

Marc Chagall's Eightieth Birthday – 07/07/1967

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Jean-Claude Turjman: It's a party that's undoubtedly taking place in a completely different way, but just as joyfully: the party at the painter Marc Chagall's apartment. I think Jean-Albert Cartier is beside Chagall, who is celebrating his eightieth birthday today. Earlier, when I began this report, I told you that I think, Jean-Albert Cartier, that the painter's numerous grandchildren are with him today.

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Jean-Albert Cartier: Listen, Jean-Claude Turjman, that's not exactly true. I am indeed in Chagall's apartment, which overlooks L'île Saint-Louis and is filled with baskets of flowers. I can tell you that these flower baskets are coming in from around the world. There are some from the United States, from Switzerland. There are also a lot that come from France, from all of Marc Chagall's French friends. But Chagall's grandchildren, of whom there are several, how many are there, Chagall?

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Marc Chagall: For now there are three.

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Jean-Albert Cartier: Three, just three?

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Marc Chagall: Yes, three lovely grandchildren.

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Jean-Claude Turjman: I was under the impression there were more.

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Jean-Albert Cartier: Have they wished you a happy birthday yet?

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Marc Chagall: Yes, yes, they came in the morning. They brought some really nice gifts this morning.

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Jean-Albert Cartier: Because I have to remind you that today is Marc Chagall's eightieth birthday. Exactly eighty years ago, the great lyrical and magical painter we know today was born. The works he donated are currently on display at the Louvre. It's important to remember that he was born in the modest village of Vitebsk, in Russia. Tell me, Chagall, now that you've reached, one might say, the pinnacle of glory, you have a large family surrounding you, you have wealth, you have glory, you have the whole world that loves you. Are you a happy man?

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Marc Chagall: I'm happy to be in France, that I came here 50 years ago, 60 years ago. And I saw that light, and thanks to that light, I could create, I think I created what you see before you in France, and also, in a way, I'm grateful and that's why I gave all those biblical paintings and other things to the opera house, for France, and that's all.

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Jean-Claude Turjman: Marc Chagall, what is your fondest memory from your life as a painter?

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Marc Chagall: Arriving in France in 1911. When I saw that café in front of the Gare du Nord train station and I saw the sun, a different sun, a different light than in Vitebsk.

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Jean-Albert Cartier: I'll ask you another question, Chagall. How far are you looking back? Sixty years of painting, something like that? What does that feel like?

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Marc Chagall: I think, I don't know. It seems like I have to start all over again. Maybe. I'm always doubting myself and I don't know how it happened that my work is on display at the Louvre right now. I don't know why—it always seems like I have to keep working and working and working. God knows what will become of me... I'm not very happy.

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Jean-Albert Cartier: Tell me, is it more difficult to paint at age 80 than at age 20?

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Marc Chagall: That's a tough question and it's very hard to give an answer. I think it was easier when I was 20 and these days it's very difficult and I can't tell you, I don't know.

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Jean-Albert Cartier: What about inspiration when you've already made so many paintings?

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Marc Chagall: You don't need inspiration. You just need to work. You have to work and work.

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Jean-Albert Cartier: Is that the advice you would give to young painters? To work?

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Marc Chagall: You have to work, but you still have to have a little talent. [laughs]

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Jean-Claude Turjman: Well, Marc Chagall, on behalf of France Inter, I wish you a happy birthday.