Cendrars, and other famous artists and writers. Exhibited at the Salon des Independants and the Salon d'Automne in Paris, with the Donkey's Tail group in Moscow, at Der Sturm Gallery in Berlin (first one-man show) and also in St. Petersburg and Amsterdam. On the eve of the war, returned to Vitebsk.
- July 1915 Married Bella Rosenfeld.
- 1915-1917 Worked in Petrograd, served on the military-industrial committee. Exhibited in Moscow and Petrograd.
- 1916 Birth of his daughter Ida.
- 1918-1919 Appointed Commissar for the Arts in the Regional Department of People's Education in Vitebsk. Set up and ran (from early 1919) an art school in Vitebsk, where the teachers included Mstislav Dobuzhinsky, Ivan Puni and Kasimir Malevich. Headed the Free Painting Workshop (Svomas) and the museum. Organized the celebrations in 1918 for the first anniversary of the October Revolution. Took part in the First State Free Exhibition held in the Winter Palace, Petrograd.
- 1920-1921 Conflict with Malevich and Lissitzky forced Chagall to leave Vitebsk. He lived in and near Moscow, producing works for the Jewish Chamber Theatre and teaching in the Malakhovka and Third International colonies for homeless children. Began work on the book My Life.
- 1922 Joint exhibition in Moscow with Nathan Altman and David Sterenberg.
- 1922-1923 Travelled to Kaunas with an exhibition of his works. Visited Berlin and Paris. Settled in Paris in September 1923. Produced etchings for My Life and began work on illustrations to Gogol's Dead Souls.
- 1926 One-man shows in Paris and New York.

CHAGALL

- 1930-1931 Worked on illustrations for the Bible. Travelled to Switzerland, Palestine, Syria and Egypt. Exhibitions in Paris, Brussels and New York.
- 1933 At Goebbels' command, Chagall's works were burnt in public in Mannheim. Exhibition in Basle.
- 1935 Visited Poland.
- 1937 Granted French citizenship. Travelled to Italy.
- 1939 Carnegie Prize (USA).
- 1940 Moved to the Loire and then to Provence.
- 1941 Arrested in Marseille and then freed. Moved to the USA.
- 1942 Worked for theatres in the USA and Mexico.
- 1944 Death of Bella Chagall in New York.
- 1945 Set designs and costumes for Stravinsky's ballet The Firebird.
- 1946 Exhibitions in New York and Chicago.
- 1947 Exhibition at the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris.
- 1948 Returned to France. Publication of Dead Souls with illustrations by Chagall. Exhibitions in Amsterdam and London. Travelled widely in this and the following years.
- 1950 Moved to Vence, near Nice. Worked on lithographs and ceramics.
- 1951 First stone sculptures. Large exhibitions in Bern and Jerusalem.
- 1952 Married Valentina Brodsky. Visit to Greece.
- 1953-1955 Major exhibitions in Turin, Vienna and Hanover.
- 1956 Publication of the Bible with illustrations by Chagall.
- 1957 Began work on stained-glass windows (for Assy, Metz, Jerusalem, New York, London, Zurich, Reims, Nice). Exhibitions of graphic works in Basle and Zurich.
- 1959 Murals in the foyer of the Theatre in Frankfurt am Main. Exhibitions in Paris, Munich and Hamburg.
- 1963 Exhibitions in Japan.
- 1964 Ceiling paintings in the Opera in Paris. First mosaics and tapestries.
- 1966 Moved to Saint-Paul-de-Vence. Painted murals in the Metropolitan Opera in New York.
- 1969-1970 Foundation of the Musée Chagall in Nice. Major retrospective exhibition at the Grand Palais in Paris.
- June 1973 Trips to Moscow and Leningrad at the invitation of the USSR Ministry of Culture.
- July 1973 Opening of the Musée Chagall in Nice.
- October 1977 Exhibition of paintings produced between 1967 and 1977 in the Louvre.
- 1982-1984 Major exhibitions in Stockholm, Copenhagen, Paris, Nice, Rome and Basle.
- 28 March 1985 Marc Chagall died at Saint-Paul-de-Vence in the ninety-eighth year of his life.
- 1987 Major exhibition of Chagall's works in Moscow.



Through one of those curious reversals of fate, one more exile has regained his native land. Since the exhibition of his work at the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow in 1987 which gave rise to an extraordinary popular fervour, Marc Chagall has experienced a second birth.

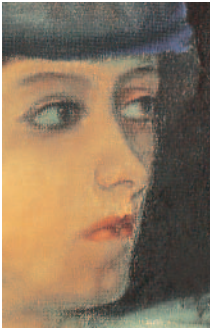
Kermis

1908

oil on canvas, 68 x 95 cm

Wright Ludington Collection Santa Barbara
(California, USA)





Here we have a painter, perhaps the most unusual painter of the twentieth century, who at last, attained the object of his inner quest: the love of his Russia. Thus, the hope expressed in the last lines of *My Life*, the autobiographical narrative which the painter broke off in 1922 when he left for the West – “and perhaps Europe will love me and, along with her, my Russia” – has been fulfilled.

My Fiancée in Black Gloves

1909

oil on canvas, 88 x 65 cm

Kunstmuseum, Basle





A confirmation of this is provided today by the retrospective tendency in his homeland which, beyond the all-in-all natural re-absorption of the artist into the national culture, also testifies to a genuine interest, an attempt at analysis, an original viewpoint which enriches our study of Chagall.

Self-Portrait

1909

oil on canvas, 57 x 48 cm

Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf





Contrary to what one might think, this study is still dogged by uncertainties in terms of historical fact. As early as 1961 in what is still the main work of reference, Franz Meyer emphasised the point that even the establishment of, for example, a chronology of the artist's works, is problematic.



The Artist's Sister (Mania)

1909

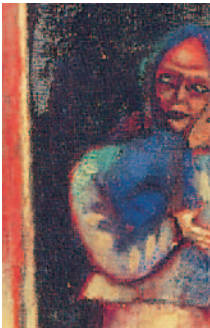
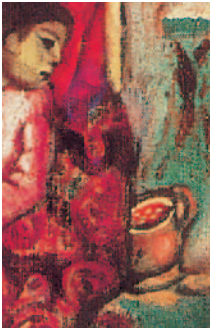
oil on canvas, 93 x 48 cm
Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne





In fact, Chagall refused to date his paintings or dated them *a posteriori*.

A good number of his paintings are therefore dated only approximately and to this, we must add the problems caused to Western analysts by the absence of comparative sources and, very often, by a poor knowledge of the Russian language.



Sabbath

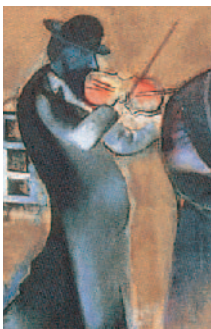
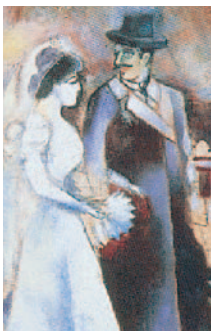
1910

oil on canvas, 90 x 98 cm
Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne





Therefore, we can only welcome such recent works as that of Jean-Claude Marcadé who, following the pioneers Camilla Gray and Valentina Vassutinsky-Marcadé, has underlined the importance of the original source – Russian culture – for Chagall's work. One must rejoice even more in the publications of contemporary art historians such as Alexander Kamensky and Mikhail Guerman with whom we now have the honour and pleasure of collaborating.



The Wedding

1910

oil on canvas, 98 x 188 cm
collection of the artist's family, France





Yet, Marc Chagall has inspired a prolific amount of literature. The great names of our time have written about his work: from the first serious essay by Efros and Tugendhold, *The Art of Marc Chagall*, published in Moscow in 1918 when Chagall was only 31, to Susan Compton's erudite and scrupulous catalogue, *Chagall*, which appeared in 1985, the year of the artist's death.

The Butcher

1910

gouache on paper, 34 x 24 cm
Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow





On the occasion of the exhibition at the Royal Academy in London, there has been no lack of critical studies, but all this does not make easy our perception of Chagall's art. The interpretation of his works – now linking him with the Ecole de Paris, now with the Expressionist movement, now with Surrealism – seems to be full of contradictions.



Jewish Wedding

1910s

pen and Indian ink on paper mounted on cardboard

20.5 x 30 cm

Z. Gordeyeva Collection, St. Petersburg





Does Chagall totally defy historical or aesthetic analysis? In the absence of reliable documents – some of which were clearly lost as a result of his travels, there is a danger that any analysis may become sterile. This peculiarity by which the painter's art seems to resist any attempt at theorization or even categorization is moreover reinforced by a complementary observation.

Birth of a Child

1911

oil on canvas, 65 x 89.5 cm
collection of the artist's family, France





The greatest inspiration, the most perceptive intuitions are nourished by the words of poets or philosophers. Words such as those of Cendrars, Apollinaire, Aragon, Malraux, Maritain or Bachelard... Words which clearly indicate the difficulties inherent in all attempts at critical discourse, as Aragon himself underlined in 1945: "Each means of expression has its limits, its virtues, its inadequacies.

Self-Portrait with Seven Fingers

1911

oil on canvas, 128 x 107 cm
Royal Collection, The Hague