

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 WEST 53RD STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART OPENS RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITIONOF WORKS OF MARC CHAGALL

Horses that fly through the air, an acrobat balancing himself with one foot on an up-ended violin, a bride with two faces, a juggler, half-bird, half-man, a corpse laid out in the road with candles burning brightly around him while a little man plays a violin on the rooftop above, two lovers embracing in a snowy street with not only the moon but a cosy parlor-lamp shedding beneficent light from the sky, a clock borne aloft by a fish with wings--all these and much more, rich in color and fantastic in form, will be seen in the paintings of Marc Chagall on Wednesday, April 10, when the Museum of Modern Art opens a retrospective exhibition of the work of the noted Russian painter who has been living in New York since 1941. The exhibition, which is being held in collaboration with the Art Institute of Chicago, will remain on view through June 23. Next Fall it will be shown in Chicago.

James Johnson Sweeney, Director of the Museum's Department of Painting and Sculpture, has directed the exhibition and installed it on the first floor of the Museum. It includes 56 paintings plus theatre designs and graphic work. Eighteen important oils never before shown in the United States have been lent from great European collections: four from the Regnault Collection, Amsterdam; three from Frau Nell Urech-Walden, Switzerland; and one each from H. Gabrielson, Gothenburg, Sweden; Museum of Fine Arts, Liège, Belgium; Baron von der Heydt, Ascona, Switzerland; Vicomte de Noailles, Paris; Dr. Potvin, Brussels; Philippe Dotremont, Brussels; Mme. N. Berr de Turique, Paris, and others.

Simultaneously with the opening of the Chagall exhibition on the first floor of the Museum a representative showing of the artist's original scene and costume designs, ranging from his early essays in Russia between 1917 and 1921 to his recent scenic creations for the ballets Aleko and Firebird, will be presented in the auditorium galleries. The Aleko designs are a selection from the Museum's recent acquisition of the entire group of Aleko designs comprising 67 sketches in color. The selection and installation of the ballet

designs has been made with the collaboration of George Amberg, Curator of the Museum's Department of Dance and Theatre Design.

In conjunction with the exhibition the Museum will soon publish a book on Chagall with a biographical-critical essay by Mr. Sweeney and a brief article by Carl O. Schniewind, Curator of Prints at the Art Institute of Chicago, on Chagall's prints. It will be illustrated with three plates in color and eighty halftones. Mr. Sweeney opens his essay with a quotation from André Lhôte:

"It is the glory and the misery of the artist's lot to transmit a message of which he does not possess the translation."

Mr. Sweeney goes on to speak of Chagall's first arrival in Paris from his native Russia in 1910, when the focus of attention was passing from impressionism to cubism. He writes:

"Chagall arrived from the East with a ripe color gift, a fresh, unashamed response to sentiment, a feeling for simple poetry and a sense of humor. He brought with him a notion of painting quite foreign to that esteemed at the time in Paris. His first recognition there came not from painters, but from poets such as Blaise Cendrars and Guillaume Apollinaire. To him the cubists' conception seemed 'earthbound.' He felt it was 'necessary to change nature not only materially and from the outside, but also from within.'"

Quoting André Breton as saying of Chagall, "with him and with him alone the metaphor made its triumphant return into modern painting," Mr. Sweeney defines Chagall's major contribution to contemporary art as "the reawakening of a poetry of representation, avoiding factual illustration on the one hand, and non-figurative abstractions on the other."

In the final paragraph of his essay Mr. Sweeney sums up Chagall's work as follows:

"Chagall is a conscious artist. While the selection and combination of his images may appear illogical from a representational viewpoint, they are carefully and rationally chosen elements for the pictorial structure he seeks to build. There is nothing automatic in his work. In fact his much talked-of illogicality appears only when his paintings are read detail by detail; taken in the composite they have the same pictorial integrity as the most naturalistic painting, or the most architectural cubist work of the same level of quality. He is an artist with a full color sense. He has a deep regard for technique. He is a subtle craftsman who, rather than dull his hand in virtuosity, affects clumsiness. He is an artist who has been content with a limited repertory of representational forms. But his work of nearly forty years shows a persistent effort to bring out new and richer effects from his consciously limited thematic material by unaccustomed arrangements and by a steady development of a more complex technique. In an age that has fled from sentiment he has drawn constantly on it for his stimulation. And our debt to Chagall is to an artist who has brought poetry back into painting through subject matter, without any sacrifice of his painter's interest in the picture for itself, and entirely aside from any communication that can be put into words."

Although Chagall's chief fame is as a painter, he has executed nearly 400 different subjects in graphic media. Best known among

78

these are 20 plates of his autobiographic series published in 1923 by Paul Cassirer in Berlin. The majority of Chagall's prints were, however, executed under commissions from the French picture dealer and publisher, Ambroise Vollard. Vollard commissioned him to etch 96 illustrations for Gogol's Dead Souls. Before he could finish them, Vollard gave him another commission to paint 100 gouaches to be reproduced in full color as illustrations of La Fontaine's Fables. The color reproduction of these was found too difficult and Chagall made 100 etchings for the Fables in black and white. Then Vollard suggested that Chagall illustrate the Bible, but by the time the artist had finished a total of 105 of these plates, Vollard died and the work was never completed.

Thus Chagall's tremendous accomplishments in print-making are little known. Mr. Schniewind writes of this phase of Chagall's art:

"Within the first year of his experiments Chagall found that etching and dry point were his true media. In them, all that is so fantastically exuberant in his painting finds translation into terms of black and white....Almost completely unknown to the print world, Chagall nevertheless must be regarded as one of the great etchers of our day. From the beginning he has shown a love and understanding of black and white which is quite unique among his contemporaries. He has never fallen into the fatal routine performance of the professional printmaker. He has always preserved the freedom of the painter and, above all else, in every one of his prints his great imagination always leads him to new and interesting results."

Lenders to the exhibition are as follows:

Europe: Philippe Dotremont, Uccle-Brussels, Belgium; Hjalmar Gabrielson, Gothenburg, Sweden; Baron Edward von der Heydt, Ascona, Switzerland; The Vicomte de Noailles, Paris, France; Dr. Potvin, Brussels, Belgium; P. A. Regnault, Laren, Holland; Mlle. Marcelle Berr de Turique, Neuilly-sur-Seine, France; Frau Nell Urech-Walden, Schinznach-Bad-Postfach, Switzerland; Museum of Fine Arts, Liège, Belgium.

United States: Mr. and Mrs. Walter C. Arensberg, Hollywood; Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Bissett, New York; Marc Chagall, New York; Miss Ida Gordey, New York; Mrs. Charles B. Goodspeed, Chicago; Miss Mary E. Johnston, Glendale, Ohio; Adolphe A. Juviler, New York; John S. Newberry, Jr., Grosse Pointe Farms, Michigan; Mr. and Mrs. Walter Paepcke, Chicago; Mme. Helena Rubinstein, New York; Louis E. Stern, New York; Josef von Sternberg, Hollywood; The Art Institute of Chicago; City Art Museum of St. Louis; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York; The Worcester Museum, Worcester, Mass.; and Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York.