

MARC CHAGALL

Marc Chagall^[a] (born Moïse Shagal; 1887 –1985) was a Russian-French artist. An early modernist, he was associated with several major artistic styles and created works in a wide range of artistic formats, including painting, drawings, book illustrations, stained glass, stage sets, ceramics, tapestries and fine art prints.

Chagall was born into a Jewish family near Vitebsk, today in Belarus. Before World War I, he travelled between Saint Petersburg, Paris, and Berlin. During that period, he created his own mixture and style of modern art, based on his ideas of Eastern European and Jewish folklore. He spent the wartime years in Belarus, becoming one of the country's most distinguished artists and a member of the modernist avant-garde, founding the Vitebsk Arts College. He later worked in and near Moscow following the Bolshevik Revolution, before leaving again for Paris in 1923. During World War II, he escaped occupied France to the United States, where he lived in New York City for seven years before returning to France in 1948.

Art critic Robert Hughes referred to Chagall as "the quintessential Jewish artist of the twentieth century". According to art historian Michael J. Lewis, Chagall was considered to be "the last survivor of the first generation of European modernists". For decades, he "had also been respected as the world's pre-eminent Jewish artist". Using the medium of stained glass, he produced windows for the cathedrals of Reims and Metz as well as the Fraumünster in Zürich, windows for the UN and the Art Institute of Chicago and the Jerusalem Windows in Israel. He also did large-scale paintings, including part of the ceiling of the Paris Opéra.

He had two basic reputations, writes Lewis: as a pioneer of modernism and as a major Jewish artist. He experienced modernism's "golden age" in Paris, where "he synthesized the art forms of Cubism, Symbolism, and Fauvism, the latter giving rise to Surrealism". Yet throughout these phases "he remained most emphatically a Jewish artist, whose work was one long dreamy reverie of life in his native village of Vitebsk."¹

"When Matisse dies," Pablo Picasso remarked in the 1950s, "Chagall will be the only painter left who understands what colour really is".