

CHAGALL

A Cry of
Freedom



Throughout his life, Marc Chagall (Vitebsk, present-day Belarus, 1887 – Saint-Paul-de-Vence, France, 1985) experienced some of the most traumatic events of the 20th century, including two world wars, which led him to undergo uprooting and migration; a condition embodied in the figures that can be found in much of his work. The exhibition *Chagall. A Cry of Freedom* draws a chronological and thematic journey through Chagall's oeuvre, taking into account the artist's position in the face of the convulsions he endured since his childhood in Russia, during his time in France, Germany, Palestine, and the United States, until his return to the French nation after seven years in exile.

Marc Chagall

Paysan russe / L'Homme à la Torah dans la neige [Russian Peasant / The Man with the Torah in the Snow], c. 1930

Collection Sisters «L»

© Vincent Everarts de Velp



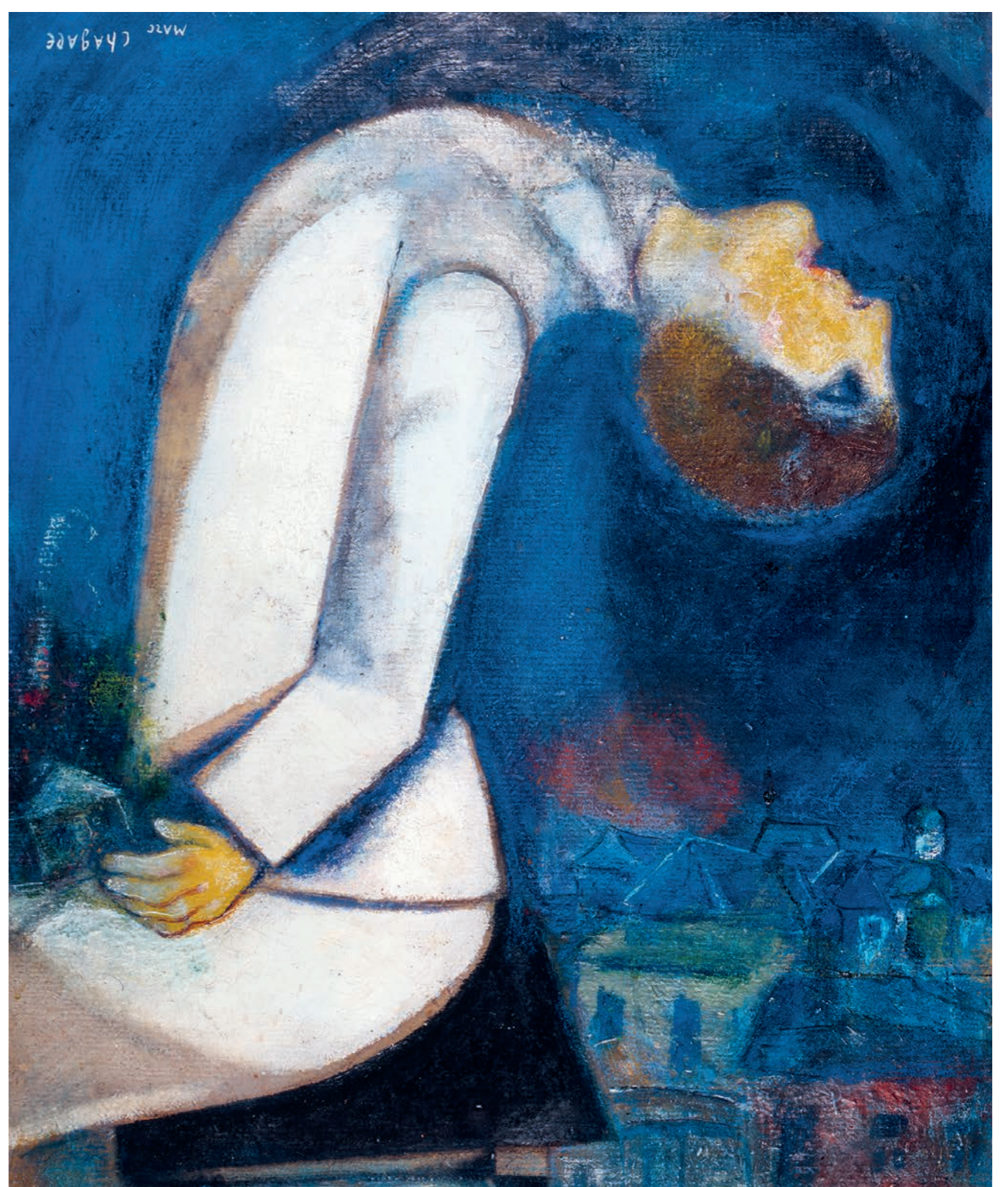
Marc Chagall

L'Homme à la tête renversée

[Man with His Head Thrown Back], 1919

Private collection

© Archives Marc et Ida Chagall, Paris



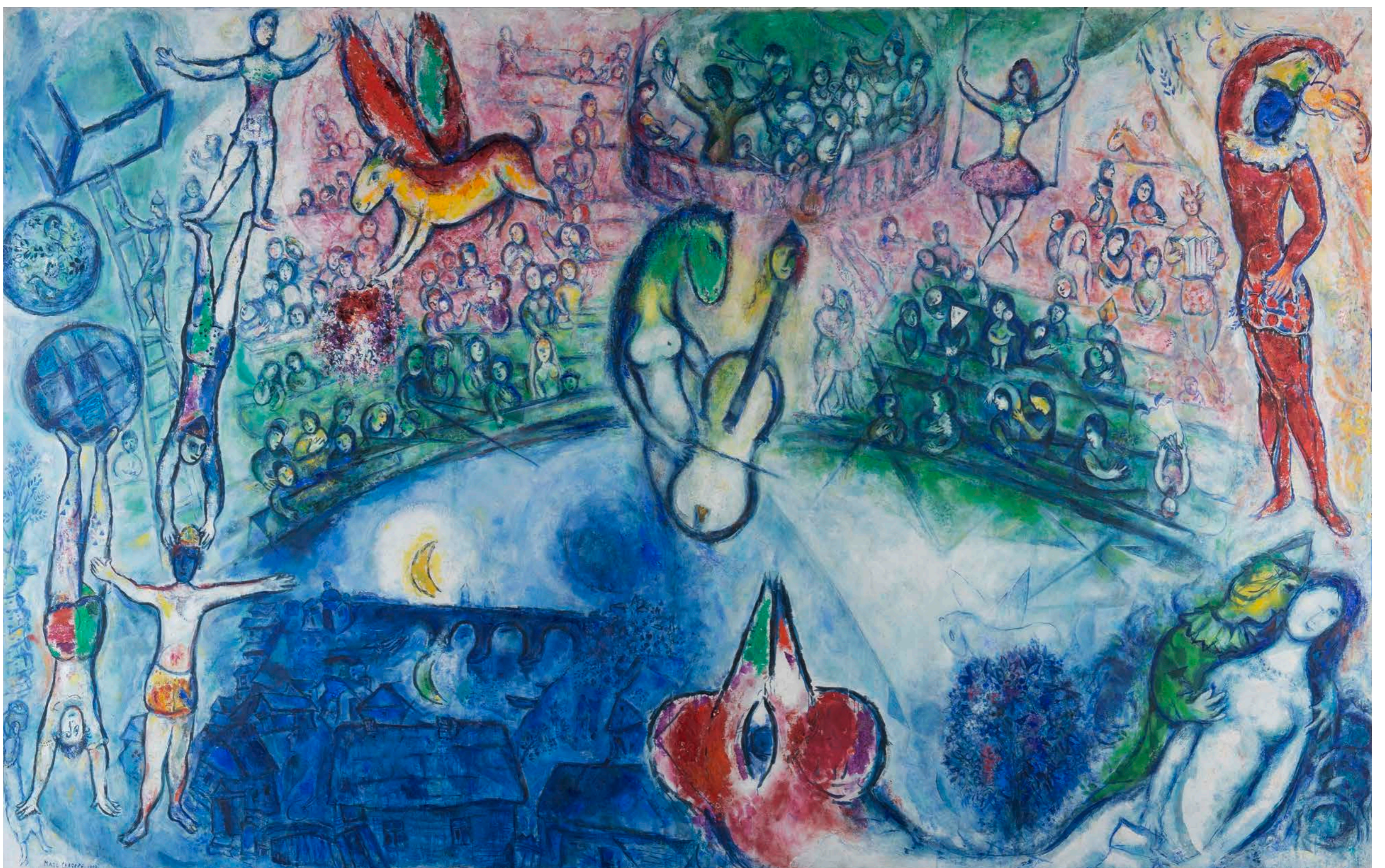
In opposition to the principles of his Hassidic Jewish roots, which restricted the representation of three-dimensional figures in order to avoid the temptation of idolization, Chagall began his career as an artist early on, in 1906, under Yuri Pen, at the art school in his hometown. He continued his studies in Saint Petersburg until he moved to Paris in 1911, where he became steeped in the most important European avant-garde trends, such as Fauvism, Cubism, and Futurism. In the French capital, he established relationships with artists such as Fernand Léger, Amedeo Modigliani, Alexander Archipenko, Chaïm Soutine, and became acquainted with the poets Blaise Cendrars, Max Jacob, Guillaume Apollinaire, and André Salmon, among others.

The outbreak of World War I in 1914 caught him by surprise during a visit to Russia, where he was forced to remain until the conflict subsided. In 1917, after the October Revolution, he was named art commissary for the region of Vitebsk, where he founded the Vitebsk People's Art School, whose teachers included El Lissitzky and Kazimir Malevich. Chagall returned to France in 1923. However, the anti-Semitic threat became prevalent throughout Europe. In 1937 his work was included in the *Entartete Kunst* [*Degenerate Art*] exhibition along with works by one hundred artists, many of whom were Jews, which opened in Munich and was part of the Nazi party's cultural policy aimed at the country's "purification". Ultimately, Chagall and his wife, Bella, succeeded to exile to the United States in 1941. After Bella's sudden death in 1944, Marc Chagall did return to Europe in 1948, settled first in Orgeval, later on the Mediterranean coast working on various cycles of monumental projects centered on the dimension of transcending peace in arts.

Marc Chagall

Commedia dell'arte, 1959

Adolf und Luisa Haeuser-Stiftung für Kunst- und Kulturpflege, Hattersheim am Main (Alemania)



Chagall's work always remained within the realm of figurative representation while being inundated with supposedly magical and fantastic dream-like elements, which allowed the artist to give a different reading to the reality. An awareness of the historical events that influenced his life, Chagall's work alludes to a world that seems to range between reality and imagination, yet exhibits the author's profound commitment to his understanding of reality through humanity, human rights, equality, and tolerance among living beings.

Chagall. A Cry of Freedom thus focuses on some of the issues that were of greatest concern for the artist from a novel point of view. The archival work and in-depth research conducted for this project seek to open paths for new readings of Chagall's oeuvre and highlight his immovable faith in universal harmony and peace by establishing interwoven perspectives and dialogues with the history that was unfolding. Featuring over one hundred and sixty works, the exhibition also includes an ensemble of more than ninety documents from the Marc and Ida Chagall Archive, most of which have never been published. Likewise, a selection of the artist's writings in Yiddish, his native language, in which he expressed his political and humanist commitment, will also be on display.

The exhibition has been co-organized by
Fundación MAPFRE
La Piscine – Musée d'Art et d'Industrie André-Diligent, Roubaix
Musée National Marc Chagall, Nice.

Marc Chagall

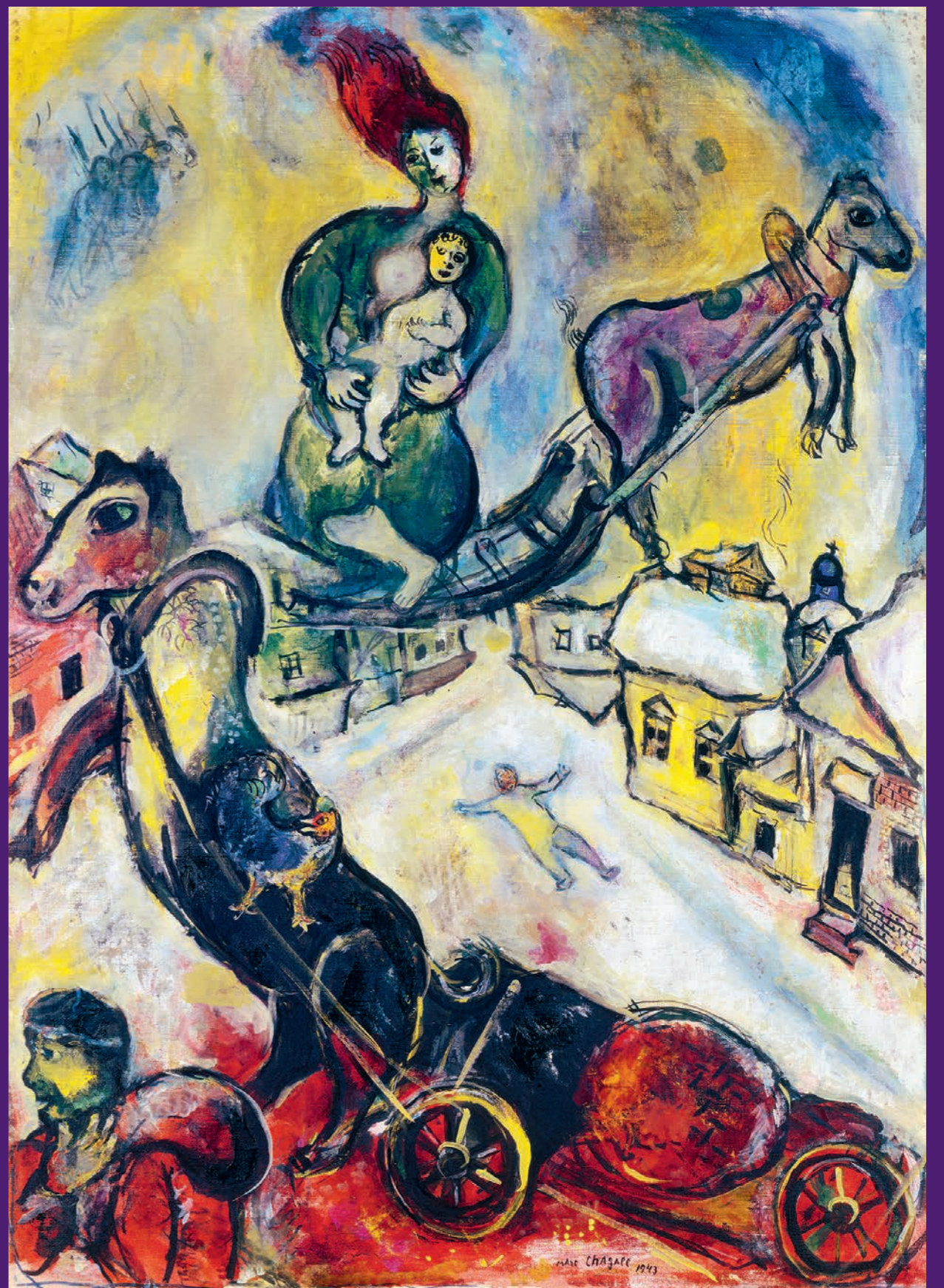
Le Marchand de bestiaux [The Cattle Dealer], c. 1922-1923

Musée de Grenoble. Centre Pompidou deposit, Musée National d'Art Moderne /
Centre de Création Industrielle, Paris. Dation, 1988

AM 1988-63

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Marc Chagall

La Guerre [War], 1943

Musée d'Art Moderne, Céret. Centre Pompidou deposit, Musée National d'Art Moderne / Centre de Création Industrielle, Paris. Donated by the artist, 1953

AM 2922 P

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Witness of his Time

Marc Chagall's work consistently reflects the political and social events he lived through; his pictorial testimony and his writings are able to capture the zeitgeist of the time and allow for a complex vision of 20th century history. The works he produced during the 1920s and 30s are imbued with the sense of tension and anti-Semitism that was prevalent throughout Europe. The duty of remembering and bearing witness in an effort to avoid the repetition of such "barbarism" is also at the core of his post-war work. A notable example is *Exodus*, which recalls the fleeing of the Israeli people from Egypt, echoes with the Jewish migration during Nazi time.

Vitebsk

Halfway between Russia, France, and the United States, the many locations Marc Chagall lived in did not diminish the profound love, attachment and memorial value he felt for his hometown; instead, his fondness of Vitebsk grew. Throughout his career, both the city and its Jewish community were featured either as the protagonists or as the backdrops of his compositions. Chagall departed from the *lubok*—a traditional Russian illustration—and popular imagery in order to conjugate them with different motifs related to his family and his homeland. Likewise, he would not only depict Vitebsk, but also the town's cattle dealer, barber, travelling musicians, panhandlers, and the wandering Rabbi leaning on the Torah. Furthermore, he represented himself and his wife, Bella, in scenes symbolizing eternal uprooting, helplessness, and others representing unflinching hope.



Marc Chagall

Résistance [Resistance], 1937-1948

Musée National Marc Chagall, Nice. Centre Pompidou deposit, Musée National d'Art Moderne / Centre de Création Industrielle, Paris. Dation, 1988

DMBMC1990.1.3; AM 1988-73

© RMN-Grand Palais (musée Marc Chagall) / Gérard Blot

Crucifixions and Calvaries

In 1908, for the first time, Chagall represented a calvary whose protagonist was a non-Christian Jewish Christ wearing a tallit—or prayer shawl—on his hips instead of the white cloth and crown of thorns identifying the suffering of Christ as martyr with that of his community.

Several Jewish artists were referring to this iconography too; however, at least from 1938 onward, after “the night of broken glass” Chagall was the first painter to recall the motif numerous times as a premonition in order to express the suffering of the Jewish people facing the Nazi persecution. For the painter, these works become political and militant statements.

Luftmensch

From 1910 onward, a number of characters—either flying or suspended in the air—became habitual in Chagall’s paintings. Regardless of whether they are animals or people, the flying beings, whose condition is to wander without being able to settle in any given place, are intimately linked to the processes of uprooting and exile that Chagall himself experienced throughout his life. These motifs have been identified with what is known as *Luftmensch*, a Yiddish word originally used to describe a dreamer, someone who had their head in the clouds and no roots; ultimately, images that question identity. *The Green Violinist* and *Rooster Man Above Vitebsk*, to name two examples, embody the artist as an expression of Chagall’s yearning to overcome imposed borders and limitations.

GLOSSARY

Isba Wooden rural dwelling specific to northern European nations and particularly Russia. Frequently inhabited by peasants, isbas were built close to roads and included a pen, a garden, and a barn.

October Revolution Bolshevik uprising led by Lenin in Saint Petersburg in October of 1917 against the provisional socialist government of Kerensky, which had been established in February of 1917. Organized around an assault on the Winter Palace—a former residence of the tsar and the provisional government’s headquarters—the insurrection rapidly extended throughout all of Russia, leading to a civil war and resulting in the birth of a new state that toppled the anti-Semitism that was prevalent in the former Russian Empire.

Lubok Popular Russian illustration that was developed between the 17th and 19th centuries, initially as wood engravings and later as lithographs. Reproduced in color and accompanied by a simple text describing the image, luboks often originated from literary and religious narratives or traditional Russian tales. In Chagall’s work one can identify the concept of the color surface going beyond the outlines found in the lubok.

The Night of Broken Glass Occurring on the night of November 9th to November 10th 1938, it was one of the most violent pogroms perpetrated by the National Socialist regime in Germany. Twenty-six thousand Jews were arrested and transferred to the concentration camps in Dachau, Buchenwald, Mauthausen, and Sachsenhausen after an unprecedented escalation in anti-Semitic violence. Hundreds of synagogues were burned, thousands of businesses destroyed, while houses and cemeteries were damaged.

Pogrom Originally a Russian term, pogrom means “to wreak havoc, to demolish violently”. Historically it was a reference to violent attacks by part of non-Jewish populations against the Jews living in the Russian Empire and in other nations. As a descriptive term, it was commonly used to reference the anti-Semitic riots that raged throughout Ukraine and southern Russia between 1881 and 1884 after the assassination of Tsar Alexander II. These actions reached their peak during World War II with the Holocaust, also known as the Shoah in Hebrew.

Purim A yearly Jewish holiday held on the 14th and 15th of the Hebrew month Adar (March) in reference to the Book of Esther—one of the Five Scrolls in the Hebrew Bible—commemorating the salvation of the Jewish people from the genocide planned by Haman, an advisor to King Ahasuerus of the Persian Empire.

Shtetl Term referring to small towns or cities constructed around a marketplace in which a Yiddish-speaking Jewish community was established. Originally, in the 18th and 19th centuries, *shtetls* were found in Polish and Lithuanian territories, but slowly extended toward Russia. Although each *shtetl* was unique, all these settlements were differentiated from surrounding neighborhoods and cities by their religion, way of life, culture, and Yiddish language.

Torah Literally translated as “instruction, teaching, doctrine”, it is the most ancient and sacred Judaic text and contains both its oral and written law. It corresponds to the first five books of the Old Testament, which comprise the Pentateuch. According to Jewish tradition, it comprehends the entire revelation and divine teachings granted to the people of Israel. Not to be confused with the Hebrew Bible as a whole, also known as Tanakh, which consists of twenty-four books.

Curators

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Dates

From February 2nd to May 5th 2024

Opening Hours

Mondays (except public holidays): 2 pm to 8 pm

Tuesdays to Saturdays: 11 am to 8 pm

Sundays and public holidays: 11 am to 7 pm

(Last entry 30 minutes before closing time.

Visitors must leave the galleries 10 minutes before closing

Admission

Standard: 5€

Reduced: 3€

Free entry: Mondays (except public holidays)

Guided tours

7€

Hours and bookings: on this website

Educational visits for schools and families

Hours and bookings: on this website

Audio guide

Spanish and English: 4€

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<https://exposiciones.fundacionmapfre.org/ExpoChagallFM>

www.marcchagall.com

Exhibition co-organized by Fundación MAPFRE,
La Piscine – Musée d'Art et d'Industrie André Diligent, Roubaix,
and the Musée National Marc Chagall, Nice

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Cover: Marc Chagall *Le Violoniste vert* [The Green Violinist], 1923-1924.
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