

Marc Chagall | Biography



Marc Chagall was born on 7 July 1887, in Belarus. Ninth son of a Jewish family, all his childhood was very happy although the conditions of the Jews during that period were really tough. When he's 9 years, he goes to Jehuda Pen's atelier, one of the most important names of Jewish and Russian art.

One year later, he goes to School of Imperial Society for Protection of Fine Arts in San Petersburg. This period was particularly hard for him because of the Russian law that permitted Jewish people to live there only with an authorization.

Chagall moved to Paris in 1910, into a studio on the edge of town in a bohemian area known as La Ruche: Paris at that time was the best city in the world to know new artistic movements and trends, and also other artists were living in Paris too, and Chagall, surrounded by such artistic atmosphere was encouraged to experiment his art.

In such artistic company, experimentation was encouraged, and Chagall quickly began developing the poetic and innovative tendencies that had started to emerge in Russia at the time.

In 1912 he exposes for the first time in the Salon des Independants and then in the German first autumn salon Herbstsalon.

After the exhibition in Germany, Chagall returned to his hometown in Belarus, to marry Bella, but the World War I forced him to stay much longer than he expected, as the Russian borders were closed. Despite of the tragedy of the events, Chagall took advantage to concentrate on his artistic research, working on some beautiful portraits of his family or scenes inspired by Vitebsk.

Those were really happy years for Chagall, whose joy for his new life with his wife Bella, is well reflected on his artworks. Between 1917 and 1920, Chagall worked before in Vitebsk as commissar for art and founder of Vitebsk Popular Art School, and then, enthusiastic for the Russian revolution, he moved to Moscow to work as

stage designer.

In 1923 Chagall, with Bella and their daughter, moved to Paris where his first retrospective took place the following year, at the Galerie Barbazanges-Hodebert. It's in this period that Chagall approached to engravings for the first time. In 1922 when he is in Berlin (a short stop before Paris), he worked on his autobiography, illustrated with several etchings.

These artworks made him gain his first commission by the art dealer Vollard, to illustrate the novel by Gogol, *Dead Souls*. From that moment Chagall worked with enthusiasm to new series using etching and engravings.

The Second World War tragedy marked the contemporary art of that period: the artworks of the new avanguardes were considered degenerated, and it's also possibile to notice how the war influenced Chagall's work. Now his painting were more dark, with signs of terror and persecution.

The figure of the Wandering Jew and the elements of Christian symbolism were melted together on his works, in order to transmit the sense of horror that all his age was living.

With the outbreak of World War II, Chagall moved farther and farther south in France, as the Nazi threat became increasingly real for European Jews. A group of Americans ran a rescue operation smuggling artists and intellectuals out of Europe to the United States via forged visas, and Marc Chagall was one of more than 2,000 who escaped this way.

In New York he continued to develop hi artistic path, and was very interested in the design of the costumes of several ballets (one of his greatest passions), but in 1944 a tragedy strokes Chagall's life again. Bella, his beloved wife and muse, died letting him alone with only the memories of those days, when love could make a man fly.

In 1948 he decided to return in France, after the exhibitions at both the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Art Institute of Chicago.

In 1952 he married Valentina Brodsky and in 1958, Chagall started to design the scenery and costumes for the ballet *Daphnis and Chloe* for the Paris Opera, from

whom, five years later, he received a commission to paint a new ceiling for its theater. During this years he also lived in Israel, in order to create the window of the Synagogue of the hospital.

Marc Chagall died in Saint-Paul de Vence, France, on March 28, 1985, leaving behind a vast collection of work in several branches of the arts, as well as a rich legacy as a major Jewish artist and a pioneer of modernism.

The lithographies of Marc Chagall

The graphic work of Chagall is vast and occupies a time span of about 60 years. He approaches it in 1922 when he decided to work on his autobiography which was illustrated by twenty drypoints that describe the youth and the life of the artist.

The book was not finished in time, but however the incisions are published in a collection entitled *Mein Leben (My Life)*.

The etching technique raises from that moment a strong fascination in the artist, who decided to work with other techniques realizing engravings and lithographs.

His illustrated autobiography achieves success and Vollard, an important figure of the Parisian art world of the time, asked him to devote himself to the illustration of some of the most important series in the career of Chagall, including *Dead Souls*, from the text of Gogol and the Bible.

From now on, lithographs and etchings will be part of his artistic production until his death.

He works on several projects, characterised for the commixture of written word and the image.

Besides the Bible, maybe the subject that Chagall worked more on, he decide to illustrate different texts, such as *Derrière le Miroir*, *Daphnis et Chloé*, *le Mauvais Sujets*, and many others.

The beauty of these lithographs and engravings lie on the extraordinary sensitivity and ability of the artist, who is capable to guide the reader in a world where images can tell a story as much as the written word.

The illustrated books, catalogues and all the graphic work that Chagall elaborates, testify how rich the inner world of the artist was, and moreover how the stories and the words of others could be re-elaborated through his personal language, in order to support the written words.

The artist's lithographs are a very important corpus in his artistic work.

His artworks reflect a variegated and stratified itinerary, in which it is possible to see all the *souls* of the artist.

If the first years drypoints represent his first approach to etching techniques, thanks to the printer Mourlot it will be lithographs, his favourite technique.

The color lithographs of the '60s, perhaps the most varied and intense, are an example of how this medium is essential to Chagall's artistic work. The colors and clarity of the sign characterize the entire production of these years and the collaboration with Mourlot becomes just ongoing and essential.

The artwork exposed by Deodato Arte gallery, offers a new sight on Chagall's graphic work, and occupies a time span that goes from 1925 to 1980, with a large unit of artworks dated around the 60s.

Chagall is one of the most loved artists of the twentieth century, especially for his chromatic sensitivity and for the fantastic and dreamy atmosphere he created during his long career.

He lived all the cultural upheaval of his time and was in touch with several artists and artistic movements, even if he never changed in order to follow a particular avant-garde. He always let his soul be the guide for his art.