

Radioscopy: Marc Chagall Discusses His Life and His Work – 05/25/1971

00:00:10

Jacques Chancel: Jacques Chancel Radioscopy. Today in Cannes we experience a rare encounter. A young man of 84, an artist, a poet, for the entire world, one of the greatest painters: Chagall, Marc Chagall, for those who read the signatures at the bottom of the immense frescoes. When one speaks of Chagall, one speaks of fantasy and the fantastical, mystery and the mystical, psychoanalysis and magic. But for me, he's even more. He is Chagall, a man. And this man exists, and I met him, at his home, surrounded by trees, surrounded by flowers, in silence, in Saint-Paul-de-Vence. In Saint-Paul-de-Vence, where I take you with me. Men who can be called "masters," without undue flattery, with respect, are few and far between. Chagall, you are one of those men. You are replete with honors. But I'd like to know what honor means to you.

00:01:19

Marc Chagall: Oh, really, what a question! Why do you speak of honor for me? No, no, *honor* isn't the right word. I don't know what that is. Yes, I was... recently, in France, the government bestowed a great honor upon me. That, you know, for that, yes. I don't know how to thank them. But every time, I'm unhappy because I always say... I can't utter the word "merit." I'm so anxious, aren't I? And I receive honors because people are... even officials are nice to me. But I have doubts. I have doubts, sir, there's nothing to be done about it. I have doubts. When people speak well of me, I said somewhere yesterday or the day before, I don't remember, even when people write good things about me, I unfortunately don't really believe it. If I'm criticized, I take it rather seriously and then my life isn't so happy.

00:02:26

Jacques Chancel: I'm thrilled to meet you, Mr. Chagall. I saw your retrospective, the retrospective of your works of art. Earlier I was at the Maeght Foundation. I saw even more Chagall paintings. I'm now in your house in Saint-Paul-de-Vence and I see even more Chagall. You have a nice place here. It's calm and I saw you earlier with your wife. I didn't find Chagall; I discovered a couple. A couple in love.

00:02:53

Marc Chagall: Yes, my wife is something else. She is logic, stability, charm, and everything else I don't have. And when that woman, when she says, when she says—it's rare—but I show her my paintings, I ask her what she thinks, and if she says, "Yes, it's not bad," I'm really quite happy. That's all.

00:03:19

Jacques Chancel: How old are you Chagall?

00:03:20

Marc Chagall: Oh, let's not talk about age. You have, I see that you have a little book. It embarrasses me to talk about my age. I think I'm already old, pretty old, I believe.

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Jacques Chancel: You're doing so well.

00:03:34

Marc Chagall: Yes, um. I don't drink, you know. I don't even eat much. But I do really love a

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little wine. Why not? If it's really one of the best, I still drink a little, but it's rare. Champagne is pretty. I've got work. You know, in the Champagne region, in Reims, I worked in Reims, stained glass. It's the land of Champagne. And it's nice to look at, but I don't like, I don't dare, I don't dare. You're a young man, you know. What's Champagne? I don't dare. So that's it. I don't go to bed late. I'd like to work very, very late, but I mustn't go back to my bedroom too late. My wife wouldn't like that. And I'm not a painting factory. Since I have doubts, I do what I can. It's not my role to talk about myself, about my art. You can do the talking, if you're interested.

00:04:37

Jacques Chancel: Are you anxious in life?

00:04:41

Marc Chagall: Today, you know, today still, I was always anxious... As you know, in my book *My Life*... I've always sort of, apparently... No one knows why, I write in... My mother told me long ago that, when I was born, there was a great fire in the city and she was taken, her and me, in the bed, from one place to another, to save us. Maybe that's why I'm always worried. I don't know why. And yet, I'm joyful, I'm always smiling, I love people profoundly. I never complain. Oh no. I like good people. I'm sad, of course, when I read the newspapers, what's going on today. I'm sad, I'm anxious, but I adore young people. I love young people.

00:05:30

Jacques Chancel: What do you think of young people today?

00:05:32

Marc Chagall: My God, I really love young people! But you, across from me, you're a young man. I'm even envious of young people.

00:05:40

Jacques Chancel: Oh really? It goes that far?

00:05:41

Marc Chagall: I love, I love young people and today there are protests. They have it in them. I was a protester too, in a way, before the war, before fourteen, with my friends Cendrars and Delaunay. We wore socks in different colors. I had one red sock, and the other blue, I believe. I had a green jacket and I protested. I made the impossible painting, with my head down, cutting off the heads of the characters. What do I have? It's true, I had 125 francs per month. Never, I was never unhappy. Today, I love young people. I can even say that I forgive all that they do, that slightly strange thing, for me. Time. In the mean time, they're so nice.

00:06:38

Jacques Chancel: Do you like people who work?

00:06:40

Marc Chagall: Yes, so much! Yes, you have to work, you have to work. You always have to work. You can't get... You lose time. You can't get the so-called ideal in life if you don't work... A work of art, you have to give more than 100%. More than that, you give 90%. It's not enough. So you have no talent. A young person, in all professions, you have to work through to the end. You have to work, absolutely, work a lot. It's not about making money,

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it's for quality. So if there's quality, life has meaning. That's it. Young people are happy when they go to work, when they work hard. Today, it's a little, that's maybe sort of missing.

00:07:24

Jacques Chancel: Are you comfortable today, in this era?

00:07:27

Marc Chagall: In this era? Oh, don't ask those questions. Well, I am. Um. This is going a little too far. I like to do fantastic things with my paintings, write books, poems, and do so-called fantastic things. Spitting in someone's face? I'm not interested in that. And I don't like reading about it in the newspapers. Every time, and even on the radio, the story is always "killed over there, someone." It's rare to hear "Someone wrote..." on the radio. "Someone wrote a great poem today, or someone wrote..." It's true that on France Culture, you talk about that, but still "someone was killed, someone was hurt." I can't listen to that radio often, with the horrifying news.

00:08:19

Jacques Chancel: But war does exist.

00:08:21

Marc Chagall: Yes, war. Yes, war. Young people and old people make war. War. Why not read Shakespeare and the Bible? Look at Rembrandt all the time? Why not go to the museum a little bit, see people, go to the museum, see how it's all done? There would be less war. I don't know. Listen to Mozart all the time. There are Mozart concerts, then, you go out. Always nonsense, the same thing. Why do we work? Why did Mozart compose? Shakespeare and Rembrandt, why? Why did he do it? Who was the Bible written for? Why did the prophets talk all the time? Useless. War again. I don't know. I can't. Don't force me to speak.

00:09:06

Jacques Chancel: You were saying earlier, Chagall, that you were envious of young people. Is that because you miss your younger years? They must have been wonderful.

00:09:14

Marc Chagall: Wonderful [laughs], wonderful, wonderful.

00:09:18

Jacques Chancel: Chaotic?

00:09:18

Marc Chagall: I'm envious of young people, because I see, you know well. I see, I see before me, I see a lifetime. But when I was young, life was behind me. Now, life is before me. I'm envious. I love, I love young people and that's all. What do you want? I love them. I love young people. I'm not saying, they do those other things a little bit... I shouldn't say it—I did things too when I was 20 years old. Maybe.

00:09:48

Jacques Chancel: Would you go down the same path that led you to where you are today?

00:09:52

Marc Chagall: Oh my oh my, questions... It would be kind of exhausting, maybe, because I

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would almost do the same thing. Except, I wasted a lot of time. I was often in love, you know. So I left it like that. It's a little... I shouldn't say it. Yeah, I wasn't painting anymore, I wasn't keeping myself busy... How do I put it?

00:10:18

Jacques Chancel: With my work?

00:10:20

Marc Chagall: I was busy mostly with work. Yes, I was less so-called romantic. I was romantic but, in my studio, I was working all the time.

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Jacques Chancel: And when you were young, you were passionate about just one thing? Painting.

00:10:36

Marc Chagall: Oh yes. I didn't know what to do in life. You know, when I saw my dad, my father worked hard. He had eight children.

00:10:43

Jacques Chancel: Where were you at that time? What city were you in?

00:10:46

Marc Chagall: I was born in Vitebsk. It's a city that was known only when Napoleon was there. It was destroyed. Hitler went there. Otherwise, it isn't known. I paint it in my work. And I saw that my father worked so hard to earn a living and I didn't know what to do, really. I felt that I couldn't do what he did. I'm not talented. I'm not a good student. Oh, I shouldn't say it for the young people. I stuttered because I'd been bitten by a dog, but I stuttered. I don't know what to do. Only by chance, I saw someone. A student showed a drawing, something in black and white. I was mad, because he was a bad boy. He showed me the drawing. I asked, "What is it?" Because that, I felt, was a good job for me. You can go to the library, copy, you can also take an image and copy. It was only then that I understood that I could just scribble. That's it. It suits me. Well, I can't talk about my life.

00:11:58

Jacques Chancel: Are you pleased with yourself today, Chagall?

00:12:02

Marc Chagall: If my wife is happy...

00:12:04

Jacques Chancel: I saw her. I think she's happy.

00:12:05

Marc Chagall: [laughs] I smile all the time. If my wife isn't too tired, she's kind. I'm very happy. I told you that I love everyone. I'm happy. If I was sick I wouldn't have you here. And I'm happy today. The sky, the house. Only, you can't read the newspaper too often. I'm not going to promote not reading the newspaper, especially the front page, the titles, you know that...

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00:12:35

Jacques Chancel: Chagall, I'm going to utter some sentences that you've said. You must have said them in 1910. You say, "And I arrived in Paris, as if driven by destiny. Words from my heart boiled up into my mouth, almost smothering me. I stuttered. The words were fighting to get out, impatient to bathe in the lights of Paris, to grow wings." Was that when you arrived? When you arrived in France?

00:13:05

Marc Chagall: Yes, yes! Wonderful! And you know, it's wonderful. I left from Vitebsk, Russia. The journey lasted four days. I went to the border of Berlin. I was... I won't speak. Or tell you the questions I was asked. Because yes, I went in, and at the Gare du Nord train station, I was blinded by all those cafés and all those people sitting around and a luminosity that was... The impressionists showed that. And then the first, the artists before 1914 showed those luminosities. Delaunay, Léger, Monet, all that was... I was blinded. It was the first time in my life I was blinded, it must be said. Since then, I felt it was over, over, over. I have to live and die in France.

00:13:58

Jacques Chancel: And those lights of Paris, they lit up your life too, your entire body of work.

00:14:03

Marc Chagall: Incredible. The light of... That's why they came in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The artists of the world came here. I like to look at poor Van Gogh. I apologize for uttering the name Van Gogh here. He had brown hair, he was dark. He lit up when he came here. And all the others. I won't name them. Not for the job, critiquing.

00:14:29

Jacques Chancel: Are you capable of being mean, Chagall?

00:14:31

Marc Chagall: Ha ha ha ha ha! Oh yes, it's true that I don't say that to everyone. You see, it's nice with you. I'm smiling. It isn't easy to come to my home, meaning...

00:14:43

Jacques Chancel: You're very discreet, mostly, you want to protect your life...

00:14:50

Marc Chagall: I don't know, protect... Oh yes, I have to keep working, but I'm not mean. I don't know what mean is. Why? If someone isn't pleasant, I don't receive it. That's all. I'm not... we don't trade, I don't sell anything, I remain... My God... nothing. I don't have a reason to be mean. When they say terrible things in the newspaper, well then, I'm mean to myself, like everyone, you too.

00:15:21

Jacques Chancel: You were saying again: "My days crawl by on the Place de la Concorde and near the Luxembourg gardens. I look at Danton and Watteau. Paris, you are my second Vitebsk!"

00:15:31

Marc Chagall: What else can I say? I was saying, it's already imprinted. It's imprinted. Deep

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down, I have nothing to say. Just read over there. I have no secrets, you know. I did my paintings. And there, in my paintings, if you feel it, everything is there. There's nothing else to add. I have to keep working, of course.

00:15:53

Jacques Chancel: What if I said of Chagall's paintings that it's illogical within logic, but still with a prodigious lucidity.

00:16:02

Marc Chagall: That [laughs], that's it, you're adding to it. To me, you know, I'm talking to you about life. So-called art that doesn't have a certain element of the illogical. It isn't art. If art is only real, if there isn't a certain unreality, it isn't real. I say that when I was still a boy, in 1907, when I was asked, "But what is that? Why did I put dead people in the street, and on the roofs, there, the musicians?" and whatever you want. I felt that beauty was upside-down and the head is cut off. It's because I felt that. We need... I can't explain it. Maybe Freud explained it well, after Breton came and we did the illogical... we did surrealism. But to me, you know, when there isn't a certain unreal, illogical element, there is no reality. I can't explain it. I'm not a theorist.

00:16:59

Jacques Chancel: There are dreams and there is escape in your paintings.

00:17:02

Marc Chagall: Oh yes, of course, everything is a dream. Our life, you know. Thinking, it's funny, on this planet we're in the air, aren't we? We don't fall. Is it a dream? I don't know. When I was a boy, I felt that we were in the air. That's why. Before the astronauts, they went into the sky in my homeland, characters. You see, I was asked how come he's in the air, but we walk in the air anyway. Yes, there are so-called fantastic things, in life and in art. We need that, but we mustn't cultivate them on purpose. You're born, we're born that way. Maybe we can feel, you could say... well, I didn't learn anything in my life, except when I got married to my wife. You learn from the moment you're born. It's in you, with your blood. I didn't go to a university to learn things. I was a bad student. I didn't learn anything. I learned with my parents. My father, my mother. Yes, it was, like I wrote it, it was school. When I saw my dad, my father working hard. He drinks tea and makes cigarettes. Tired. When I saw my mother cooking for eight children. That was school for me. And then I left. I would go out. I saw the sky with the stars and such nice little girls, whom I didn't touch. That was school. And all my paintings are there. No academy. How to draw? I would rather draw poorly, draw very badly. Not drawing well is good.

00:18:44

Jacques Chancel: In a few sentences, you just told the story of your painting.

00:18:48

Marc Chagall: Ha ha!

00:18:48

Jacques Chancel: It's true, you feel it leave. You feel the little girls at school, you feel the whole family growing up and everyone getting agitated. You're very curious, Chagall.

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00:19:00

Marc Chagall: What does curious mean?

00:19:00

Jacques Chancel: You're curious about things. You know how to look.

00:19:03

Marc Chagall: I don't know Einstein, you know, nor Freud. They are great wise men. Einstein was shown on television recently. It was truly sad. I was shaken up. He's a man, an incredible man. But I'm a poor man. I'm just, I don't steal, I don't kill, I love people. I work almost for free, if you will. I don't like it. I don't want anything. Yes, like I told you, I receive a lot of honor. That...

00:19:40

Jacques Chancel: Is it pleasant?

00:19:42

Marc Chagall: Oh yes, when you feel love, you know, that's very, very important. Oh yes, love, I say it all the time, that's all there is, that's all there is. If I could say those words, if young people would listen to me, I would beg them, love is all there is. Because there is no love today. I speak of love... because the reason we all have nightmares is because that love isn't here today. It's horrible.

00:20:11

Jacques Chancel: Chagall, are there any other countries that could have given you what France gave you?

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Marc Chagall: Oh... That doesn't exist. We came to France with the nineteenth and twentieth century. Here, like back then, we went to Italy. My sponsor, when he sent me, he said, "Go to Rome." I didn't go to Rome. I went to Paris. My God, I can't explain it. These days I see the air and the trees. It's like Cézanne, it's Monet. It's very complicated. I can't... I can't imagine going, I don't know to which country. For now, it's France. They came, all of the people who came here, they live here.

00:21:04

Jacques Chancel: You're French.

00:21:07

Marc Chagall: Of course. What do you expect me to be? I'm not Turkish. I'm French. I was born in Russia. Maybe one day they'll show my paintings and maybe they'll show them and they'll see that I'm not a man who... not a man who was fleeing a country for reasons... I went to Paris to find the color blue, and white. All the colors that I felt, that are here in France. Russia was black... a little like... Pardon me, I'm going to say Van Gogh's name again. He came from Holland where it was dark. He came to France and all the others.

00:22:00

Jacques Chancel: A Chagall museum in Moscow?

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Marc Chagall: Oh... What are you saying? No, you mustn't say that. Chagall museum... There

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are paintings by me, maybe 21 to 25. I don't know many. Old ones. My God, you mustn't speak. The only thing I'd like, perhaps, one day, I'd like it if in my home town... My Vitebsk, poor Vitebsk where I was even commissioner of Fine Arts. Back then I founded... Maybe I'd like, if there's a museum over there, if there was a painting, two or three, a little piece of myself. My house. Apparently it still exists. There, it exists, a piece... Someone sent me a photograph. I might like that. It was a little weakness, but I won't say that, I won't.

00:22:47

Jacques Chancel: Would you like to return to your home town? And have you been back?

00:22:52

Marc Chagall: Oh, I went in... I went in 1914, for the exhibition in Berlin, and to see my fiancée Bella. To see. Because my wife, these days, she's my second wife, whose name is Vava. I went there and I stayed because of the war, the revolution, until 1922. And well, since then, I haven't been back.

00:23:19

Jacques Chancel: You're famous in your lifetime. That must really be something.

00:23:25

Marc Chagall: [laughs] I don't know what famous is, sir. You are kind to me.

00:23:29

Jacques Chancel: Well, there's a Chagall retrospective. There are museums.

00:23:31

Marc Chagall: There is... It's Malraux, yes you know, Malraux. It's him, of course. And he's the one who asked me to do the Opera House ceiling. I won't forget. It's true, de Gaulle, de Gaulle agreed with him too. Oh yes, and then... And then what did, the Biblical Message, he encouraged the construction of the building, the Biblical Message in Nice. Yes and the other government ministers are nice to me.

00:24:13

Jacques Chancel: Who are your painter friends today?

00:24:16

Marc Chagall: My friends?

00:24:17

Jacques Chancel: Yes.

00:24:17

Marc Chagall: You know, I don't get out much, but I love... There's my wife who is an incredible person. And then, friends, you, yourself, you're my friend. Why not? You're so nice to me, so you're my friend. All good people are my friends. We'll come to my house tomorrow, the day after tomorrow. People. I receive. Good people, with good thoughts, are my friends. I can't receive, of course, everyone. And I can't go to lunch or dinner when I come to Paris.

00:24:49

Jacques Chancel: Is it important to you to meet people you don't know?

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00:24:54

Marc Chagall: Oh yes, if I discover something that's enjoyable to me, I'm very happy and very happy. But I have to work anyway. That's hard. We did an exhibition. Don't believe that I'm happy about the exhibition. I came once to see, and I have doubts. It's a great honor, at the Grand Palais.

00:25:22

Jacques Chancel: You deserve it.

00:25:23

Marc Chagall: If you say so. You are kind.

00:25:27

Jacques Chancel: When you look at one of your paintings, Chagall.

00:25:31

Marc Chagall: I don't understand anything. Nothing at all.

00:25:33

Jacques Chancel: You don't understand?

00:25:34

Marc Chagall: No. I'm like I'm passing in front of my paintings. I don't know anything. Maybe when I saw old paintings, very old from 1909, even 1907, I was stunned. I was wonderfully young. I loved that incredible youthfulness that could be felt in the line, in the color. It stuns me. In general, every time, when I see a painting from 10 years ago, I say I had strength. I had courage. Well, don't ask me.

00:26:10

Jacques Chancel: There will be a musical break. Chagall chose Mozart's Symphony No. 40. For those who are just joining us, I'll remind you that my guest today is the great painter Chagall. And in your paintings, Chagall, you always write Marc in smaller lettering. Why?

00:26:30

Marc Chagall: Oh yes. That question is a little...

00:26:32

Jacques Chancel: Yes, I noticed.

00:26:33

Marc Chagall: Strange... Yes, yes, yes, I put "Marc," yes but, I can't answer you. I think maybe there's are some other Chagalls, maybe. I put "Marc" too. Do you think "Chagall" is enough on its own, without the "Marc"?

00:26:49

Jacques Chancel: Oh yes, completely. Chagall, I haven't said "Marc" a single time since the beginning of this conversation. Marc Chagall.

00:26:59

Marc Chagall: In general, I just say that my paintings, I sign them when they leave, but all my paintings are never signed. They remain without a signature, and "Marc" isn't important, it's

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not more than a Raphaël, poor man. It's nothing. It doesn't count! It's kind of silly. I don't know. It doesn't count.

00:27:19

Jacques Chancel: Do you believe that in 200 or 300 years we'll still be talking about Chagall?

00:27:24

Marc Chagall: Oh... [laughs] You're asking great questions today! What do you want me to say? My God, what a question! You mustn't. You're a strange character. Asking questions like that. Who would dare to answer that? My God. But listen, I have to tell you one thing. All those museums, everything we have today, it's preserved. If there's no war, no catastrophe, why not? Paintings can remain hanging in place. For better or for worse. If it's Rembrandt, that's something else, but if there's a fire tomorrow, it will burn. If it's in the museum somewhere, it will be over there. Painting by X or Y, you'll see the paintings in 200 years as well! But if there's an earthquake or an atomic bomb, nothing will be left. That's all I can tell you. It doesn't mean I have values. Even you, if you scribble something, it will stay in the building for 200 years.

00:28:18

Jacques Chancel: I don't think my painting will be hung on display [laughs].

00:28:20

Marc Chagall: But you're asking questions and I can't answer. In 200 years... If we don't throw it out, a town hall, people, then it will stay on location. Otherwise you won't see it. You can't speak of quality. We don't know how to say anything. We're not allowed to talk about quality. That something is wonderful... Today, you think, it's great. But in 50 years, maybe it will be nothing at all. I'm not speaking about myself, because if that's how it is, I won't roll over in my grave ten times. Ten times. It's not because... by modesty. Um. Because I told myself that I was terribly wrong. I still, I don't feel like I'm completely wrong. No. Maybe that's not modest on my part. Yes, because with age, you know, with age. Before, I didn't know anything, but with age, I think, well, a tiny piece of your life, of your activity... It seems like it might pass by something, but you have to be advanced in age. And be careful. I have the feeling that maybe a little piece... It might pass by something. A tiny piece. That's all I can say. And to keep, there mustn't be war, earthquakes. It's the director... it will be on location. If there's room.

00:29:53

Jacques Chancel: Chagall, others in your place would be extremely vain.

00:29:57

Marc Chagall: What? Tired?

00:29:58

Jacques Chancel: Vain, proud in your position.

00:30:01

Marc Chagall: No, no, no. That's useless. It's completely useless, sir. As long as you have a kind wife, and you're in decent health, and the sky is clear. And you see France, grandiose

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France, with this climate and this atmosphere. Vanity. I don't know what vanity is. I don't know what it is.

00:30:24

Jacques Chancel: Do you prefer the word *love*?

00:30:26

Marc Chagall: Oh yes, for sure. It's... I'm repeating myself. That's all there is on earth. The only policy. Read the Bible if you want. The Songs and all that, and Shakespeare. Look at Rembrandt and Mozart. Listen to Mozart. You can go crazy. What else is there? I don't know what that is. You lose your health, you lose time. I don't understand. With love, you can get anything. You can get absolutely everything.

00:31:07

Jacques Chancel: Do you have a family?

00:31:11

Marc Chagall: Yes, I still have... I have sisters who are in Russia, and lots of grandchildren. Other sisters who died during the war, in Leningrad, who died, you know, murdered. I still have those poor sisters who love me a lot, and the children. Yes, I'd like to see them maybe a bit. I don't know how to do it. They love me so much, the poor women... And then in Vitebsk, there are the tombs. But that's over. It's gone. It's destroyed. Like I said, in my town there is, a piece of my childhood home remained. Two pieces even, someone sent me photographs. They sent me photographs. I'd like to see it, but I can't weep, you know that. I can't do that anymore. I can't see my sisters anymore and see the house. I can't weep anymore.

00:32:24

Jacques Chancel: There is your wife.

00:32:26

Marc Chagall: My wife?

00:32:27

Jacques Chancel: She's your family. She's here.

00:32:29

Marc Chagall: Yes, you said it well. Thank you. Oh yes! Oh yes! And that's incredible!

00:32:35

Jacques Chancel: I looked at you earlier, Chagall...

00:32:37

Marc Chagall: Oh yes, that woman.

00:32:38

Jacques Chancel: Sometimes you think about a lot of things. You escape. We can tell your eyes go elsewhere. And your wife arrives and immediately your face brightens. And you're in love, but a young man in love.

00:32:51

Marc Chagall: Ha ha ha ha! Young man, why not? Of course, I can make mistakes! It's really,

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I'm in love, that's true, because I look, I look at you, I look at people, I look at women, I look at almost everyone. And my wife, my second wife, because before it was... I lost her. I lost the first one in New York, where I spent the war in New York, you know. Unfortunately, Hitler's war, and I married her when I was maybe 19 years old. The second... I'm not supposed to talk about it much...

00:33:30

Jacques Chancel: And then, Chagall, there is your daughter, your three grandchildren because you're a grandfather.

00:33:36

Marc Chagall: Yes, yes, they're charming. It's charming, it's really both girls. It's beauty, and the boy, I hope they'll be important people like...

00:33:47

Jacques Chancel: Painters?

00:33:47

Marc Chagall: No, no, no, no. The girls... The girls are 16. The boy is 18. And my daughter Ida, she really loves me. She loves her dad.

00:33:57

Jacques Chancel: What are their names?

00:33:58

Marc Chagall: Ida.

00:33:59

Jacques Chancel: Your grandchildren?

00:34:00

Marc Chagall: Oh, the grandchildren are named Bella and Meret. And the boy's name is Pit.

00:34:08

Jacques Chancel: Are you a good grandfather?

00:34:10

Marc Chagall: They're good children, listen. It's charming.

00:34:15

Jacques Chancel: The art of being a grandfather is something else.

00:34:17

Marc Chagall: Yes, there are. They're nice.

00:34:25

Jacques Chancel: In 1910, when you were at La Ruche, you were a free man like the others: Max Jacob, Apollinaire. Are you still free?

00:34:34

Marc Chagall: Yes, I was... I was very wealthy, with 125 francs per month. I was the richest man at La Ruche, the wealthiest. Modigliani lived there, Soutine, and everyone thought I was a rich man. They would knock on my door. They'd say, "Chagall, give me a little beefsteak

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today.” So we bought calf’s liver. The only thing I could do well was calf’s liver. Then Cendrars would come over often. He didn’t have any money. From time to time, we would discover money. I offered him lunch. It wasn’t expensive. One franc. For a franc, you can get lunch. Then I worked all night long. You know, I spent my days walking, to see exhibitions, see the museum. I came back to work at night.

00:35:21

Jacques Chancel: Chagall, do you think Modigliani and Soutine knew, could know that they would become what they are today?

00:35:30

Marc Chagall: No, no, no, of course not. But I think, you know that. I sort of have to tell you. The feeling of becoming someone important was hidden in us. Oh yes, it must be said. It would be nonsense to hide it. I remember Cendrars for example, who came to read poetry at La Ruche. I didn’t understand very much, maybe the grandeur of his poetry, but I felt, he felt, he was, he also wanted to be, at least as well-known as Apollinaire. And all those poems in *Les Soirées de Paris* weren’t printed right away. He wanted to be a great man and he was great to me. He was well known, maybe Max Jacob too. Yes, Max Jacob wanted [to be] well known. There were no artists who didn’t think they’d become well known. That didn’t exist, greatness, by which I mean to have perfection. Modigliani of course... While I was over there, he wasn’t painting. He was vaguely doing sculpture. And Soutine came. He wanted to have my workshop. When I left for Berlin, to work. Of course, he too, like many others, thought they would become great men, which means they would be perfect. That doesn’t exist. A poet, an artist, or even in another branch, not wanting to become well-known, perfect, I don’t think that exists.

00:36:53

Jacques Chancel: Chagall, do you like Picasso’s painting?

00:36:58

Marc Chagall: Listen, if he has a bit of sympathy for me, well then, I would tell you that I love what he does. I also accept it from him, on that condition. Is that good? Answering like that?

00:37:12

Jacques Chancel: Yes, I understood. Today, do you think about your future?

00:37:19

Marc Chagall: You are, you ask such questions... Really, you’re a kind specialist to ask questions. Listen, once again, if my wife tells me, “You’ve done good things,” that’s my future. And listen, I still had signs of sympathy. Even in France. That doesn’t mean that it secures my future. I liked it. Let’s not talk about the future. I don’t know. You’re young. You’ll see later on, for example.

00:37:51

Jacques Chancel: For you, what have been the greatest friendships in this life? Who have your best friends been? Well, there are those from La Ruche, of course.

00:38:00

Marc Chagall: At La Ruche. You know, I didn’t have time. I worked all the time and on top of

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that, no, I went every time to collect 125 francs. And I remember when in the Crédit Lyonnais bank, I was paid, they would ask me, “How do you want it? In gold or in bills?” I would say, give it to me in paper because otherwise I would lose it. They gave me five, five little coins, as big as my fingernail. Like this. Well, I was afraid I would lose them. I was very happy. Four weeks, three weeks, I was happy.

00:38:30

Jacques Chancel: Friendships, friends, real friends.

00:38:33

Marc Chagall: Well listen, Cendrars was nice to me. Very nice. And I liked [to be] with him because he spoke a little Russian, and I wasn't very good at French, like now maybe. And then I was friends with Delaunay because his wife, Sonia, spoke Russian too. He liked me a little bit. It's true that all those people told me, “Chagall, you're acting.” They criticized me and, “You don't know how to do the job,” they told me. I was kind of happy. And I would get letters from Russia, from my fiancée. But in that case, if I worked, it was friendship. I don't know. You're my friend too. Everyone is my friend. Why? I could go out in the street and stop in front of a peasant and say, “You're my friend,” that he has an admirable face. He's my friend.

00:39:27

Jacques Chancel: Today, do you sometimes look at beautiful women?

00:39:32

Marc Chagall: Oh no, no, no, no beautiful women. I've seen beautiful women, because when I see women, I look at them with my wife! Women, why not, but I love my wife Vava, that's once. Let's not talk.

00:39:49

Jacques Chancel: Do you work a lot, Chagall?

00:39:51

Marc Chagall: I have to work a lot but...

00:39:53

Jacques Chancel: How many hours a day?

00:39:55

Marc Chagall: Oh... I get up at 8:00, then I go to the studio. I read, I look, I rub. I don't know. There isn't much of a system with me, you know. No, no, no. You have to work a lot. But that doesn't mean you have a system. You can't be in a hurry. Yes, when I have a so-called commission then I'm very nervous. Oh yes, I'm nervous, with the ceiling and everything, and this, and that. Stained glass windows for Jerusalem, mosaics for Nice, for Metz, I was nervous. I may have had a system. I was driven. I was driven when I have a so-called commission. But other than that, well, I work.

00:40:32

Jacques Chancel: Earlier, you told me, “I came to Paris to find blue.” Are there colors that, in a way, belong to certain countries?

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00:40:40

Marc Chagall: Yes, yes. To certain countries, to certain people, do you mean? Yes, yes, yes, I think blue suits me. I don't know why. With the blues, yes it's true, the blues, white, black, it's not bad. Yes, perhaps we're born, we're born with a certain color.

00:41:00

Jacques Chancel: What if one day someone had told you you'd become a critic? You're going to critique Chagall's body of work.

00:41:09

Marc Chagall: Oh no, not that, not that. I can critique the works by other artists, I think I understand a good deal. Maybe it isn't modest, but not me. Nothing, absolutely nothing.

00:41:23

Jacques Chancel: Is there still a painting you prefer?

00:41:25

Marc Chagall: Nothing.

00:41:27

Jacques Chancel: You told me earlier, "I'm happy with the Opera House ceiling."

00:41:30

Marc Chagall: Yes.

00:41:31

Jacques Chancel: Because it was different. It was a whole. It was already a fresco.

00:41:35

Marc Chagall: You're unbelievable [laughs]... You know, I worked incredibly hard. But when I saw, when I saw de Gaulle himself, in the box seat, he was pointing it out to a prince next to him, in the box seat. He said, "Look at that." And when Malraux accepted it, how could you expect me not to be a little proud? Oh yes... Yes, when he accepted, it was hard for me to do that. I even had to do several sketches, several mockups, because my wife told me that it wasn't nice to do just one mockup. And after inviting Malraux to choose, what to choose, you have to do more than one. I had to do more than one. It was hard, I made several and he chose. That I have to say a little... I'm happy when it's done. When it's done in Jerusalem, well, I'm also a little happy. Please excuse me for telling you this. I have... in Metz cathedral, there are some of those. I'm happy about that too. And we were [...]. The stained glass window, you know. I'm happy, you see, I'm happy. When something gets done, something is placed somewhere. Do you see? That doesn't mean it will live. I don't know. I'm happy if something is done, if something happens. That's all.

00:42:51

Jacques Chancel: Well, there are Chagalls all around the globe.

00:42:54

Marc Chagall: I don't know. At any rate, I know that... in Parliament, in Jerusalem, there are tapestries. I'm happy. I accomplished something. Of course, if in the ceiling, from my point of view, you know, people grumbled, I was criticized for the ceiling, don't think... If I felt that there were flaws there, I would ask permission to go up to the ceiling and correct them. I

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wouldn't be at ease. But for now, I don't have that feeling. It's kindly accepted. I hope it will stay there. Maybe. I don't know.

00:43:32

Jacques Chancel: Earlier, you were saying, "I didn't go to any school, any academy." Everything you've learned, you've learned on the street, by watching people.

00:43:41

Marc Chagall: Yes, my parents, my house. Parents, parents above all. The house, parents, honest people, and then friends. I had friends. Oh yes. A few friends, boys. And in France, I saw people work at markets. Oh my God, I'm talking about 1910 to 1911. I really loved that method. You only need to see the paintings by Chardin and Poussin, and Monet... It's wonderful. That's what France is. You know, to make that, to make Cézanne and to make Monet... And make, you know, French cuisine, those beefsteaks and all that [laughs]! You have to be a genius. That's what art is.

00:44:26

Jacques Chancel: Do you know how to cook?

00:44:28

Marc Chagall: I do not know how to cook. I like eating. I mustn't eat too much. I love good things and I love the difference in the cuisine, French cuisine and in other countries. There isn't much Cézanne, you know, or Monet. There's none left. I mean, I had told you as much.

00:44:51

Jacques Chancel: Do you ever get jealous?

00:44:55

Marc Chagall: I'm jealous of... Yes, that's true. 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!

00:45:16

Jacques Chancel: You're even younger than I am.

00:45:19

Marc Chagall: [laughs]

00:45:20

Jacques Chancel: Thank you, Chagall.

00:45:22

Marc Chagall: Thanks to you, sir.