

**Marc Chagall**  
(Pronounced Shah GAHL)  
1887-1985

Marc Chagall was born in a small village in Russia. He was the oldest son in a family of nine children born to Zahar and Feiga-ita Chagall. His father, Zahar, worked in a herring packing house, and his mother, Feiga-ita, sold herring, flour, sugar, and spices from a small shop in their home.

Marc's entire village was made up of Jewish people. The things important to them: religion, family, friends and creativity. This could be shown in music, crafts and art. Marc's family moved to Vitebsk where he attended school. Chagall studied the elements of drawing, and later painting, in the studio of a local artist.

In 1907, when Chagall was twenty, he went to St. Petersburg, (now Leningrad), to study with Leon Bakst, a brilliant stage designer. Then in 1910, Chagall went to Paris where he met many poets and painters, later destined to become famous. With this creative and imaginative company surrounding him, Chagall was encouraged to paint his imagination. Chagall said that it was the actual city of Paris that taught him more about life and art than any art academy or professor. To some viewers of his work, Chagall's paintings seemed crazy.

He enjoyed reliving the memories of his childhood very much. He let his imagination shape and re-shape his recollections of Russian folktales and Jewish proverbs, of the countryside near his childhood home, and of his ideal family and friends. Chagall included these fantastical images of reality, imagination, and dreams on canvases splashed with bright and beautiful colors.

Often Chagall included rooftop violinists (his favorite uncle was a violinist), upside-down floating people, and animals with human features.

In addition to his many paintings, Chagall produced many stage sets and costumes for plays. During the 1920's and 1930's, Chagall's painting became more popular. He traveled extensively throughout Europe. When World War II broke out, and it became dangerous for all European Jewish people to live there so Chagall took refuge, in 1941, with his family in the United States. He spent the most of the next few years working in New York City, designing sets and costumes for the New York City's Ballet Theatre, and later for Igor Stravinsky's ballet, *Firebird*, and Maurice Ravel's ballet, *Daphnis and Chloe*, at the Paris Opera.

Chagall was also very fond of the circus and he paid homage to the circus world through several of his paintings. Chagall believed that " .... the circus is a magical show, like a world that comes into being and then is gone again." The magic in the circus is much like the magic in his paintings. In *The Large Circus*, (1968), and in *The Grand Parade*, (1979-80), oil paintings which are both displayed in the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York City, we see performers in the center stage of the circus arena, members of the audience, several musicians, including violinists, and large animals and floating people dominating the colorful canvas.

Chagall was a popular and leading innovator of the twentieth century school of Paris. Huge flower bouquets, fiddlers on the roofs, floating lovers and angels, and animals with human-like characteristics dominate his rich, personal canvases. These dream-like and colorful images, reflecting themes from folklore, legend, and Chagall's own cherished memories, distinguish him as a master at conveying visual stories.