

Program about Marc Chagall at his second exhibition at the Louvre – 17/10/1977

00:00:05

François Le Targat: Afternoons on France Culture. Good afternoon, and we'll be spending it with our Monday guest, who today is the painter, Marc Chagall. A fabulous afternoon for a number of reasons. Firstly, the long life of artist Marc Chagall—he's 90. And because in Marc Chagall's paintings, clocks are fish, lovers fly high over towns, and houses, which women open up in the morning and close at night, have eyes and watch us. And now these legendary visions are being honored at the Louvre Museum. After Georges Braque, Marc Chagall is the second artist to view his own paintings in a museum where the strengths of pictorial art from all the previous centuries are brought face to face. And this isn't Chagall's first exhibition at the Louvre. For him, it's an honor. It's also a chance to recognize that his art is established as part of the millennia-long debate among the voices of silence. The afternoon was prepared by François Le Targat, Sylvie Andreu, and André Mathieu, and is relevant to current events because today there are three successive openings at Chagall's exhibition at the Pavillon de Flore: first the President of France at 12 p.m., followed by art critics at 3 p.m., followed by guests. The public will be welcome starting on Wednesday. We will be with Chagall and surrounding him for about 100 minutes. At 4:25 p.m., Jean Mantel-Betty and Anne-Marie About host their international program which today will focus on the Frankfurt International Book Fair. And at 5:15 p.m., the people of France will question themselves. That's today's program this afternoon on France Culture, with sound recording by Raymond Buttin and Philippe Destrebeck at Studio 109 and, at the Louvre Museum, Louis-Michel Schwartz. Our address is Room 87-16, Maison de Radio France, in the 16th district of Paris. And to take part in the program, and for bibliography inquiries, please call one of two telephone numbers: 520-05-50 or 525-78-06. If you live outside Paris, you can place a collect call. Marc Chagall at 12:00 p.m. at the Louvre Museum, as soon as we can find him following the private opening by the President of France. In his "Louvre Dialogs," Pierre Schneider has brought together all of Marc Chagall's statements in this great house of painting. Firstly, when he arrived in Paris in 1910, Chagall said, "I went straight to the Louvre, a magic word for me. I could feel that the truth was here. High up at the top, in the Grande Galerie, I discovered Bassano's huge painting, a blend of characters and beasts. I knew it was very important. I go to the Louvre to gain strength, to control myself. You hope to learn something, but there's no point. Nothing helps you. Nothing is certain. Learn nothing. You don't learn to paint. I'm against the notion of drawing well, painting well. Cézanne had no drawings. Nothing." Chagall also said about the Louvre: "The Louvre is a wonderful cemetery" and "The Louvre, what a magical word! A visit to the Louvre is like reading the Bible or Shakespeare. Of course, some things are troubling. Guido Reni is arrogant, but he's arrogant with a lot of class. And then Watteau's painting Gilles, "Gilles" by Watteau! I'd give anything for those pants. What singing and crying by Cimabue. The feeling from that Gilles painting isn't death, it's the ending of life. And of course on Cimabue, which soon we'll hear Chagall talk about almost live, because we recorded it at noon, "Cimabue, my love, my God, what a shock when I arrived in Paris. It goes beyond everything else! That religiousness. I'm talking about the painting, not the subject. Cimabue is more piercing than Giotto. You have to look to Watteau to find the equivalent." We found Chagall just after the French president's visit, sitting in a section of the Louvre now reserved for special guests. He was sitting

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in a large wing chair near some women who were smiling at him. He seemed happy and tired at the same time. Behind him was a painting he was undoubtedly fond of. He didn't say anything about it. It was Caravaggio's painting, "The Fortune Teller." And then, of course, as soon as he heard the word *Louvre*, Chagall started talking about Cimabue.

00:05:03

Marc Chagall: Ah yes, Cimabue. Yes, yes, I saw it. It was on the stairs. It's lovely. It might have been the first painting that shocked me. It made me want to stay in France. Yes, Cimabue above all. You know, I didn't really understand French art because I fought against realism; it bothered me. All the paintings are [realist], Monet, whoever... I was against realism up until 1900, until I came back from America in the late 1940s. When I discovered the subject with Monet. But before that, I wasn't interested in realist painting.

00:05:55

François Le Targat: And did you like Watteau and Corot too?

00:05:59

Marc Chagall: But afterwards, more after than before. Watteau, I think he's a genius. Oh... It's my daughter! You know, Watteau is incredible, the whites, the grays... It can drive you crazy. He just may be the Frenchman who torments me the most, along with Monet, of course! Monet, Rousseau, Gauguin.

00:06:24

François Le Targat: Why?

00:06:27

Marc Chagall: Why? Why do you love your wife and sleep with her? I love my wife.

00:06:32

Woman: Sorry, excuse me. That's a man from the Academy. Do you remember? When we were in Glasgow.

00:06:41

Man: Yes, in Edinburgh, yes.

00:06:46

Marc Chagall: Magnificent.

00:06:46

Man: [In English] You are very busy.

00:06:49

Marc Chagall: Every time I exhibit here (?)...

00:06:50

Woman: The Scottish Academy of Arts wishes you all the best.

00:07:02

Marc Chagall: Thank you very much.

00:07:03

Woman: It's with great admiration that I meet you today.

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00:07:08

François Le Targat: One more thing: suddenly you're appearing alongside Cimabue, in the same building.

00:07:14

Marc Chagall: Currently, yes.

00:07:17

François Le Targat: Yes.

00:07:17

Marc Chagall: Hello, my dear (greeting someone). I was in Florence and I saw Cimabue's crucifixes. For me, it's still there, again, and there's a Masaccio.

00:07:29

François Le Targat: But you, Chagall, appearing alongside Cimabue, what do you think about that?

00:07:33

Marc Chagall: Alongside?

00:07:34

François Le Targat: Your painting alongside Cimabue's.

00:07:39

Marc Chagall: I think that in my book *My Life* I said that perhaps Rembrandt would like me. And Cimabue is a... I don't know what to say... a great man.

00:07:53

François Le Targat: But now, you're appearing alongside him, you're alongside Rembrandt. How does that make you feel?

00:07:57

Marc Chagall: It's because of the president that I was invited, you know, I don't know why. The exhibition... Because maybe people like me, they exhibit my paintings. Don't you think?

00:08:12

François Le Targat: Yes, but you're at the Louvre.

00:08:14

Marc Chagall: Don't go thinking I believe anything.

00:08:18

François Le Targat: Thank you!

00:08:19

Marc Chagall: You are kind.

00:08:20

François Le Targat: That was Chagall, with his friends, earlier today, between noon and 12:30. You'll notice he didn't say anything. He didn't want to say anything. Behind a smile and a laugh, he hid the answer he could have given to the question I was asking him about how he felt about being at the Louvre. Although he didn't give an answer, I know what it is. He said this to Pierre Schneider: "The people who are at the Louvre are people like us. They've been lucky or unlucky enough to get into the

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Louvre, that's all. Besides, half of them could just as well not be there." That's what Chagall didn't want to say to us earlier. After the opening, Chagall's friends whisked him off to a quiet spot to recover, because there really were a lot of people. Having crossed him on the stairs, one of Chagall's old friends, and above all the man with whom he did a large chunk of his lithography work, the lithographer Charles Sorlier. Listen to how Charles Sorlier describes this exhibition of recent paintings.

00:09:20

Charles Sorlier: For me, there's this wonderful side to Chagall, the continuity of his work and his faithfulness to his roots. Some people find these latest paintings upsetting. I'm thinking of "The Fall of Icarus" for example, which Chagall explained to me in great detail in front of the painting. He said he wanted to include something other than the Greek icon, but that he wanted to include the man with angelic aspirations rising towards the sun, and of course getting burnt, while village life continues and everything is the same as before. But as a contrast to that canvas, and sadly this isn't in the exhibition, Chagall recently painted "Phaeton," and I think that in his mind, Phaeton's chariot is the resurrection and continuity of the sun. And I think Chagall's work is also the continuity of the sun. For me, his approach is truly tremendous. I should add that Chagall is one of the greatest painters in the entire history of painting. I hope the public will be very happy to see this exhibition at the Louvre, where he's exhibiting for the second time—they said it was the first time. Indeed, his wonderful Biblical Message paintings were already on show at the Pavillon Mollien seven or eight years ago.

00:10:34

Host: Marc Chagall by Marc Chagall. Chagall by Chagall himself, from over the years. Today, the virtues of the Louvre by a man of high distinction who is within it. Recently—that is, seven years ago, on April 30, 1970, at his home in Vence, Chagall spoke among friends for Françoise Malettra's program *An Evening With...*

00:11:02

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. It 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 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 1910-14, I didn't

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leave Paris because I couldn't afford it. 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 from 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 time to stop. Poets, writers and painters have translated this rebirth, those changes inspired by Nice and the surrounding area. Why? No other place creates this sort of impression, this incomprehensible approach, this clarity, this irrational joy. And carelessness, perhaps too much. It has 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. That was many years ago. For me, 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.

00:15:51

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 works. 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 and 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, so I gave it here. It's a gift; 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 know? This is my religiousness, is it not? And I donated it because I live here, that's all. Like I said before, you know, it's 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?

00:17:55

Host: You forget, you found yourself in this climate. We can tell you're doing well.

00:18:00

Marc Chagall: I don't know! There's this frivolity when I go back to Nice. There's no way I can work. You know?

00:18:08

Host: You've become Mediterranean? Completely.

00:18:12

Marc Chagall: I'm not saying... Yes. As I said earlier, artists have become too soft,

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but I like it and I donated the paintings. I wasn't going to sell them and I donated them here, and that's it. All I ask is that the future generations don't throw out this old guard.

00:18:36

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

00:18:41

Marc Chagall: You know, I don't understand my paintings. I don't know anything, don't 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.

00:18:51

Man: But I don't think that Marc Chagall himself knows where the boundary is...

00:18:56

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, especially 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, and if I think it's finished, I hang it over there and then it's out of the way. I only started asking for opinions after I got married. Yes. Ah yes, right away. First wife, [I asked for] her opinion and currently, charming Valentine... Vava, I ask Vava and it's really serious. When she says it's good, well that means it's finished.

00:20:56

Host: September 24, 1964, Chagall beneath his ceiling at the Paris Opera House, speaking with Sophie Dumoulin.

00:21:05

André Malraux: It's always the same problem. There are a certain number of people who dislike anything they've never seen before. It was crucial that, after the ceiling disappeared, we should be able to recreate music's tremendous poetic quality, which all the great Italian ceilings had done. Chagall had said, in short, "I won't do anything like what Tiepolo did," but he managed to achieve something just as good as Tiepolo. He brought celebration to Paris with everything that he brought from afar, in the same way Tiepolo had brought celebration to Venice. The people who were here and who just applauded had come unbiased. They recognized the poetry. We're congratulating ourselves. Well, madam, so much the better!

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00:21:53

Sophie Dumoulin: Marc Chagall, now you're thanking all your friends who are coming to greet you after applauding the ceiling.

00:21:58

Marc Chagall: But I don't know what to say because you know, I was blinded by my friends' applause.

00:22:03

Sophie Dumoulin: Were you worried?

00:22:05

Marc Chagall: Very, very, very worried. But I can't say anything because I'm all wet. I still have a cold. And everybody kept kissing me. I think there's lipstick on my lips. Hello. Hello. What else can I say? Malraux said all there was to say.

00:22:23

Sophie Dumoulin: But I wanted to know what you thought about the ceiling?

00:22:28

Marc Chagall: I didn't sleep for one night and two days so there you go, I thought. I don't know what to think. You just have to look.

00:22:36

Sophie Dumoulin: Mr. Georges Auric will now share his impressions with us.

00:22:39

Georges Auric: Well, my impression of this evening and moreover the one I had several days ago when I was able to see Marc Chagall's ceiling for the first time. For me, it's especially moving because when I was fifteen or sixteen, I admired Chagall, who was older than me. I saw him in Montparnasse and never imagined that one evening I'd be seeing him in a venue like the Paris Opera House. This evening I feel very proud. Proud for the Opera House and deeply proud that Chagall has agreed to offer this enormously successful gift to our auditorium, to our country.

00:23:21

Sophie Dumoulin: Now, after the official celebrities, after collecting the emotional impressions of the painter, we'll take our microphone to the balconies of the Opera House and ask what the audience thinks, what the regulars think.

00:23:34

Woman: I find it too intimidating. I'm sorry, don't blame me.

00:23:40

Man: Indeed, it's filled with a lot of light and that's really very good for our Opera House, which was starting to feel a little darkened.

00:23:47

Man: For the Palais de Chaillot, but not for here. It doesn't match at all. It's a very beautiful ceiling indeed, but it doesn't go with the Garnier setting at all. Now, it doesn't matter because since no one looks at the ceiling of the Opera House except for tonight. No one will notice that it's Chagall's, not anymore than we noticed Lenepveu's in the past.

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00:24:08

Host: Six years later, he speaks about it again during “An Evening With.”

00:24:13

Marc Chagall: I did the Opera ceiling of course, and that was Malraux. I was a little scared of Malraux, you know? You had to listen, that’s Malraux. You had to... I asked, I asked, but that, that has nothing to do with the Biblical Message? And I asked Malraux what to do and he said “do what you like” and afterwards, well, I did some sketches, but it was extremely difficult. And I said to my wife, “Well now, we need to invite Malraux to show him.” “Oh no, don’t do just one,” she said, “you need to do several 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. But 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.

00:25:19

Host: But what is surprising, 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 yourself, for your own enjoyment?

00:25:35

Marc Chagall: Joy mainly, because I’m not paid, you understand, I’m not paid anything, so I’m free. You see.

00:25:44

Host: Freedom is important.

00:25:46

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

00:25:55

Host: There’s less anxiety. When it’s like that?

00:26:00

Host: Anxiety or problems. Yes, there is. I didn’t accept immediately. I only wanted, particularly when you have someone somewhere in France, in the newspaper, no, I had restless nights and woke up in the night... and I said to my wife, this isn’t possible, I can’t do this. I don’t want to. I’m going to write to Malraux and tell him I don’t want to. 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.”

00:26:50

Host: April 28, 1962, ORTF radio news.

00:26:55

Host: In the assembly hall at Vence town hall, there’s a huge crowd of guests and friends witnessing the great painter Marc Chagall becoming an honorary citizen of Vence. After a very witty introduction from Mayor Jean Marais, an emotional Marc Chagall gave his reply.

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00:27:12

Marc Chagall: I'm really touched, perhaps even more than in Oxford or in the United States when I was offered an honorary PhD, I don't know, I'm really touched. I hope there are no English or American guests here. They won't be angry. I must say, you mentioned marriage. My daughter has already been married here in your country, not long ago. And us as well, not long ago. What I wanted to say was that I'm deeply grateful to all of you, Mr. Mayor and the city council, for this huge honor. I've often been told that I'm a so-called fantastic artist, but I must tell you that when I look back, I don't know how many years have passed, I can't tell you, maybe fifty, maybe more... When I was a boy and I walked under the stars of my hometown, where I grew up, accompanied only by the poor moon of my hometown, I never would have thought I'd become an honorary citizen. And where? In France? In a French town? In the country of art! Of art! It's incredible, to be an honorary citizen here. It goes beyond my dreams. You see, I'm not strong enough.

00:28:33

Marc Chagall: Here, Vence. Radiodiffusion Télévision Française.

00:28:36

François Le Targat: One year earlier, on June 16, 1961, in an interview with Janine Tuchert's, for the five o'clock program, presenting the stained glass for Israel.

00:28:47

Host: In the Jardin des Tuileries, in the shade of the Carrousel, Mr André Malraux, the French Minister of Cultural Affairs, had a special pavilion built. For one month, Parisians could admire Chagall's stained-glass windows, which would then be sent to Israel to adorn a synagogue. Today we're at the opening of this exhibition, which is part of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs. Marc Chagall, these stained-glass windows will be sent to a synagogue in Israel, which you visited before creating them, of course, is that right?

00:29:16

Marc Chagall: Yes. It's a synagogue that's will be built and will be inaugurated next year. And I've been working on them for almost two years. You see. And now, they're being unveiled with permission from the minister. He built a pavilion and the directions of decorative art. I'm happy and very grateful for their generosity.

00:29:37

Host: So tell me, you probably had to have special glass made for these windows. Did you have something made that was similar to those Matisse made for his chapel in Vence?

00:29:48

Marc Chagall: Let's not go into all the technical details. I'm a bit tired of speaking about that. I would like to say that I made the right noises and that God, my parents, my hometown, and France gave me, and it's up to others to judge. I worked in Jacques Simon's workshop, with Charles Marq who is beside me at the moment, in their workshop which was a huge inspiration to me, because he has a lovely wife, and he is very nice. I was very touched; she gave me coffee with cream every time I went.

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00:30:22

Host: And tell me, why? Just to bring you back down to earth, why the number twelve? Does twelve symbolize something or have a tribal meaning?

00:30:30

Marc Chagall: Have you not read the Bible? It's the twelve biblical tribes; legend has it that's where humanity came from. It's in the literature, it's Jacob's psalm when he talks to his children before dying. He characterizes each son. You see.

00:30:46

Host: The twelve tribes of Israel, I thought that perhaps you'd taken something from the Kabbalah which has the science of numbers.

00:30:52

Marc Chagall: Ah no, we took lots of things from many sources but it's absolutely Jacob's psalm, they're the twelve tribes from the Bible.

00:30:59

Host: And tell me, which decorative themes did you use? Because Judaism is quite austere and any portrayal of God is forbidden.

00:31:06

Marc Chagall: Oh, I don't know, I don't know what to say. They asked me nicely to avoid faces, that's all. For the rest of it, I was free to do as I pleased, since I'm gifted.

00:31:15

Host: And so did you call upon biblical, floral themes?

00:31:21

Marc Chagall: No. I conveyed what Jacob said in his Psalms about each son.

00:31:28

Host: So in other words, it's a biblical illustration.

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Marc Chagall: I hate the word "illustration."

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Host: Not the word "biblical" though [laughs].

00:31:37

Marc Chagall: Biblical... But the Bible is a great and wonderful book.

00:31:41

Host: And tell me, one last question, do you view secular art and sacred art differently?

00:31:47

Marc Chagall: No, no, no. If I'm asked to do a synagogue chapel, that's one thing. If it's a layperson's home, that's another. They mustn't be mixed up.

00:31:56

Host: You tackle them with a different spirit then.

00:31:58

Marc Chagall: I tackle, my god, the word "tackle" is too strong. It's different. I did work

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for Metz cathedral. Here, it's something else. If it's a theater company, or somebody's home, that would be different.

00:32:10

Host: Yes, naturally, you adapt your inspiration to each subject you treat. Can I ask, what projects are you working on now, my dear Marc?

00:32:18

Marc Chagall: Ah, I'm going to live a little and enjoy the sunshine.

00:32:22

Host: You're going to rest. You have really earned it.

00:32:24

Marc Chagall: There are good people coming, because I work for the people.

00:32:33

Man: [sings]

00:33:38

Marc Chagall: And then, ten years ago, on July 7, 1967, on his eightieth birthday, a report by Jean-Albert Cartier and Jean-Claude Tujman.

00:33:48

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 with the painter Chagall, who is celebrating his eightieth birthday today. Earlier, when I began this report, I said I think the painter's numerous grandchildren are with him today, Jean-Albert Cartier.

00:34:11

Jean-Albert Cartier: Jean-Claude Turjman, that's not exactly true. I am indeed in Chagall's apartment, which overlooks 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?

00:34:34

Marc Chagall: For now there are three.

00:34:36

Jean-Albert Cartier: Three, just three?

00:34:37

Marc Chagall: Yes, three lovely grandchildren.

00:34:38

Jean-Claude Turjman: I was under the impression there were more. Have they wished you a happy birthday yet?

00:34:43

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

00:34:48

Jean-Albert Cartier: Because I have to remind you that today is Marc Chagall's

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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?

00:35:19

Marc Chagall: I'm happy to be in France, where I came fifty years ago, sixty years ago, and I saw this light and thanks to this light, I was able to create, I think I created what you see in front of you, in France and elsewhere. I'm grateful and that's why I gave these biblical paintings and other things to the Paris Opera House, for France, and that's it.

00:35:42

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

00:35:48

Marc Chagall: My arrival to France in 1911, when I saw those cafés in front of the Gare du Nord train station and I saw the sun, a different sun, a different light than in Vitebsk.

00:35:58

Jean-Albert Cartier: I'll ask you another question, Chagall. You're looking back on sixty years of painting, something like that? What does that feel like?

00:36:09

Marc Chagall: I think, I don't know, I feel like I have to start again, perhaps. 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, you know.

00:36:29

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

00:36:35

Marc Chagall: Ah, that's a scary question. It's very difficult to answer that. I think it was easier when I was twenty and these days it's very difficult and I can't tell you. I don't know.

00:36:48

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

00:36:51

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

00:36:55

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

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00:36:59

Marc Chagall: You have to work, but you still have to have some talent.

00:37:02

Host: But beyond a biography, from a life that began in Vitebsk in 1887, a work conveyed by Georges Charbonnier in his book *Le monologue du peintre* [The Painter's Monologue].

00:37:52

Host: A man sitting on a chimney high on a rooftop. A donkey. A man playing the violin. A house. Above the house, a man. Above the man, a crescent moon. A fish. A man. He looks like an Assyrian warrior on his goatskin, and angels, violins. A woman's portrait. A violin. A tightrope walker on the woman's chest, a green dancer with white wings and a yellow bird's head. An arm goes through a clock and very dark red, the circus ring. On the ring, a rider and houses, and a dancer. And an ass. And a man playing the violin. [music]

00:39:03

Marc Chagall: When I was a boy, I always looked out of the window, always. What was I looking for in the air, in the sky? I was looking for something divine, a thing, a luminosity. A certain luminosity which I got to some extent when I was doing the stained glass in Reims. [music]

00:40:02

Host: One life, one work and one book entitled *My Life*. [music] "What first caught my eye was an angel [...] my sad and joyful city. I see the river getting further away, the bridge in the distance and up close, the eternal fence, the tomb of flowing blood. My aunt is lying on the divan. Her yellow hands are folded, crossed. Black and white nails, yellow and white eyes. The teeth are shining, nebulously. Black dress, through which the reclining body appears, exhausted. [...] I'm alone in the river, I am bathing. Barely stirring the water. Around me, the peaceful city, the milky, blue-black sky is a little bluer on the left. And at the highest point a celestial happiness shines. Suddenly, on the opposite bank, on the roof of the synagogue, smoke pours out, as if one could hear the screams of the burning Torah scrolls and altar. The windows shatter. Quick! Out of the water, bare naked through the beams. I run to get my clothing. I love fires so much. Flames are shooting all around. Half the sky is already filled with smoke. It's reflected in the water. The shops close. Everything's abustle. People, horses, furniture. Screams, calls, tumbles. My childhood home has become dearer to me, more moving. I run to it to see it and say goodbye. Ashes are already falling on its roof. Shadows. Reflections of fire. The house seems to have fainted. My father, I, the neighbors, we water it. We get it wet, they save it. In the evening, I climb onto the roof to get a better view of the burned city. Everything is smoking, cracking apart, crumbling. Sad and tired, I go back home. [music]

00:43:47

Host: And Chagall finishes his book. These pages have the same meaning as a painted surface. "If my paintings had a hiding place, I could slide them in. Or maybe they would glue themselves to the back of one of my characters, or to the pants of the musician in my mural? Who can know what's written on his back?" [music]

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00:45:13

Host: A life which he spoke about to Jacques Chancel in the Radioscopy of May 24, 1971. His arrival in Paris. “My days crawl by on the Place de la Concorde and near Luxembourg. I look at Danton. I look at Watteau. Paris, you are my second Vitebsk! A work that Jacques Lassaigue conducted a sensitive investigation for in 1969, far away from schools, theories, and art history.

00:46:30

Jacques Lassaigue: He’s an extremely elusive man; or at least, an extremely elusive artist. And I admit I’m expecting a lot from this exhibition, because I’m certain it will surprise us even further. I also think it’s impossible to categorize Marc Chagall. I have to admit I laugh every time I read Chagall being described as a Fauvist, a surrealist, or an expressionist somewhere, because he has absolutely nothing in common with any of these movements. He aligns with them perhaps like every great painter aligns with many things, but really, he doesn’t fit in those boxes and he’s very resourceful. And he uses those resources, well, to create something completely unexpected which often the technicians who are most aware of those resources have never even seen before. So I don’t think we should try to define Chagall. You have to wait and see what he brings you. And you have to try and feel his emotions with him, because it’s obvious that his art is always an outpouring of emotion. He never adheres to a purely intellectual drive; he is never trying to prove anything. I think that’s his characteristic. He is placed completely outside all of these movements that are shaking up modern painting, where theories play a certain role and the painting doesn’t always follow. He’s the exact opposite of an intellectual painter. He doesn’t have the Ingresian or Picasso trait at all; on the contrary, he always starts with something extremely vague, extremely subtle, and something gradually emerges from that. I did see him working once—I believe it was his first experience with sculpture. He wanted to make a commemorative tombstone for a cherished female friend who had just died. He had never sculpted before and someone brought him some plaster which he shaped very, I might say, timidly and respectfully. And I must say that very quickly, he created something extraordinary which was given to the founder and made a very beautiful plaque. He has a huge respect for materials, a certain, I wouldn’t say a, a fear of the material, no, but a respect. And he uncovers possibilities quickly because he’s extremely gifted with his hands. We saw it with ceramics, when he started doing ceramics. He did that, my God, for fun essentially, because others had done it, all the great artists were doing it. So he started trying and very soon he was capturing things that others had never, ever seen. And it’s this kind of mixing of shapes and colors that I think is completely particular to him.

00:49:49

Host: Comment by Chagall: “Since I’m talented, I do what I can. You’ve got to work, work, always work. You can’t reach an ideal without working.” For a painting that’s like music, music that he likes.

00:50:25

Marc Chagall: 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 at age 35 and nobody went to his funeral. I was deeply moved by that. Music, music... let’s not talk about it. It’s tough, the greatness,

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the greatness of a mandarin (?), 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 modest but... 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, that is, nothing. She had to borrow the money. Let's not talk about it. Listen, I apologize because I'm talking about these great names, you're asking me questions about music. [music]

00:52:30

Host: "I am envious of Mozart, of Rembrandt, of certain Goya portraits. I am envious of Titian, of old age. I am envious of you because you're young," he said to Jacques Chancel. Nothing, then, is perfect.

00:52:47

Marc Chagall: For me, perfection often looks like death. [music]

00:53:19

Host: The radio archives contain enough meetings with Chagall, for François Le Targat and André Mathieu to be able to create "Marc Chagall by Marc Chagall," after scouring the hours of recording kept at the *Institut national de l'audiovisuel*. One more self-portrait in a very full gallery. Chagall constantly looked at his reflection in the mirror, at least as much as—if not more than—Rembrandt and Van Gogh.

00:53:52

Host: Chagall and the young. To begin with, ninety years of life, and of course, around seventy-five years of painting. Is that of interest to twenty-year-olds? Sylvie Andrieux opened up the microphone to young people interested in art, young art students. As you'll hear, first she went to the courtyard at the *École Nationale Supérieure*, in rue Bonaparte, and then to the doorway of the Académie Julian, on Rue du Dragon, in Paris, naturally.

00:54:24

Host: What does Chagall represent for you?

00:54:26

Student: Um. I don't know. Jewish culture, I think. But yeah, someone who stands out in modern painting. For me, he represents the painting of a certain culture.

00:54:50

Host: Can I ask you the same question?

00:54:51

Student: Well, I don't know that much. I've seen some of his paintings at the Pompidou. Mostly I've heard others talk about him.

00:54:58

Host: Does he represent anything in particular? Yes... You can feel it strongly in his paintings. I think so, anyway. I've seen some of his paintings. It's. I don't know how to explain. There's lots of black, it's very haunting. I don't think I know how to... his painting is quite harsh... Ah, yes, I think so.

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00:55:26

Student: No, it's not harsh. The colors are bright, perhaps. For example, these turquoise blues, you know the one with his animals, it's a little naive.

00:55:37

Student: No, no, that wasn't him then, it's the one who did a kind of cow... The women and all that. Ah yes, okay. Yes? Well, no, I was thinking of someone else.

00:55:44

Student: There's a painting that's turquoise blue, it's, well I mean it's really beautiful. We walked past it at the Louvre, at that exhibition there one day, and we saw it, we saw several paintings on display.

00:55:55

Host: How important is he to you?

00:56:00

Student: I'm waiting for his exhibition at the Louvre to learn more about him.

00:56:03

Host: But is he someone whose work you're sensitive to, and curious about?

00:56:09

Student: Sensitive, definitely. And, I mean, curiosity too. I'll be going to the Louvre when his exhibition is on, to have a look and learn more.

00:56:19

Host: What have they told you about Chagall's work here?

00:56:22

Student: They haven't mentioned him yet. We are new, we're in P1, so we haven't gotten to it yet.

00:56:28

Student: I don't really know Chagall, I only know that it's very colorful and his stuff is really busy [laughs].

00:56:38

Host: Can you say that again?

00:56:38

Student: There are cellos hanging from the sky. It's a bit dreamy. It's very blue. It's... I don't really know.

00:56:44

Student: You're right, it's quite... There's stuff going in all directions. He uses all different colors.

00:56:50

Host: Is there a work that stands out for you? Because you're saying that a bit reluctantly.

00:56:53

Student: I don't really know much. I know who he is but I don't really know much about it.

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00:57:02

Student: It might be interesting and it could really interest me, that's for sure. But I can't say much about it.

00:57:09

Student: I really like him. I really like Chagall because I find his painting pretty amazing, but I don't really know what to say.

00:57:16

Host: But you do think he's important?

00:57:20

Student: Since I like him, yes, he's important for me, yes.

00:57:22

Host: What about you?

00:57:23

Student: I really like him.

00:57:27

Host: Can you remember a specific work by Chagall that you particularly like?

00:57:32

Student: There's that, where's that cupola thing?

00:57:35

Host: Yes. Describe it, tell me about it. What colors have you seen Chagall use?

00:57:40

Student: All the colors. Well, I don't know. Actually, there's a painting that I really like where he depicts a red rooster, all ruffled up.

00:57:50

Student: Personally, I like the dreamlike aspect, but I really don't like his technique.

00:57:55

Host: How do you mean?

00:57:56

Student: The way he composes things and the way he treats all his subjects. Otherwise, I really like the colors and the atmosphere that emanates from them.

00:58:05

Student: It's vague, it's... We're not used to a drawing, we're more used to strict or academic painting, not a drawing that's as... Well, I don't know how to describe it.

00:58:17

Host: Has anyone not heard of Chagall?

00:58:19

Student: Me, I haven't heard of him.

00:58:21

Student: He's a Russian painter.

00:58:25

Student: Not me. No, I don't know him. I've heard the name.

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00:58:26

Student: He did some really good stained glass; I went to see his stained glass windows in Israel. I really liked them. Much more than his paintings, actually. I found them really beautiful, really bright, and I thought they were fantastic.

00:58:36

Host: Is he important to you?

00:58:38

Student: Chagall? Look, to be honest, I'm not that familiar with his paintings, I'm more aware of his stained glass, which I really loved. I really liked them.

00:58:47

Host: Why? Could you explain?

00:58:51

Student: It's more an impression, you know? First of all, the exhibition was really well done and the artwork looked so bright. It's hard to explain, but I thought it was really, really beautiful.

00:59:11

Host: "Marc Chagall. Recent paintings 1967-1977" at the Louvre. Marc Chagall is everywhere. The painter, who appeared with images that seemed to need to be kept secret, since they were brimming with the possibility of an exchange between the earth and the sky, had offers from everywhere and replied to all requests. Stained glass for the cathedral in Reims, a ceiling at the Paris Opera House, a piece for the Tokyo auditorium, stained glass for a hospital in Israel, images for a parliament, illustrations for La Fontaine's *Fables*, and many more. Chagall accepted all the business offers he received, assured that he would be able to bring in a strength that was incumbent upon him, at a time when his future didn't contain much more than painting signs for the hairdresser, the butcher or the notions dealer in Vitebsk. The message from Chagall, whom we could have thought that as a naive, would not have left his neighborhood and would have become incomprehensible just around the corner, was suddenly in demand and very established within his own community and in communities around the world. So what is it about Chagall that's so naturally universal? We will now go to the Louvre, for the press opening, where specialists have arrived in front of Chagall's recent paintings. François Le Targat is at the opening of 62 Chagall paintings on view for the first time. We are live from the Louvre. François Le Targat.

01:00:39

François Le Targat: Yes, Pierre Descars, we are live from the Louvre. We're at the entrance where all of our colleagues, press specialists, of course, are arriving. There aren't huge numbers yet. And the first painting, next to the press office where they're giving out catalogs to journalists only, we're next to a painting that you'll definitely have seen this morning, and which isn't, if I remember, one that you like much, which is "The Fall of Icarus." Actually, the one by Breughel is called "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus." In the painting kept in Belgium, I believe, at the Royal Museum of Fine Arts, poor Icarus, who falls into the water amid general indifference, while the man continues to dig his furrow. With Chagall's piece, as you'll notice, it's the complete opposite. It's the complete opposite happening, given that Icarus is falling into the

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middle of a crowd, is he not? And already from this first painting, it's life. We thus find ourselves fully alive, in full color, as is always the case with Chagall. So these seventy paintings displayed in the Flore rooms on the second floor, displayed therefore in a bright, light-filled setting, and you'll have noticed, too, with no frame, just simple wooden rods. I can see they're already taking photographs, I'll go ask. I hope you're receiving properly. I can hear lots of noise. Yes, no.

01:02:01

Host: All is well, the connection is excellent. We are a real part of this press preview.

01:02:05

François Le Targat: So we'll walk around the press preview and there are different people, some of them well known, others not so much, or how should I say, anonymous guests. For example, one of our well-known counterparts is here, Georges Charensol. I'll ask him his opinion about the exhibition.

01:02:28

Georges Charensol: Well, it's clearly an exhibition to be admired, and what's extraordinary is that these are recent works, I mean that these are the works of a man who today is ninety and who is as youthful as he was in 1923, when I interviewed him for the first time in his very modest apartment in Montparnasse, on his return from Russia.

01:02:56

François Le Targat: Yes, in other words, you know him very well. By the way, I notice that in private you address him informally as "tu" —you even used "tu" when you interviewed him on the radio two days ago. So is he the same as on that first day? Has nothing changed?

01:03:08

Georges Charensol: Look, look at this King David. It's in the great tradition of all his works inspired by the Bible, which are the pinnacle of his body of work, in my opinion, because this man has an extremely deep religious spirit. This is a man who was deeply affected by his childhood. We constantly see views of his hometown with biblical characters who blend in perfectly with this ghetto of Vitebsk where he was born.

01:03:43

François Le Targat: In essence, for a great painter—and Chagall is a great painter—there's no need change every week. One can paint in the same way for eighty or seventy years without repeating oneself, if I can say that?

01:03:55

Georges Charensol: Ah yes, you are right to say "without repeating oneself," because he is constantly changing. Look at his, his Opera House ceiling, his extraordinary Opera House ceiling. It was a revelation when we saw it for the first time, Chagall is always himself and Chagall is always new.

01:04:12

François Le Targat: Thank you. Yes, in fact, Chagall's painting is a miracle that's constantly changing, and I'm going to start walking around the halls which are

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beginning to fill up. There's a young man here, I don't know if he's a young journalist or a young student, what do you think of Chagall?

01:04:30

Man: Yes, I'm sorry, I've just arrived and haven't had time to visit the exhibition so I won't have much to say about it.

01:04:37

François Le Targat: I'll wait until you've had a look round then. Of course, I won't be able to comment on all of these paintings because there are, there are too many of them. I think color, as is always the case with Chagall, is the important thing. And then all the same, a kind of imagery, a bit like Epinal imagery. For example, we see it in "Don Quixote," which is number 37 in the catalog. We see an extravagant Don Quixote, surrounded, followed by characters holding red flags. Why? And then the painter himself at the bottom, as always shown painting, painting a picture of some flowers. And then there's another painting. I don't know if you found it striking, I found it very striking. It's Christ on a cross, Christ on a cross with no name, because it's named in front of the painting. So do you have any idea, Pierre Descars, as to why Chagall depicted a painting within a painting? I wonder why.

01:05:34

Host: It happens often, François Le Targat, the proof is that you were just talking about "Don Quixote" where we see a painter. What is the painter doing? It's almost the exact image that Courbet gave in his workshop. It's a very similar situation, and besides, we know... thanks to Pierre Schneider's book "Louvre dialogues," we know Chagall was very interested in Courbet. What do we see in this painting you mention? The painter is sitting down holding his palette. Beside him, there's a naked woman, exactly like in Courbet's paintings. On the other side there's a woman holding a bouquet. So what is he painting? Well, he's painting something that's blue and white, something that's flying away, and which is the artist's painting within this large image where we see a knight, the Don Quixote that you mentioned, followed by a crowd holding red flags. What could that mean? Well, Chagall, since we've been listening to him, since early afternoon, we know that Chagall says the paintings mean what they mean and nothing else, but it's not that simple. But I think you have seen two pieces that are revealing. Earlier, when we were listening to an extract where he was talking to Jacques Chancel, Chagall was saying that there were two countries, Vitebsk and Paris. And one painting that was called "Memory of Paris," if I'm not mistaken, it's number 58, it must be somewhere around here. The very beautiful memory of Paris. I'm turning the pages of my catalog. I will find it. It's at the back. It's quite simple, it has dancers in it. It's a memory of his life in Paris, of dancers in front of a building which must be the Opera House. Next to them is the Eiffel Tower, then there's the bridge, the Seine and Notre-Dame. Then there's a mention of Carpeaux's group, La Danse, and an image of the obelisk at Place de la Concorde. And there are a couple of lovers at the front. Ultimately, in this painting, Chagall is telling his life story. And if that's his Parisian side, because he said earlier that Paris was the place of his second birth. And then there's another one, there's number 48 which is "The Prodigal Son," a very interesting painting. You know, that period, I think the painting is dated 1974-75 which is when Chagall had finally gone back to Russia and finally made contact with his country, his hometown. I don't think he went to Vitebsk, but the

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meaning of the return of the prodigal son is very obvious. There's someone, who is possibly Chagall, going back to see his father or grandfather, or his uncle, just like he painted them when he was in Vitebsk. There's a bearded man wearing a moujik hat and heavy shoes. And this man has come to collect the prodigal son who is arriving. He is holding him in an embrace that Rembrandt has already painted in a very obvious way. And what do we have in the background? Well, we have all the Vitebsk houses. In that respect, of course, I was forgetting that on the right, there's a magnificent sun and also a rooster approaching and obviously, on the bottom right, we have the painter near his painting, guided by a billy-goat. And between these two paintings, we have, if you like, it struck me this morning when I saw them, a sort of phrasing of Chagall's journey. What does he do? What has he been doing his entire life? He has looked around him and all these images, all these houses, all these characters, as much the dancing group in front of the Opera House as the cattle dealer in Vitebsk, all of these characters are featured. You have the obelisk, the izba, the little snowy streets, the large clearing with the bridges. All that comes together. How does it come together? Well, we don't really know, we don't really know. It's a sort of painting miracle, but it all goes together.

01:08:54

François Le Targat: Perhaps we will learn with this painting, we're in front of painting number sixteen, there's a young man next to me who was busily writing things down. Are you struck by this painting, "Christ on Cross"?

01:09:02

Man: Yes, I'm always struck by everything Chagall does. But it seems that in these paintings, there's an important aspect, which is that above Christ, instead of the letters INRI, meaning Jesus Christ, King of the Jews, I see the words Chagall wrote in Hebrew characters, gold letters, so in yellow. What I have noticed also in the candelabras located behind the cross, is also what I've seen in several paintings in this series. Chagall usually includes words, texts written in Hebrew characters. And given that, in these paintings, we find his own name instead of Jesus Christ's, it's interesting to see Chagall's attachment to Judaism, perhaps throughout the last ten years in particular.

01:09:53

François Le Targat: But for a Chagall, this painting is particularly dark, because apart from the painter, who seems to be depicted as an ass, I think to the left, there's a palette and then a type of animal, an animal that appears to be holding a palette. And in the background, the Christ is really black, apart from his left hand which he's holding on his heart and which creates a brilliant white patch, matched only by the dress of the flying angel, who's actually flying very low. The angel at the right of the painting, rather than flying over the top, like in religious triumphalist paintings, where you have the angels above.

01:10:26

Man: Yes, well, I don't know what Chagall's approach was when painting it, I mean the painter being depicted by an ass and I haven't been able to see more than... because I was more struck by the words written in Hebrew underneath. I mean, that's what I was looking for in his paintings.

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01:10:43

François Le Targat: That's great, thank you. Other paintings, as we have seen, always very, very colorful, very cheerful, are dotted around this exhibition. Here's the young man who said he hadn't seen enough paintings yet. He has seen four or five. It's just a general impression. It's not a detailed critique. Yes, your impression, as you stand in the middle of the hall? Is it appealing? Do you find sometimes the colors are harsh, like the one on the right? Over there, there's a blue, yellow and green one where it's almost as if the painting were divided into four sections. So do you find it has much poetic charm?

01:11:28

Man: I find it very, very poetic. I'm very struck by the mystical aspect that emanates from Chagall's paintings.

01:11:37

François Le Targat: Even when the subject isn't necessarily mystical, there might be a bouquet of flowers or some lovers. Do you feel it was deeply imbued with mysticism?

01:11:45

Man: I think so, because it's inherent in Chagall's personality and it's something that emanates from his work generally.

01:11:54

François Le Targat: So you would classify... well, we don't classify, or we shouldn't, but for you, a heavy tendency for mysticism permeates Chagall, in your opinion?

01:12:01

Man: I think so, yes, and I also think it's related to the fact he's Russian. Russians are very focused on mysticism and we can feel that very strongly when looking at Chagall's work.

01:12:21

François Le Targat: We'll continue walking around in this hall, I have just noticed a conversation which I'm going to interrupt. But when he took a note, our friend Schurr who is also a paintings and galleries specialist. So Gérald Schurr, this much-anticipated Chagall exhibition, we see a lot of Chagall. But is it...?

01:12:41

Gérald Schurr: I have to say, I'm a little disappointed.

01:12:43

François Le Targat: Why?

01:12:45

Gérald Schurr: Because Chagall is, is a young painter of 90 years old, who is still a naive painter, but has only retained a certain ability from his naivety. This is tiresome for a naive artist.

01:13:00

François Le Targat: So do you prefer his older paintings?

01:13:02

Gérald Schurr: Ah yes, yes, he's been creating the same canvas for seventy years.

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01:13:07

François Le Targat: You know, we also say that novelists write the same novel all their lives.

01:13:10

Gérald Schurr: True! All painters are doing self-portraits. Yes, Cocteau.... but particularly him. We are constantly seeing the same themes: the flying violinist, the man with his head thrown back. It's nice, it's enjoyable, but it's always the same thing. I already got this impression at the Grand Palais some years ago.

01:13:33

François Le Targat: So for you, what was Chagall's greatest era?

01:13:36

Gérald Schurr: 1920. Before even, maybe even before. 1910-1920, the Vitebsk period, when he was in Russia. Since then, he's just been repeating himself, I feel.

01:13:49

François Le Targat: And you, sir, is that your opinion, too?

01:13:51

Man: Don't ask, it's so bad that there's nothing to say. It's downright awful. Take a look yourself.

01:13:57

François Le Targat: I'm not a critic, I'm a reporter [laughs].

01:13:59

Man: It's not a critique, it's so bad that there's nothing to discuss about it.

01:14:04

François Le Targat: But you still came along?

01:14:05

Man: Yes I came. I always come.

01:14:07

François Le Targat: You see, opinions are mixed...

01:14:09

Man: They're not mixed. If we took away the prices, if tomorrow we said they were worth 50 cents, we'd put it all in the garbage and nobody would say it was art. That's all. It's for commercial gain, and that's the end of it.

01:14:22

François Le Targat: Not in the Louvre.

01:14:24

Man: The Louvre too. The Louvre goes where the money is, what can I say?

01:14:27

François Le Targat: That's the problem, Pierre, you understand that it goes beyond the basic, how can I say it, the basic debriefing of an exhibition.

01:14:34

Host: No, François Le Targat, I think it's very valuable to have these immediate reactions like this. And I think that those who are angry about this exhibition, they are

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ultimately as valuable as those for whom it is well received. Because it's important for a painter to not please everybody. It's important that a work is sometimes seen as harsh. I'm thinking particularly of a painting we were talking about earlier. It was Charles Sorlier who mentioned it; perhaps you have it in front of you. It's a painting that I think is wonderful, "Fall of Icarus." It's the criticisms made of Chagall just now which are the most useful, because it's a remarkably diverse and, and renewed painting.

01:15:11

François Le Targat: Yes, I spoke about this painting at the beginning of the program. It's the opposite, if I can say that, of the spirit of Bruegel's piece, in that it depicts participation instead of indifference. Incidentally, it's that big crowd that's watching Icarus fall.

01:15:22

Host: That's what's important, the village, the village which is not so much indifferent as curious.

01:15:27

François Le Targat: Curious.

01:15:27

Host: And, it's interested in what's happening, but isn't really bothered by it. But here we can, if we have some time, François Le Targat, we can speak about one of Chagall's specific traits, which is that Chagall is perhaps the only contemporary painter who knows how, or more is interested in, depicting crowds. I don't see it anywhere else, not in Picasso's work or Matisse's, not in Bonnard's, and of course not in Braque's, and not in surrealists' work either. Nobody depicts groups in their paintings. And here, we can count them, the people in "Fall of Icarus" who are lifting their heads, there are so many things. There are perhaps thirty or forty of them. They are passionate. They are very varied. For example, there you have people raising their arms, others which are next to their asses, others climbing on the roof. And it's very strange, why nobody ever talks about it, Chagall won't talk about it. There's also a naked woman lying on the roof of an izba. And elsewhere, there's a woman holding a child. It's a theme we recognize. I really don't understand why we begrudge Chagall and why, just before, our friend Schurr was criticizing Chagall for constantly repeating these themes. He's clearly somebody who has always used the same themes. We could also criticize Picasso for the same thing. And yet God knows if he knows how to change them. Picasso has always used the same themes: motherhood, women sitting in chairs. We see those themes all the way through his painting career. It's really no different. So I think this painting is quite a, quite a solid, a strong retort to the fierce criticism that we just heard. And maybe we should reflect on the fact while reminding ourselves that Chagall can depict crowds, remembering what he said earlier. I think it was about the Jerusalem stained glass. He said, "Now people are arriving, people who don't know about painting," but people who don't know about painting, people from Vitebsk and beyond, well, they appear in Chagall's painting and they have a place there. Don't you think?

01:17:20

François Le Targat: Ah yes, personally I agree with you. What really surprises me is

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that not many of our friends have arrived yet. I think they're running a bit late. It's a little tiresome because we can't get very varied opinions, which would have been good to compare.

01:17:35

Host: I do understand, but look, we do have what we have already heard, very opposing views. On the one hand the tireless enthusiasm of Georges Charensol, who has known Chagall since 1923, which is a massive 54 years, during which time he has tracked Chagall's development. And then, whatever one might say of it, Gérald Schurr's opinion was quite obvious. And then the opinion of the painter just now, I think we just heard him, who said it belonged in the garbage, that's quite clear.

01:18:03

François Le Targat: I see a man here whom I'm going to try to interview if he speaks French. He's Japanese I think. Excuse me, sir, do you speak French? Yes, yes, of course. Your opinion about Chagall, this exhibition that you're currently visiting?

01:18:20

Man: I haven't seen everything yet.

01:18:22

François Le Targat: No, but from what you have seen.

01:18:25

Man: Yes, OK. I'm writing a short article about Chagall, an artist who is inspired by the Old Testament. He's not very well, very well known in Japan. That's why I wanted to broach this subject. What surprised me a lot about this exhibition, is the vitality which has not changed at all through, through living life, I suppose.

01:18:54

François Le Targat: But in Japan, is he a painter that speaks to you or is he hard to get into, given your culture of a completely different type of painting?

01:19:04

Man: That's it, yes. As you know, the different civilizations have completely different contexts, as you well know, but we are very... In Japan we are vaguely aware of Chagall's work, but more from an aesthetic point of view, you know? We don't discuss the motifs very deeply. Yes, and even the culture of Christianity is another world, particularly in my country, you know?

01:19:49

François Le Targat: Yes, yes, but it's a sensitive, abundant, emotional painting.

01:19:52

Man: Yes, OK. I mean, the charm of these paintings strikes a chord, even with the Japanese, of course. The abundance, definitely.

01:20:02

François Le Targat: Yes, yes, because you don't need to know the Bible off by heart, and all the details within it, to be struck by the colors.

01:20:13

Man: That's it, yes. In Japan, we've already had two large Chagall exhibitions recently, last year I think. Similarly, with the general public in Japan, in terms of

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numbers, there's been a lot of talk about him, and of course we really like him, but personally, I want to find out about the civilization or Christianity side of it. Yes, it's obviously a little difficult for the Japanese public.

01:20:46

François Le Targat: Yes, it's a different world. Well, you see, Pierre Descars, in the Far East, not everyone is unknown, far from it. And we were talking about this world, about the two very different worlds, of far eastern civilization and then Biblical, well Jewish, civilization. I think it's actually quite hard to find common ground.

01:21:08

Host: Yes, François Le Targat, but I think what's important is the following, and it's what the Japanese critic just said, the Japanese fan, which reassures me a little, because when you and I were looking, when we were looking, when I look at Far Eastern works, I think, how can I understand that? Everything goes over my head. I don't understand the basis of their religious tenet so I'll bypass the basics. Just now, the Japanese man, who is unfamiliar with Bible culture as you were saying, it doesn't bother him and he thinks that communication is possible, that interpretation is possible, even for someone who doesn't know Job or the other texts off by heart, or Ezekiel or... He's happy to dive in, which I find reassuring. And I learn from it. Above all, it confirms one thing, that Chagall's art is perhaps the only, let's say, spiritualistic, spiritual work, not to say mystical, because he did specify in the recording you chose earlier, François Le Targat, he did specify that there were two realms, "sacred" and "other." So Chagall is the only contemporary spiritual or spiritualistic painter. And as we said earlier, Chagall is able to create decorations for a synagogue, he can... well, stained glass, sorry, for a synagogue, stained glass for a cathedral, in Reims, decorations for a parliament, and also decorations for an auditorium in Tokyo. Which that Japanese man will undoubtedly be familiar with. And what has he sold throughout the world? What has he offered throughout the world? He has put forward a vision which perhaps he is the only person to champion, that communication between heaven and earth is possible. And it's Chagall's spirituality that spreads completely naturally, with slightly disconcerting ease, which we understand better following the statements from your Japanese interviewee. Because there's clearly a transparency, a possibility of communicating with the other world. But to a certain extent the painting is metaphysical in its reality, and meaningful for everyone. Earlier, when we were wondering about Chagall's role in the most diverse communities, whether that be Christian or Jewish or Japanese, or American, since he created well-known decorations for theaters and buildings in the States. All that is very well received. So we must ask ourselves what we look for in Chagall, what are we looking for? Something that perhaps we don't find elsewhere. A world where water, the sky, things signify... this fish in the sea, which seems to bother everyone since Chagall started painting. After all, let's be a bit serious. The fish that Chagall depicts in the sky, well that's the zodiac signs, of course. Why is it that when suddenly, when Chagall portrays that, we are surprised? And when we consider the animals for a moment, not in their usual environment—the animal in its barn or stable—but its graphic or symbolic meaning, we have no problem. An ox or an ass, we know that very, very well. They don't present the same issue that most people seem to have in Laon, in France, with Laon cathedral, because what do we see atop Laon cathedral?

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Well, we see oxen looking out at us. We have lost track of the meaningfulness of creatures. For example, when we look at the Apocalypse, each great character from the church is accompanied by an animal, there's the ox, the eagle, the bull, all those are present. And today, if there's an eagle near someone, we say it's somebody with a bird. Before, it didn't used to mean that at all. And that's what's important when Chagall reminds us that there's symbolism in beings, whether they are animal or human or, since he is very fond of botany, living beings as flowers or as plants, or beings that are water beings, or indeed water, water itself, or indeed the earth itself, or indeed home itself. Chagall depicts that admirably. There's a painting where Chagall said he had brought the color of Van Gogh's potatoes with him when he arrived in Paris. And there's that Van Gogh painting that maybe Chagall likes, I don't know, perhaps we should ask him—but what seems important is that he painted that work in one year, when he was in his home country of Holland. The painter is outside. He is looking at a house, a big house, and a window and its shutters are closed, apart from one glass window. Through this glass window we see a light and a woman loosely holding the light. And this profound image of the house and its meaning, at the same time symbolic and, why not, psychoanalytic, we should also perhaps approach it from that angle. And we find this again in Chagall's work, in certain paintings featuring the house. It's, you know, those houses where women open the windows in the morning and close the shutters at night. And this house, it no longer has windows—it has eyes, and its eyes are open or closed. And this house is living alongside us. That's what Chagall gives us, all of that. And perhaps we are denied all of all that, so it creates unanimity, as much in the Japanese as it does as the Americans, Israelis or God knows who.

01:26:18

François Le Targat: Actually Pierre, don't you think that perhaps we're victims of two things, Cartesianism and Jansenism, which have shut us off from the cosmic world? This slightly cosmic idea of the world. And through painting, Chagall is reconnecting us with the great tradition we had before this separation?

01:26:35

Host: And that is why Chagall is something new. I know some people think this exhibition is perhaps not as surprising as if we were discovering Chagall... how surprising he was when Apollinaire discovered him in Paris, and when Cendrars discovered him with this kind of fascination. And then Chagall... and Chagall, he avoided surrealism. He did not get swept up in it. Like Chirico, it passed him by, and he went through his career peacefully, with some ideas, not many, and eventually he was able to build an immense body of work. François Le Targat, I think we'll need to go our separate ways now, unless there's anybody else at this preview needing to say anything. I don't think there is.

01:27:14

François Le Targat: No, Pierre, unfortunately there's nobody.

01:27:17

Host: Perfect. In any case, thank you for bringing us this live footage from the press preview of Marc Chagall's exhibition. A reminder that from today, for guests, this morning, the French president, indeed currently for the press, and this evening, the

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general public and for guests, Chagall is displaying his recent paintings from 1967-1977, and the general public will be admitted from Wednesday, because as you know, national museums are closed on Tuesdays. So from Wednesday, I think the girl recorded earlier by Sylvie Andreu will be attending, the one who saw the paintings coming by and the signs being put up in the Louvre courtyard, and who promised to come to see Chagall's exposition at the earliest opportunity. So it's to that young lady, who is curious about Chagall, the elderly painter of 90 years, whose career perhaps is beginning. It's to that young lady that we, François le Targat, André Mathieu, Sylvie Andreu and myself, devote this program about today's Monday guest, Marc Chagall.