

THE SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT SHEDS LIGHT ON MARC CHAGALL'S WORK
FROM THE 1930S AND 1940S IN A LARGE-SCALE EXHIBITION

CHAGALL WORLD IN TURMOIL

NOVEMBER 4, 2022 – FEBRUARY 19, 2023

Fantasy seems to be without limits in the oeuvre of Marc Chagall (1887–1985). He is regarded as one of the most unconventional artists of modernity. The Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt is now dedicating an extensive exhibition to the painter in Germany, the first in fifteen years. From November 4, 2022, to February 19, 2023, "Chagall: World in Turmoil" sheds light on a facet of his oeuvre that is less well known: Chagall's artwork from the 1930s and 1940s, when his colorful palette became increasingly darker.

As a Jewish painter, Chagall was again and again exposed to existential threats, which had formative effects on his life and work. In the early 1930s, he addressed the ever more aggressive anti-Semitism in his art, and finally emigrated to the United States in 1941 due to persecution by the National Socialist regime. His artistic oeuvre of these years touches on central topics like identity, home, and exile. With roughly sixty haunting paintings, works on paper, and costumes from the 1930s and 1940s, the exhibition traces the artist's search for a visual vocabulary in view of displacement, persecution, and emigration. It presents important works in which Chagall occupied himself to a greater extent with the Jewish lifeworld, numerous self-portraits, his turn to allegorical and biblical topics, the designs for the ballets *Aleko* (1942) and *The Firebird* (1945) while in exile in the United States, the recurring examination of his hometown of Vitebsk (today in Belarus), and major works such as *The Falling Angel* (1923/1933/1947). With this exhibition, the Schirn is introducing a new and highly topical perspective on the oeuvre of one of the twentieth century's most important artists.

For the presentation, the Schirn has been able to obtain loans from numerous German and international museums, as well as from public and private collections, and bring these works to Frankfurt am Main. The lenders include the Kunsthhaus Zürich; Kunstmuseum Basel; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Musée national Marc Chagall, Nice; Museo de Arte Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid; The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, Chicago; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Tate, London; Tel Aviv Museum of Art; and The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

The exhibition "Chagall: World in Turmoil" is supported by the Kulturfonds Frankfurt RheinMain and the Ernst Max von Grunelius-Stiftung. Additional funding has been provided by the Bank of America as partner of the Schirn, and further support by the Georg und Franziska Speyer'sche Hochschulstiftung.

Sebastian Baden, director of the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, emphasizes: "How closely the art of Marc Chagall, which has often been described as fantastical, is connected with his life reality is shown in particular by his less-well-known works of the 1930s and 1940s. In these paintings, Chagall reflected the political reality in a distinctive way and strove to capture the attention of a non-Jewish audience and called on it to confront the Shoah. Based on the work of one of the most renowned artists of European modernity, the Schirn illuminates central topics like flight and persecution, home and exile, but also the question of how experiences and attributions by others shape one's own identity. The exhibition thus opens up a differentiated view and new look at the work of Chagall, which currently assumes a particular timeliness."

Ilka Voermann, curator of the exhibition, explains: "With a closer look at Marc Chagall's pictures, it quickly becomes clear that the notion of this artist as a 'poet' or 'fantasist' among the painters of modernity that dominates in reception of his work cannot hold true. Chagall's art is deeply rooted in his life reality, which was shaped again and again by political events such as the Second World War or the November Revolution. He took this huge danger – not only to his own identity, but also to an entire culture – as an occasion to create some of the most impressive pictures of war, flight and displacement, and persecution in Western art history of the 1930s and 1940s. Chagall's works from this time, which are lesser known than his early and late work, are also very important for classifying and understanding his oeuvre."

TOUR THROUGH THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition at the Schirn focuses on works that Marc Chagall produced in the 1930s and 1940s in a thematically structured circuit with seven sections.

A growing interest in Jewish topics and an intensive examination of his own Jewish identity began in Marc Chagall's work of the early 1930s. The important painting *Solitude*, created in 1933, the year that the National Socialists seized power in Germany, forms the beginning of the exhibition. It depicts a Jew in a melancholic pose in front of a burning city. He is holding a Torah scroll protectively, while a cow playing a violin offers him consolation. At this time, on commission by the art dealer Ambroise Vollard, Chagall also realized illustrations of the Old Testament, which are being presented at the Schirn as well. Against this backdrop, he traveled with his family to the British Mandate for Palestine in 1931. There he created drawings and paintings with a timeless, documentary execution which was unusual for Chagall, concentrating on the depiction of sacred Jewish sites like the Wailing Wall and interiors of synagogues and leaving out contemporary life in Palestine. Drawings of *The Vilna Synagogue* (1935), produced during a trip to Vilna, Poland (today, Vilnius, Lithuania), are also on show in the exhibition.

Marc Chagall shifted the center of his life again and again over the years. In 1922, he left post-revolutionary Russia and, after a temporary stay in Berlin, lived with his wife, Bella Chagall, and their daughter, Ida, in the French capital of Paris as of 1923. In 1941, he fled with his family from persecution by the National Socialists to the United States and later returned from exile to France in 1948, after the end of the Second World War. Unlike in France, where some of Chagall's paintings like *Bonjour Paris* (1939–42) show an approach to the country with typical landscape or city views, the United States is barely reflected in the artist's works. Chagall instead occupied himself during this time with the events in Europe and his homeland. One recurring motif, particularly in the 1930s and 1940s, is his hometown of Vitebsk, evident in *The Madonna of the Village* (1938–42), *The Dream* (ca. 1938–39), and *In My Country* (1943). For Chagall, it became a symbol of the yearning for his lost, destroyed home.

Starting in the late 1930s, Chagall found a visual language for the political and personal events of his era in religious and primarily Christian motifs. For the artist, the crucified Christ became the central allegory for the suffering of European Jews. In numerous works like *Yellow Crucifixion* (1942) and *Apocalypse in Lilac (Capriccio)* (1945), he clearly characterized Christ as a Jew by means of attributes like the Jewish prayer shawl (tallit) or phylacteries (tefillin). By combining Christian iconography with Jewish symbols, Chagall developed a new narrative and stylized Christ as a Jewish martyr.

An extraordinary domestic and intellectual partnership united the artist with his wife, Bella Chagall. He visualized the iconic pictorial motif of a floating, intimately connected pair of lovers in numerous paintings. Chagall took up this couple motif in different variants and poses, as singular figures moving in the pictorial space, but more frequently as bride and groom, embedded in village-like scenery. Chagall expressed his grief over Bella's sudden death in two monumental paintings, *Around Her* and *The Wedding Candles*, both in 1945.

The work *The Falling Angel* has a special position in Chagall's oeuvre. The artist worked on this painting again and again over a twenty-four-year period of time – in Paris, during his exile in the United States, and then back in Europe again. Based on sketches presented in the exhibition, it is possible to observe, in a particularly incisive way, the development of the pictorial elements, a darkening of the color palette, and Chagall's intensive examination of the subject matter in this programmatic work of the 1930s and 1940s. The artist himself described the painting after 1945 as "the first picture in a series of forebodings." The current dating, 1923/1933/1947, identifies the points in time at which the three different versions were completed.

The Schirn also sheds light on Chagall's work during his exile in New York. Besides paintings, costumes from the year 1941 for the ballet *Aleko*, set to music by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, can be seen in the exhibition, along with costume and curtain designs for *The Firebird*, to music by Igor Stravinsky from 1945. For Chagall, the stage productions were not only important public commissions; they also gave him the opportunity to work with other Russian expatriates like the choreographer Léonide Massine.

The end of the Second World War is shown in an ambivalent way in Chagall's oeuvre. In paintings like *The Soul of the City* (1945) or *Self-Portrait with Clock* (1947), he addressed the new stage of his life, as well as his inner conflict resulting from his personal situation. In many paintings such as *Cow with a Parasol* (1946), it is possible to make out a more positive general mood, even though the topic of the Shoah remains a fixed component in Chagall's later works. The artist's inner strife in this phase of transition is also apparent in the two-faced portraits, in which he frequently combined his own face with that of his deceased wife, for instance in *The Black Glove* (1923–48). In August of 1948, Chagall left his US exile and returned to France with his new partner, Virginia Haggard.

An exhibition of the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt in cooperation with the Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Oslo.

CATALOGUE *Chagall: World in Turmoil*, edited by Ilka Voermann, with texts by Ziva Amishai-Maisels, Anna Huber, Leon Joskowitz, Sabine Koller, and Ilka Voermann, and a foreword by Sebastian Baden, director of the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, and Tone Hansen, director emeritus of the Henie Onstad Kunstsenter; German, English, and Norwegian in separate editions, 200 pages, 120 figs., 28.5 x 22.5 cm, hardcover, Hirmer Publishers, ISBN 978-3-7774-4079-8 (German edition), 978-3-7774-4082-8 (English edition), 978-3-7774-4083-5 (Norwegian edition), €35 (SCHIRN), €45 (bookshops)

DIGITORIAL® To accompany the exhibition, the Schirn is offering a Digitorial®. It sheds light on Chagall's stays in Vitebsk, Paris, Jerusalem, and New York, and the political events that shaped his work. This free-of-charge digital educational offering can be accessed in German and English at www.schirn.de/digitorial.

SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT

VENUE SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT, Römerberg, 60311 Frankfurt am Main
DURATION November 4, 2022 – February 19, 2023 **INFORMATION** www.schirn.de **EMAIL** welcome@schirn.de **TELEPHONE** +49.69.29 98 82-0 **FAX** +49.69.29 98 82-240 **ADMISSION** limited timed tickets for weekend visits €16, reduced €14; timed tickets on weekdays €14, reduced €12; free admission for children 8 years and under **TIMED TICKETS** in the online shop at www.schirn.de/shop or at the Schirn ticket office **BOOK INDIVIDUAL TOURS** Individual tours or group tours can be booked at fuehrungen@schirn.de **INFORMATION ABOUT THE VISIT** All information about the visit and the current corona measures are available at www.schirn.de/en/visit/faq **CURATOR** Dr. Ilka Voermann **CURATORIAL ASSISTANCE** Anna Huber **MEDIA PARTNERS** Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, ARTE, VGF **CULTURAL PARTNER** hr2 **SUPPORTED BY** Kulturfonds Frankfurt RheinMain and Ernst Max von Grunelius Foundation **PARTNER OF THE SCHIRN** Bank of America **ADDITIONAL SUPPORT BY** Georg und Franziska Speyer'sche Hochschulstiftung

HASHTAGS #CHAGALL #SCHIRN **FACEBOOK, TWITTER, YOUTUBE, INSTAGRAM, PINTEREST, TIKTOK, SCHIRN MAGAZIN** www.schirn.de/en/magazin

PRESS Johanna Pulz (Head of Press/PR), Julia Bastian (Deputy Head of Press/PR), Thea Stroh (Trainee) **SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT** Römerberg, 60311 Frankfurt am Main
TELEPHONE +49 69 29 98 82-148 **EMAIL** presse@schirn.de