

Chagall

I and the Village

Illustrated on page 161

James Johnson Sweeney, Marc Chagall, 1946,
pages 7, 15

When Chagall first arrived in Paris in 1910, cubism held the center of the stage. French art was still dominated by the materialist outlook of the 19th century. Fifty years earlier naturalism and realism had opened the way to impressionism. Impressionism's analyses of light on objects had led to cubism's analyses of the objects themselves. Little by little the manner of representing an object had come to have a greater interest than the subject—the physical character of the painting more importance than its power to awake associational responses in the observer. Chagall arrived from the East with a ripe color gift, a fresh, unashamed response to sentiment, a feeling for simple poetry and a sense of humor. He brought with him a notion of painting quite foreign to that esteemed at the time in Paris. His first recognition there came not from painters, but from poets such as Blaise Cendrars and Guillaume Apollinaire. To him the cubists' conception seemed "earth-bound." He felt it was "necessary to change nature not only materially and from the outside, but also from within, ideologically, without fear of what is known as 'literature.'" . . .

[In] *I and the Village* . . . cubism's respect for the plane of canvas is . . . clearly illustrated. . . . And this picture offers an ideal exemplification of Chagall's statement: "I fill up the empty space in my canvas as the structure of my picture requires with a body or an object according to my humor." The composite strikes one first, then the details: first the large profiles, then smaller reminders of life in Vitebsk: the milkmaid, the farmer and his companion and the neighborhood church. Chagall, like the expressionists, uses color and line to underscore emotion, but also makes the details serve as emotional comments, footnotes or glosses.

timentality, they became for a very wide public the symbol of all that was new, terrifying, and seemingly ridiculous in contemporary art. . . .

That so violently launched a movement should come out of Italy is not altogether surprising, for in no other country did the youth feel so completely subjugated to the past, deprived of a world of its own. The complacent Italian public was content with guarding a tradition and obstinately refused to notice new events in art and literature, at home or elsewhere.¹

As for the term Futurism, there is no mystery about its origin, nor was it a word thrust by chance upon the artists as were "Impressionism," "Fauvism," and "Cubism." It was coined in the autumn of 1908 by the bilingual Italian poet, editor, and promoter of art, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, to give ideological coherence to the advanced tendencies in poetry he was furthering in the controversial periodical, *Poesia*. . . .

In February 1909, Carlo Carrà, Umberto Boccioni, and Luigi Russolo, met with Marinetti . . . and proposed that painters also be included in the movement. With Marinetti's enthusiastic support the three young artists drew up a manifesto of their own. . . . On the manifesto's "official" publication dated 11 February 1910, appeared . . . the name of Giacomo Balla, . . . teacher of both Severini and Boccioni. These five, Balla, Boccioni, Carrà, Russolo, and Severini, became "the Futurist painters." . . .

Because the Futurist painters early adapted to their own use some of the formal language of Cubism, their painting has often been considered a kind of speeded up version of that classically oriented movement. In spite of the obvious testimony of Futurist writing and, more significantly, the painting itself, critics have persisted in seeing Futurism as an analytical procedure like early Cubism, differing only in its aim to represent motion, a goal better realized in moving pictures. . . .

Motion for the Futurist painter was not an objective fact to be analyzed, but simply a modern means for embodying a strong personal expression. As different as their procedures were, the Futurists came closer in their aims to the *Brücke* or, better, to [Vasily] Kandinsky and the *Blaue Reiter*, than to the Cubists. And in their iconoclasm and concern for the vagaries of the mind, they had not a little in common with Dada and the Surrealists. . . .

"Dynamism" was a magical word for the Futurists. It signified the difference between life and death, between participation in an evolving, expanding universe and withdrawal into an eddy of personal isolation. They looked upon the world with the same eager expectation as the Transcendentalists, but the world they saw was not the quieting realm of tree and sky; it was the world of modern science that triumphed over nature, promising always something new in its rapid development to-

wards an undetermined end. Dynamism was at its heart. Theirs was a transcendentalism founded on a whole new universe. "We are the primitives of a new, completely transformed, sensibility," they boasted. The new sensibility accorded emotional value to a mechanized world. . . .

Futurism was not a style but an impulse, an impulse that was translated into poetry, the visual arts, music, and eventually into politics. "Futurism is only the praise, or if you prefer, the exaltation of originality and of personality," Marinetti declared to an interviewer in 1911; "the rest is only argument, trumpeting, and blows of the fist."² The nature of the Futurist impulse in politics, it might be added, should not influence the assessment of its achievement in art.

Umberto Boccioni

States of Mind I: The Farewells. 1911

States of Mind II: Those Who Go. 1911

States of Mind III: Those Who Stay. 1911

Illustrated on pages 162, 163

K. G. Pontus Hultén, *The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age*, 1968, pages 60–61, 62

Boccioni was probably the most contemplative as well as the most gifted of the Futurists. Realizing how complex would be the interference of machines in people's emotional lives, he could not content himself with the over-enthusiasm displayed by some of his colleagues for the mechanical world.

In a lecture delivered at the Circolo Internazionale Artistico in Rome in May, 1911, Boccioni developed the idea of "the painting of states of mind." Before going to Paris with Carlo Carrà in the autumn of 1911 to see the most recent trends in art and prepare for the Futurist exhibition that was to take place the following winter, he had already exemplified his aims in a first version of *States of Mind*. He described these paintings to Guillaume Apollinaire: "one expressing departure, the other arrival. . . . To mark the difference in feeling I have not used in my painting of arrival a single line from the painting of departure."¹

Boccioni's early sketches and first canvases of *States of Mind* were still somewhat under the influence of Edvard Munch. Highly charged with symbolism, they were filled with expressive lines that tellingly convey a sense of nostalgia and anxiety. After his encounter with the Cubists in Paris, he reorganized the composition of the three paintings, *Those Who Stay*, *The Farewells*, and *Those Who Go*, to give them a more precise spatial clarity. . . .

Boccioni makes us realize that goodbyes in a railway station are not the same as those said at a stage-coach.