

The Museum of Modern Art

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Circle 5-8900 Cable: Modernart

No. 143

Friday, November 18, 1966

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ADVANCE ONLY

An exhibition of 40 drawings and watercolors by Marc Chagall for the ballet Aleko will be shown at The Museum of Modern Art from December 13 through February 19.

Aleko remains Chagall's most brilliant contribution to theatre design. It was the first ballet produced for the Ballet Theatre by the dancer and choreographer Leonide Massine. The world premiere took place at the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City on September 8, 1942; the first New York performance was at the Metropolitan Opera House on October 6 of the same year.

Chagall travelled from New York to Mexico to work with Massine and from the outset the production was, in every sense, a collaboration between the two Russian artists. The ballet, based on Pushkin's poem The Gypsies, tells of a Russian youth, Aleko, who, bored with city life, joins a band of gypsies and falls in love with Zemphira, daughter of the gypsy leader. She, however, tires of Aleko and falls in love with a young gypsy. Aleko discovers them embracing and, overcome by jealousy, loses his mind. In his delirium Aleko dreams a fantastic nightmare and actually kills Zemphira and her lover. The gypsy leader, heartbroken at his daughter's death, seeks not revenge but imposes a far greater punishment and banishes Aleko from gypsy life.

Chagall's brilliantly colored watercolors for the four scenes reflect successively the romance, the holiday atmosphere, the exuberance and the dramatic violence of the plot. The four scenes are: "Aleko and Zemphira by Moonlight," "The Carnival," "A Wheatfield on a Summer's Afternoon," and "A Fantasy of St. Petersburg."

In addition to the costumes of the three protagonists, Aleko, Zemphira and the gypsy lover, Chagall provides trappings for an acrobat, a baba, a bondura player, a coachman, a fortune teller, a lamplighter, a policeman, an army veteran, a poet and his beloved, a parade of society ladies and gentlemen, and numerous peasants and gypsies. To these are added a menagerie of beasts including a bear, a cat, a
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cow, fish, a fox, a horse, a rooster and a snake. In the spectacle of Aleko even candlesticks and trees are transformed into dancers.

John Martin, dance critic of the New York Times, wrote at the time of the ballet's opening in New York, "In a sense, however, it is Chagall who emerges as the hero of the evening. He has designed and painted with his own hand four superb backdrops, which are not actually good stage settings at all, but are wonderful works of art. Their sequence is independently dramatic and builds to a stunning climax. So exciting are they in their own right that more than once one wishes all those people would quit getting in front of them."

After its showing in New York, the exhibition, selected and installed by William S. Lieberman, Director of Drawings and Prints, will be shown throughout the United States under the auspices of the Museum's Department of Circulating Exhibitions.

Photographs and additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, and Lynn Traiger, Assistant Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019. Circle 5-8900.

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No. 151

FOR RELEASE:

Wednesday, December 14, 1966

PRESS PREVIEW:

Tuesday, December 13, 1966

11 a.m. - 4 p.m.

An exhibition of 40 drawings and watercolors by Marc Chagall created for the ballet Aleko, including four original designs for the background decor, eight sketches for the choreographer and 28 costume designs, will be on view at The Museum of Modern Art from December 13 through February 19, in the Auditorium Gallery.

The works in the exhibition were selected by William S. Lieberman, Director of the Department of Drawings and Prints, from the 67 designs created by Chagall in 1942 for the original production of Aleko, which were acquired by the Museum in 1945 for its Theatre Arts Collection, through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest.

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