

Marc Chagall Surrounded by His Friends in Saint-Paul-de-Vence – 04/30/1970

00:00:48

Françoise Malettra: First I'd like to reassure Marc Chagall, who has seemed a little worried since we got here. Master Chagall, François Le Targat and I are not here to ask you to disclose any of your secrets, or even secrets that aren't yours. No, I must tell you that we have come to share with you this vision of happiness that you've been giving us for so many years. And this house, this truly beautiful house where we find ourselves, your house in Saint-Paul-de-Vence, is itself a place where we can sense happiness, a very deep happiness. But I think there's so much more to this house than that. And the guests you've welcomed this evening, whom you have invited to participate in this modest gathering on this wonderful land, thanks to them, we'll get to know you a little better. François Le Targat.

00:01:40

François Le Targat: Yes, and what I find surprising—or pleasant, even—is that Master Chagall has invited the everyday friends he has here in the south of France. He hasn't called upon experienced art critics, or painting or music specialists. He wanted to welcome into his beautiful house the friends he sees, meaning his doctor, his architect, friends whose names we don't know. But Mr. Jacques Bounin, who by the way is a friend of Marc Chagall's, will be so kind as to introduce to us all these people from the south of France, who surround our master each day at Saint-Paul-de-Vence, through his troubles—because I think he has many—and also in this happiness which I believe to be unwavering.

00:02:26

Jacques Bounin: My dear fellow countryman—this time I don't want to call you my dear Marc, because a few days ago, you became an honorary citizen of Nice, so officially recognized. We've recognized the tremendous honor you've brought to our country, to France in general, by coming to live here. So this evening, we're hanging around to pester you and we're also very happy for you to pester us. So next to you I see Mr. Trotabas who, as dean of the law faculty, received a mosaic which was admired by all. I see Louis Gautier-Vignal, president of the Friends of the Museums. The doctor Charles Alfred Laroche—well, I say doctor but he's above all a friend, because how can you be Chagall's doctor without becoming his friend? I see Hervé de Fontmichel, the town council delegate for culture and youth. And André Hermant, the architect who first refurbished the rather dreary château de Saint-Germain-en-Laye, which he made habitable. He later prepared the Biblical Message and achieved a very difficult partnership between a man of genius, Marc Chagall, and a modest man of art, Hermant. That's not easy. And me, quite simply, the Biblical Message promoter.

00:04:02

François Le Targat: Yes, indeed, is this Biblical Message one of the great subjects concerning you, master, first and foremost?

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Marc Chagall: Yes.

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Françoise Malettra: What can you tell us about it?

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00:04:16

Marc Chagall: Well I don't want to talk about myself. It seems like the more you say, the less clearly you see yourself, the less understandable you feel, the less you feel that we belong, and you distance yourself. The more you work, the more you wonder. That's what I do. Often I think this place where I live, and where I'll probably remain, this French Riviera, for me, it's Vence, Saint-Paul, Nice. It started when the great publisher Ambroise Vollard asked me to create an edition of the luxury book, La Fontaine's *Fables*. To finish the job, I went to the French Riviera. That was around 1922-23. A little while after I came back from the Soviet Union, I suddenly felt enveloped by a pink cloud, a fragrance emanating from the flowers, and renewed youthfulness. Especially because just beforehand, in Vitebsk or Moscow, like many people, I'd been living off bread. But I was surrounded by La Fontaine's ideas, that golden garden with its colors and wisdom, which I found charming. I wanted to start working, to go far away from Paris in search of different trees, different landscapes, woods, flowers, something else in France, that I'd imagined. I embarked upon this journey with a friend I had at the time, the painter Robert Delaunay. In my strange, in his strange automobile which hopped along the roads. Thankfully there wasn't much traffic in those days. The closer I got to the provinces, the more I returned to myself, more than anything else. It was my first time traveling in France. During my first stay in 1910-1914, I didn't leave Paris because I couldn't afford to. We got to a village called Limoux, near Carcassonne, where the writer Joseph Delteil lives. There I discovered peasants, cows, and farm animals which would soon appear in my gouaches and etchings for La Fontaine's *Fables*. After that, we headed towards Toulon. The closer I got to the Riviera, the more revived I felt. The scent of the flowers, which I hadn't experienced in my Vitebsk childhood, washed over me like a wave. In Toulon, where we stopped, I'd already seen flowers that would soon be placed into the arms of fiancés. And from a distance, the silky shimmer of the sea. As I approached Nice, like many other artists who have lived there, I felt it was the right place to stop. Poets, writers, and painters have translated that rebirth, those changes inspired by Nice and the surrounding area. Why? No other place gives that kind of impression. An incomprehensible approach. That clarity, that irrational joy. And carelessness. Perhaps too much. An almost musical charm. Later, I saw how living on the French Riviera affected Renoir, Bonnard, Matisse, and others who worked there. The city of Nice in bloom like a floral canopy, that's where I stopped and began sketching. This was many years ago, but the land [turned into] a different type of Vitebsk, one that was softer and more tender. I can't find the words to explain what has kept me here. I was someone else. Who? As if I was twenty years younger, waiting for something. I'll be brief. Nice already has the "Ulysses mosaic" which I did for the Law University. Soon we will have my Biblical Message. Looking into residents' eyes, I ask myself: "Will they like all that when I am with them?" But can I read the wind? Which, not long ago, was blowing along the seashore? And why does the tree foliage feel emotional here and there? I brought and I gifted what I saw, felt, under Cimiez hill. It'll be like a symbol of another world, this biblical world that will penetrate the present, passing through the light of the French Riviera, where I worked as much as I could.

00:09:58

Françoise Malettra: You just told us that the more we speak about the self, the less we understand ourselves and the more we lose sight of ourselves. So this Biblical Message that

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you mentioned a moment ago, perhaps it's up to you, friends, to talk about it, because I think several of them are directly affected by this venture, by this significant venture. So perhaps you could ask Mr. André Hermant, the architect, who perhaps can speak to us about it as a technician.

00:10:22

André Hermant: Yes, I think it's difficult to talk about architecture, even as a technician. But all the same, I would like to recall the problem Marc Chagall brought to me when he had to house, let's think of it as housing, his Biblical Message, which is the essence of this venture. No problem, let's try to respond to that and make it a truly exceptional place for reflection and meditation. Exceptional in the sense that no other place is like it. And of course, essentially, it's a significant collection of paintings. It was also a beautiful garden in the heart of Nice, so in short it was about housing one in the middle of the other. And for an architect, it's hard to explain why shapes become what they are. There is something striking I come across in the worries that Marc Chagall expresses very often in his painting. And it's also an architect's concern—gravity. In all the poetry and expressions of life that appear in Marc Chagall's painting, you can feel the effort that's been made to avoid heavy things. When you're constructing a building, there's also this preoccupation with trying to make materials weigh less. And regarding the architect's material, for me in Nice it was mainly an alpine material, this beautiful Nice stone, that would predominantly make up the building, using a millennia-long technique, because we extract this stone from quarries, which is how we extracted the Tropaeum Alpium long ago. It's a magnificent, white stone which we will pair with the latest techniques. Because this Biblical Message, which we can interpret in a number of ways, but perhaps there's this message of permanence which is one of the... which is perhaps the most essential part. And in combining the permanent and the new in volumes or in spaces—I don't want to paraphrase Ecclesiastes—well, we need spaces to lose ourselves in, and spaces to find ourselves in. I think for this building to meet Marc Chagall's desires, it won't be a museum in the sense that, for many people, a museum is a building where things go to sleep, but on the contrary, it'll be a museum where things live. And that's the hope I have, without being able to explain exactly what will happen.

00:13:22

Françoise Malettra: Yes, because there's always something that amazes us. For somebody like Marc Chagall, who has always ignored the laws of gravity—and how right he has been—whatever a building is made of, whether that be stone, glass, or imaginary materials, it's always something quite amazing, something that stays on the ground and is truly fixed. Isn't that it? I think Hervé de Fontmichel wanted to add something, because he's part of this Biblical Message. In what capacity exactly?

00:13:53

Hervé de Fontmichel: In no capacity [laughs].

00:13:55

François Le Targat: Which, by the way, is an excellent capacity.

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Hervé de Fontmichel: I wanted to say to my friend Hermant that he followed the instructions

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and orders wonderfully, Chagall's genuine orders, because for the first time, perhaps, we'll have a garden that was designed for a building, and a building that was designed for a work of art. Meaning there was complete unity with this theme of the Biblical Message. And I also wanted to tell you, as you said at the beginning of this program, dear madam, Chagall always wanted the building to serve a certain pursuit of happiness. And I remember, Mr. Chagall, you remember, when you signed the donation at the administrative center, the donation of your work, you said, "I want lots of gardens that aren't fenced off with benches, so that lovers can come and walk in Cimiez in the evenings. That's what I want most of all." You said that, didn't you?

00:14:48

Marc Chagall: I was young, I was imagining things.

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Françoise Malettra: Have your dreams gone away? I'd be very surprised.

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Marc Chagall: That's true.

00:14:55

Françoise Malettra: You've kept them intact.

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Marc Chagall: That's... let's not talk about that.

00:15:00

Françoise Malettra: Why? Why not talk about it? It's a wonderful subject.

00:15:04

Marc Chagall: Friends... Let's listen to the friends speak, I could write poems about that. And more about paintings, yes.

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Françoise Malettra: Will we have the pleasure of hearing you read one of your poems?

00:15:16

Marc Chagall: No, not here. Not now.

00:15:18

Françoise Malettra: Why not here and not now? Is our presence bothering you?

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Marc Chagall: No because you know, I started a painting which isn't going well, I don't feel very good. I have to be here. You know, at my place, there are a thousand whims, a thousand whims.

00:15:32

François Le Targat: Regarding the question about the site, does it satisfy you fully, this site on which the Biblical Message will stand?

00:15:38

Marc Chagall: I think it's a splendid location. Magnificent.

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00:15:43

François Le Targat: To sum up, if I've understood, Nice will have more museums than any other city in France.

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Françoise Malettra: It's not a museum.

00:15:49

François Le Targat: No but you said it will have the status of a national museum.

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Jacques Bounin: But Chagall will tell you, it's not a museum.

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François Le Targat: What is it then, Master?

00:15:56

Marc Chagall: I'm against museums because I always thought that if you do something foolish, you'll end up in a museum one day, you know? If, on the contrary, I'm in the museum and later on it isn't relevant to the question of eternity, I'll be hiding outside. That has happened to certain artists, so I don't have to worry about that. I donated some pieces to the museum in Paris. I didn't sell them; they were gifts. But I don't make claims to be placed here or there. That's the problem with the future. But it's not a museum. I live here and I did this biblical series after my journey to Palestine, in Israel, after doing the Bible for Vollard. And I thought, "No, I won't sell it." And with my charming wife, Vava, we decided to donate it here, since I live here. If I lived in Vologda or, I don't know, in the North Pole, I'd give it to the North Pole. But I live here. I am gifting here; they're donations. It's not a museum. I don't think I'm imposing my biblical vision on future generations. I like the Bible because I think it's a top-notch political work of literature. For me, it's Shakespeare, and the poetry inspires me immensely. You see, this is my religiousness, is it not? And I donated it because I live here, that's all. After I said earlier, you know, by chance Nice is truly... for me it's different from Florence. I love Florence and I love Rome, but here in Nice, I walk, and I lose myself in it. I already said that, didn't I?

00:18:01

François Le Targat: Besides, you forget, you found yourself in this climate, you are... We can tell you're doing well, don't you think?

00:18:07

Marc Chagall: I don't know, there's this carefree spirit. When I go back to Nice, there's no way I can work. You know?

00:18:14

Françoise Malettra: You've become Mediterranean. Completely.

00:18:18

Marc Chagall: I'm not saying... Yes, I said before, artists have become too soft, but I like it and I donated the paintings. I didn't want to sell them and I donated them here, and that's it. All I ask is that in the future, other town halls and future generations don't throw out this old guard.

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00:18:42

Françoise Malettra: In any case, the Bible, no more than happiness, is not hidden away in a museum, a real museum.

00:18:46

Marc Chagall: I don't know, you know, I don't understand my paintings, I don't know anything, understand anything. I don't understand anything about Chagall. You know, I've been repeating the same thing over and over again for a long time now.

00:18:57

Françoise Malettra: Do you want your friends to explain to us who Chagall is?

00:19:01

Marc Chagall: Explain?

00:19:04

Françoise Malettra: Since you don't know. Perhaps your friends have a better idea.

00:19:07

Marc Chagall: Ask the doctor.

00:19:09

François Le Targat: Yes, exactly. Dr. Alfred, is our master faring well?

00:19:15

Charles Alfred: Well I know why, obviously he has extremely robust health. That's why I'm his doctor.

00:19:26

Françoise Malettra: And his friend.

00:19:28

Charles Alfred: And his friend. We've been friends for a long time, you know. I live in an old village, Saint-Jeannet, Saint-Jeannet-de-Provence. We're sheltered by a rock formation you can see from a long way off. It's nice to be able to sit down with a friend like Chagall. To speak nicely, to admire the olive trees that sometimes remind us of Greece, and to speak a bit about his art, although he always doubts himself. Always, every time he has to do something, he is gripped with anxiety. For several years now I've been the attentive witness to this candor, and also courage, which he has to muster up every time he has to accomplish a work of art. Earlier we spoke about the Biblical Message. I remember one of the first conversations we ever had. He'd fallen off a ladder while he was painting part of the Biblical Message. He fell three meters onto a flagstone floor and when I saw him, after comforting him and making sure that, fortunately, he wasn't injured, he said, "Nobody would believe that painting was such a dangerous profession."

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Françoise Malettra: Do you agree with what your doctor just said? Do you understand yourself a little better now? There.

00:21:21

Marc Chagall: I don't understand but...

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Françoise Malettra: You still don't?

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Marc Chagall: I'm always grateful to friends who speak nicely, that's their responsibility. There's another charming friend.

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François Le Targat: [laughs] Well there's... There's... exactly who I was also going to ask, because each painting and each work represents new anguish for you, like it's the first day, the first painting probably did, that you were asked to do by the law faculty, and Mr. Dean Trotabas is here, who I believe was in charge. This mosaic, Ulysses, was a new anguish at the time, the day when must have tried...

00:22:04

Louis Trotabas: That was also a huge anguish. Mr. Chagall often said to me that he'd even whined about it, I remember. I remember the expression. The story of this mosaic is actually one of friendship—it came about because of friendships and, in my view, it should be a message about friendship. He didn't want to give this youth simply a work of art, in the same spirit as the Biblical Message he'd done. He also wanted to give them a message, and so we did discuss the theme together for a long time. And when he chose the subject of Ulysses, it's because he found something in this Mediterranean character that I wouldn't say completed him, but was linked to what the Biblical Message embodied of the Mediterranean spirit.

00:23:00

François Le Targat: And creating this mosaic—and because Master Chagall doesn't want to speak, I'm going to ask you, Mr Dean—how did it go? It was difficult, difficult in itself, was it not, because Master Chagall is kindness itself, but it was a drawn-out process of anguish and worry? Yes.

00:23:19

Louis Trotabas: On his side, for the composition, definitely. He told me, I reminded him earlier, but the subject, I think, the theme, the scope, was him. But what was essential in creating this mosaic was, apart from his difficulties, the material difficulties with the execution. Always tricky working for the state. Incidentally, I must say that Chagall did so well, of course with the subject that he gave, to the point that his name hardly appears in the creation of this mosaic. He didn't even actually give it to the state. He simply consented for a mosaicist, who had a state contract, to complete the work.

00:24:07

François Le Targat: This work of art which is a gift.

00:24:09

Louis Trotabas: Which was a gift.

00:24:11

François Le Targat: You're a very generous man, Marc Chagall, to be giving gifts like that.

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Marc Chagall: I don't like money.

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Louis Trotabas: One important detail is that it was created at the law school in May 1968. For the university, May '68 is an important date, and throughout the entire time that the mosaic was being produced, I must say that the production by the mosaicists was carried out through fellowship, with respect on the students' behalf.

00:24:40

Françoise Malettra: You said you don't like money. You don't like money because when you sell a painting, on one side you have a silly sum of money, which doesn't carry any significance. Then, on the other side, you have the artwork that brought you so much anguish. Is that kind of the reason why money, and the phenomenon of money, troubles you—or hurts you, even?

00:25:00

Marc Chagall: Let's not talk about money.

00:25:01

Françoise Malettra: Let's not talk about money. Right, well earlier I said something that raised the eyebrows of Marc Chagall and of Mr. Louis Gautier-Vignal, who is president of the Friends of the Museums. So how do you reconcile this job with your friendship with Marc Chagall? Because I said earlier that the Bible, much like happiness, was not enclosed in a museum.

00:25:23

Louis Gautier-Vignal: I may not answer your question directly, because I have one thing to say that I think will be interesting for all of Chagall's admirers. Chagall is a great inventor, Chagall is a great creator. When we see an artistic work, we ask where it comes from, whether it comes entirely from a gift, a talent, from the genius of the inventor, the creator, or whether it comes from somewhere deeper. Indeed, earlier, I was walking in the garden with Marc Chagall and a couple of others. He said something that surprised and interested me a lot. He told me that, in 1925, Ambroise Vollard asked me to do an illustration or work about the Bible. I accepted. I thought it was an interesting idea. I know the Bible well but I couldn't do anything. One year went by. Two years, three years, five years, I think, and I traveled to... It wasn't called Israel then, Judea, Palestine. And visiting those famous sites, admirable landscapes—it's a beautiful country—I had a revelation. That astonished me, because while I know now and I can teach others who don't know, Chagall's work is entirely made up. It's a work that's inspired not only by a biblical text, but also by the shock he had when he visited these admirable sites, these admirable landscapes, and likewise being in contact with these names. And so, since it would be interesting to try to discern which part of this Biblical Message comes from him, from his own inspiration, and what comes from what he saw, what he took from history, from the landscapes, and what the illustrious names evoke in us, awaken in us. And of course, the beauty of the monuments which we still see.

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00:27:54

Françoise Malettra: And why do you wish to separate the part that comes from him and the part inspired by outside factors? I don't see why.

00:28:01

Louis Gautier-Vignal: When you care about an artist's work, it's useful to know where the work comes from, so I think it's interesting.

00:28:06

François Le Targat: Well yes, that's an analyst's viewpoint. Yes, I do understand that, but...

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Françoise Malettra: That's the president of the Friends of the Museums.

00:28:12

François Le Targat: Yes, well, but it's completely the work of an analyst and erudite, but I don't think Marc Chagall himself knows very well where the boundary is between...

00:28:23

Marc Chagall: I like the word boundary. You know, it's difficult, a work of art appears when we reach a certain boundary. But I don't know. You know, I don't know. When I was a young man, I often said I was working when I lived at La Ruche. Now, it's rotting away. I did my paintings. I never asked others for their opinions. Friends would come over, in particular Cendrars who was one of my closest friends, along with Apollinaire, but he was more in the background. I didn't even show my paintings to him. He would say, "show me." I had to show him because he insisted. But I didn't ask for his opinion or expect it. He wrote poems after that, and he did... I don't show my paintings. I didn't display them either; there was no space, no gallery where you could exhibit them. There was an independent salon where you could pay three francs and someone would take your painting there. I don't show my paintings. I don't share my opinions. I do a painting. If I think it's finished, I hang it over there and then it's out of the way. I only began asking for opinions after getting married. Yes!

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Françoise Malettra: Ha ha!

00:29:52

Marc Chagall: Yes. Straight away. First wife, [I asked for] her opinion and currently, charming Valentine... Vava, I ask Vava. For me, it's really serious. When she says, "It's good," well that means it's finished. It's weakness, but that's how it is.

00:30:22

Françoise Malettra: Isn't that one of the consequences of being happy?

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Marc Chagall: I don't know what to tell you. And when a so-called critic, when a friend criticizes, of course, he's a friend, he writes well. But when others critique, who aren't your friend, I don't get the newspaper clipping, you know? But when they scold me, why not? I have plenty of flaws. I never thought I was somebody. No, no, no, I don't. They can speak badly of me, why not, they speak well of me, it's my friends who speak well of me. That's just life. Well, I don't know what I meant. Did you ask a question? I've forgotten.

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00:31:05

François Le Targat: You were speaking about the boundary between inspiration and...

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Marc Chagall: That's the barrier, when my wife says, "That's good, it's finished," the painting is finished and after a biblical painting, I think as I already said before, I wasn't going to sell it, I had to gift it, and I donated it where I live, in France. I live here, it's finished, so I gifted it. That's the boundary. After that you have the storage problem, I am quite worried, I mean ten years, twenty years, twenty-five years, that the other town hall will chuck them outside. That a certain youth will say... I don't think so, because the youngsters do like me, youngsters up to about twenty-five or even older. I don't think the youth will chuck me outside. I don't think so, because I'm immensely fond of the youth and I suppose the youth are nice for me. I'm not going to speak about myself anymore. You will excuse me, when I finished working at the university, with Professor Trotabas, I went up a ladder. I do apologize for telling you that, it was right in the middle of the protest, the students applauded when I went up. I apologize, that's how it is. There you go.

00:32:22

François Le Targat: And the separation of a painting is when the boundary is crossed, is it not? When your wife says, what you've done is good, that means it's finished and you hang it up?

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Marc Chagall: I don't hang it up.

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François Le Targat: You hang it up, meaning you put it to one side and it's finished.

00:32:35

Marc Chagall: Yes, I put it on one side. I've said it's finished, I have nothing more to say. There are some paintings that I did in one night, with no light. The painting that's in Berne, "To my Fiancée," it's called, I started it at 5 p.m. or 6 p.m., let's say, with no light. I finished it and I said if I put on the light, it'll be finished. Disaster. It finished. That was it. Well, which boundary do you want? Not when I did the Opera House ceiling, of course. And that was Malraux. I was a little scared of Malraux, you know? You had to listen. It's Malraux.

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Françoise Malettra: You had to work.

00:33:21

Marc Chagall: You had, had to. I also... I asked beforehand. But that, that has nothing to do with the Biblical Message. And I asked Malraux what to do. He said, "Do what you like," and afterwards, well, I did some sketches, but it was extremely difficult. I said to my wife, "Now we have to invite Malraux here to show him." "Oh no," she says, "just one [sketch]. You need to do more so he can choose." So I had to start again with something else, because you need two or three options, otherwise it's like you're imposing. And he accepted. I was scared, with the ceiling, there were lots of people who grumbled, "Is he French?" and so on, you know, but what can you do? That's how it is.

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00:34:11

François Le Targat: But the surprising thing, Marc Chagall, is when, for example the government, represented by André Malraux, commissions you—because the Opera House ceiling was a commission—asks you to do it. It's what we call a commissioned piece. Do you create it with as much joy, as much happiness as a painting that you would create here, on your own, for you, for your own enjoyment?

00:34:31

Marc Chagall: It's mainly joy, because I'm not paid. So that's... you understand, I'm not paid anything, so I'm free. You see?

00:34:39

François Le Targat: Freedom is important.

00:34:41

Marc Chagall: And I don't get paid, so I'm free. There you go. Not being paid makes it easy for me. I'm more poetic, more transparent. I like that.

00:34:51

Françoise Malettra: There's less anxiety? When it's like that?

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Marc Chagall: Questions... Anguish is problems. Yes, there is some. I didn't accept immediately, but I often wanted to, especially when there's someone somewhere in France, in the newspapers, who writes. No, in the night, I would wake up and say to my wife, "No, it's not possible, I don't want to do that, I can't, I'm going to write and I'm going to write to Malraux. I can't, I can't, it's beyond me." And my wife said to me "Listen, stop torturing yourself, do something, some sketches, and if it's good, tell him, and if it's not good, tell him it's not going to work. There you go."

00:35:38

Françoise Malettra: Since we have come to talk about the Opera House, we won't stay on that subject. Perhaps we'll speak a little about music, because I would like to, yes, we're in Nice, but Nice can have music, too, music isn't...

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François Le Targat: There is music here.

00:35:52

Françoise Malettra: No, I wanted to know, I wanted to know what place music has in your life. What does music mean to you? Is it a backdrop? Is it an ornament? Or is it something, is it a routine? Or is it something much more important?

00:36:07

Marc Chagall: What a question, you know... For me, music is... When I hear Mozart or Bach, it's like the Bible or Rembrandt, it's incredible. You know, with Mozart and Bach who existed on earth, especially the young man who died aged 35 and nobody went to his funeral. I was deeply moved by that. I like lots of things in music, music, listen, music. Let's not talk.

00:36:36

Françoise Malettra: Why? If...

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00:36:37

Marc Chagall: It's tough, the greatness, the greatness of a world of art, you know, music, Mozart or Bach, or even in our times. Stravinsky, certain pieces by Stravinsky, or even Schoenberg, incredible things. Our humanity on this planet has created some wonderful things. We must be a little modest. And the Rembrandts and Cézannes, and the Goyas and everything. We can see it from a distance, from a distance we see. But when poor Mozart died, his poor wife didn't go to his funeral, she couldn't go. When the great Vermeer died, she didn't have the money for his funeral. She had a few paintings, worthless. She had to borrow the money. Let's not talk about it. Listen, I'm sorry for talking about these great names. You're asking me about music.

00:37:35

Jacques Bounin: But you see, I think you've given lots of happiness to the whole of humanity.

00:37:40

Marc Chagall: Young girls, boys. Yes, they send me letters. Yes, I can't write back. They ask, there are even people, young boys from America. The day before yesterday, I received a young girl who said, "I've got ten dollars and I'd like to buy something, \$10," etc. [laughs]. Yes, I have little letters like that. But what is that? Yes, it's good, it's nice. For me, adults, adults like you and before me, it's also... Well, I feel, I see in your eyes that you like Chagall a little, I think.

00:38:14

François Le Targat: I think everyone likes Chagall, and Nice in particular.

00:38:18

Françoise Malettra: Who could dare say the opposite.

00:38:19

Hervé de Fontmichel: So, at the second town council meeting, at the proposal of the mayor, Mr. Jacques Médecin, who is a huge admirer of Chagall ... as his father was, actually, do you remember?

00:38:29

Marc Chagall: Yes, Médecin the father ... The father would ask me, you know, it's strange, when he got to my exhibition at the Ponchettes, the first one... you weren't there yet? He said to him a bit like that, a bit, and you asked him, "What is all that? What is that?" A dozen years ago, I had an exhibition at the Ponchettes, but as he walked around, he started explaining to me what I do. It was touching. Well, afterwards he asked me to do a poster. I took that very seriously and he was very important, was he not. Did you know him, the father? He asked me to do a poster, and afterwards, Matisse did a poster. He asked me, I was so scared and so happy, that I did perhaps more than twenty mockups, more than twenty mockups. More. So that he'd come and choose. He came and he chose, didn't he? You said...

00:39:28

Hervé de Fontmichel: You'd told me he'd been one of your best critics. That he'd explained your own work to you. And what shocked me, is that he'd told me the same thing himself.

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00:39:38

Marc Chagall: He'd explained to me and really, well, he was very kind, and his son is very kind, too.

00:39:47

Françoise Malettra: Here, in this region, in your house, can you tell us how current world events affect you here? Do they reach you here? Do they affect you directly?

00:40:02

Marc Chagall: I get three newspapers, I have to get Nice Matin, don't I? Although, that said, it's the Vence section so there's not a great deal for us. I also get Figaro, I get Le Monde and then I go to sleep. I go to sleep around half past midnight. My wife says to me, turn the light off, [it's not the time] to read all that. It affects me. How can it not affect me? I can't work outside of the world, let's say. I'm aware of everything that's happening, everything, absolutely everything.

00:40:33

Françoise Malettra: Do you listen to the radio?

00:40:35

Marc Chagall: Absolutely. Ah of course, when it gets to midnight, I turn it off, I won't listen to it, but I might make an effort to. Ah, I listen to the radio. Ah yes, at midnight, listen, even at midnight.

00:40:47

Françoise Malettra: What is at midnight?

00:40:49

Marc Chagall: Ah yes, for you, no, but me, I go to sleep because I finish reading the newspapers at a quarter past midnight. Three newspapers. And then there are other magazines, aren't there? Which pile up on the beds? Well, I'm aware of everything, of all the wars, you know, there are quite a few wars. All the protests. You know there are strikes, too, I'm very aware, and anyway I'm aware of what is happening in the field of arts. Actually, I live quite close to the Maeght art foundation. I don't live far from where you can keep up to date with things. In the field of arts. Don't ask me what I think about all that. No, you won't ask me.

00:41:37

Françoise Malettra: No, I won't ask you what you think about it. I'll ask you how you receive it, how it's...

00:41:42

Marc Chagall: There you go. Only through the post, through the post.

00:41:44

François Le Targat: Ha! Ha ha ha ha ha!

00:41:46

Françoise Malettra: I was saying that's good considering the distance.

00:41:49

Marc Chagall: If there're no strikes.

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00:41:53

François Le Targat: Doctor, do you think it's serious that Marc Chagall only goes to sleep at quarter past midnight, half past midnight? Yes.

00:41:59

Charles Alfred: Very serious. He's made of steel.

00:42:03

François Le Targat: Ha! Ha ha!

00:42:06

Marc Chagall: Knock on wood.

00:42:08

Charles Alfred: The only difficulties I have, is his wife who often obliges him not to work. Because she's fierce, isn't she? But it's a good thing she's there.

00:42:27

Jacques Bounin: Your days, Marc Chagall. Is there a precise time, a thing... No, it's life, it's life.

00:42:36

Marc Chagall: Life... I get up and I go to work in my studio. And it doesn't often go well. It's...

00:42:42

François Le Targat: So what do you do, do you rip it up?

00:42:45

Marc Chagall: Ah, I'd like to. Only, what good would that do?

00:42:49

François Le Targat: So do you go for a walk in your beautiful garden?

00:42:51

Marc Chagall: No, I do that five times, that's an hour of walking, but I have to go down and come back up, go down, come back up. You know, it's five times there and back. And then I work, I work all the time, I can work, I could work a little later, but I shouldn't go to the bedroom too late. That's a bit... I have to read the papers, as I told you. Politics. Well, you've seen at the Grand Palais. Everything that I've created over there, there are quite a few things. There were quite a few, it's finished now. Thankfully.

00:43:23

François Le Targat: Why thankfully? Was it another anguish for you, this hanging at the Grand Palais?

00:43:32

Marc Chagall: It was well done, good. It took so much effort. I'm very grateful. Malraux, Chatelain, and Leymarie put a lot of effort in. I saw them once and the ministers were kind, Chaban-Delmas and Malraux, Michelet were almost friendly, you know?

00:43:50

Louis Trotabas: Pompidou, the French president.

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00:43:52

Marc Chagall: Pompidou came in the evening, too. No, I'm touched, touched, really touched. It wasn't that I... I told you that I doubt things all the time, that's my weakness.

00:44:05

François Le Targat: But is it a weakness or a strength?

00:44:07

Françoise Malettra: Yes, perhaps it's a strength.

00:44:10

Marc Chagall: Nothing. There's nothing in the world, except when Madame Chagall, my wife, says it's finished. I'm a little bit happy. There's nothing that can calm me down and it's fine, there's nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing except... Oh, I'm... we'll see when the Biblical Message is unveiled, I hope I'm still alive. And yes, I'll be happy. That, we want to keep that. There'll be friends there, you young people, other people will come. I'll be calm. Then one hour later, a little later on, I'm anxious. But that bothers my wife, because she has to make the effort each time. She prefers the mornings when I smile at her. And if I put on a face, you know, it's better, you know, if I'm smiling.

00:45:06

François Le Targat: You are smiley, by the way. There's the proof.

00:45:12

Marc Chagall: I'm smiley but you see me smiley. I'm riddled with anxiety, I think. Ask my wife, she's hiding over there.

00:45:20

François Le Targat: It's really not up to us to say.

00:45:22

Charles Alfred: And besides, earlier, we spoke about music. I can tell you something that only his close friends know. One day, Marc Chagall had to do a large work for "The Magic Flute." So we're immersed in music. To do it, he retreats to Switzerland with Vava and plays the record on the record player. After several hours, when he'd been permeating himself with music, for the sake of sincerity, for hours and hours, Vava said, "Well, I feel very familiar with Mozart's music now. Completely. I'm going out." And she puts her skis on, unfortunately. Naturally, what had to happen, happened. A fracture, and she had to tolerate Mozart for several days, meaning that his piece *The Magic Flute* caused his wife an awful lot of suffering. And the last day, he said to her, "Now I'm very happy because this work is finished. Your leg is getting better and you've been by my side while I worked." I find that extraordinary. It's this need of a presence, this family life he needs to surround him, even though he isolates himself completely. He needs a presence, a companionship, a sweetheart by his side.

00:47:19

Françoise Malettra: But he was telling us about anxiety earlier. How come it's so difficult to detect this anxiety in your canvases?

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00:47:27

Marc Chagall: It shouldn't come through. A work of art shouldn't show it. Two and two do not equal four. On the contrary, if you want daylight, you need to give dark things. It's the opposite. Listen, when I hear Mozart's perfect music, I feel like crying. I'm sad for him because perfection is bad—it's death, almost. When I listen to Beethoven, I don't know, my God, that is sadness, it's Michelangelo, you understand, he suffered, and so on, and so on. But when you listen to something perfect, when you see the beauty of a child, or think of it, you are thinking of death, of hell. When I saw a Vermeer, for example, the paintings we saw in Paris a long time ago, it's tragedy through a smile. Opposites, when there are opposites, certain artists show... I don't think so, it makes me smile a bit. I may be expressing it badly, I don't know, you understand me a bit. It's the opposite, in fact, which is positive. It's through smiles that you achieve drama, and tragedies make you smile, the opposite, perhaps.

00:48:48

Françoise Malettra: Why? Because tragedy is not really the measure of man in its representation?

00:48:53

Marc Chagall: At the moment, what a wonderful moment, a garden! Well, me, I see there are dramas and tragedies. There is bloodshed somewhere, I absolutely see bloodshed. People are dead and have nothing to eat, do they, and we are killing one another. That's why I'm often poisoned in this garden, without reading the newspapers, because there are, there are, there are, there are. We are killing one another, killing one another, people don't read the Bible, people don't read Shakespeare, don't listen to Mozart. And I don't like going to concerts because people applaud immediately there. But when they leave, they say, what was that? You see, yes, it's quite a vague subject that I'm telling you.

00:49:40

Françoise Malettra: No, because if I have understood, beauty, near-perfect beauty almost hurts you, because you can't receive it with complete serenity.

00:49:52

Marc Chagall: For me, perfection often looks like death. I can't explain it. We'll leave that to the philosophers. I don't want to deal with it. And when I see a bouquet of flowers... Because in three or four days it will be over and that makes me cry. Because maybe we think, in the whole of our planet, of the events, that it's done that way. You understand a bit what I mean, perhaps you need to feel it.

00:50:26

Françoise Malettra: Yes, you mean you need to be aware that there can be beauty behind these things.

00:50:31

Marc Chagall: There always has to be something behind, there's always something behind, two plus two doesn't equal four. There isn't a perfect work of art, splendid. What is that? What? What is a pretty painting?

00:50:44

Françoise Malettra: Perhaps it's a really beautiful moment.

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00:50:47

Marc Chagall: Really beautiful moments, but I don't like it when it's a really pretty painting. What is behind the painting? It's from the viewpoint of the subject or the content. A wonderful work is when we say, not only is it a pretty painting, it's tragic, too. It's tragic. When you listen to Mozart, it's a young boy of thirty. When you (?), the end of the world, finished.

00:51:15

Françoise Malettra: Well perhaps we could take the word that François le Targat used earlier. You really liked the word when he spoke about your boundary between happiness and sadness. The boundary is very hard to identify, but it's very close by.

00:51:31

Marc Chagall: Yes, that's a good way of putting it. Yes, well said. [music]