

Marc Chagall, prints, monotypes, illustrated books

[text by Riva Castleman] published by **Gérald
Cramer**, printed by **Jacques Frélant**

Author

Chagall, Marc, 1887-1985

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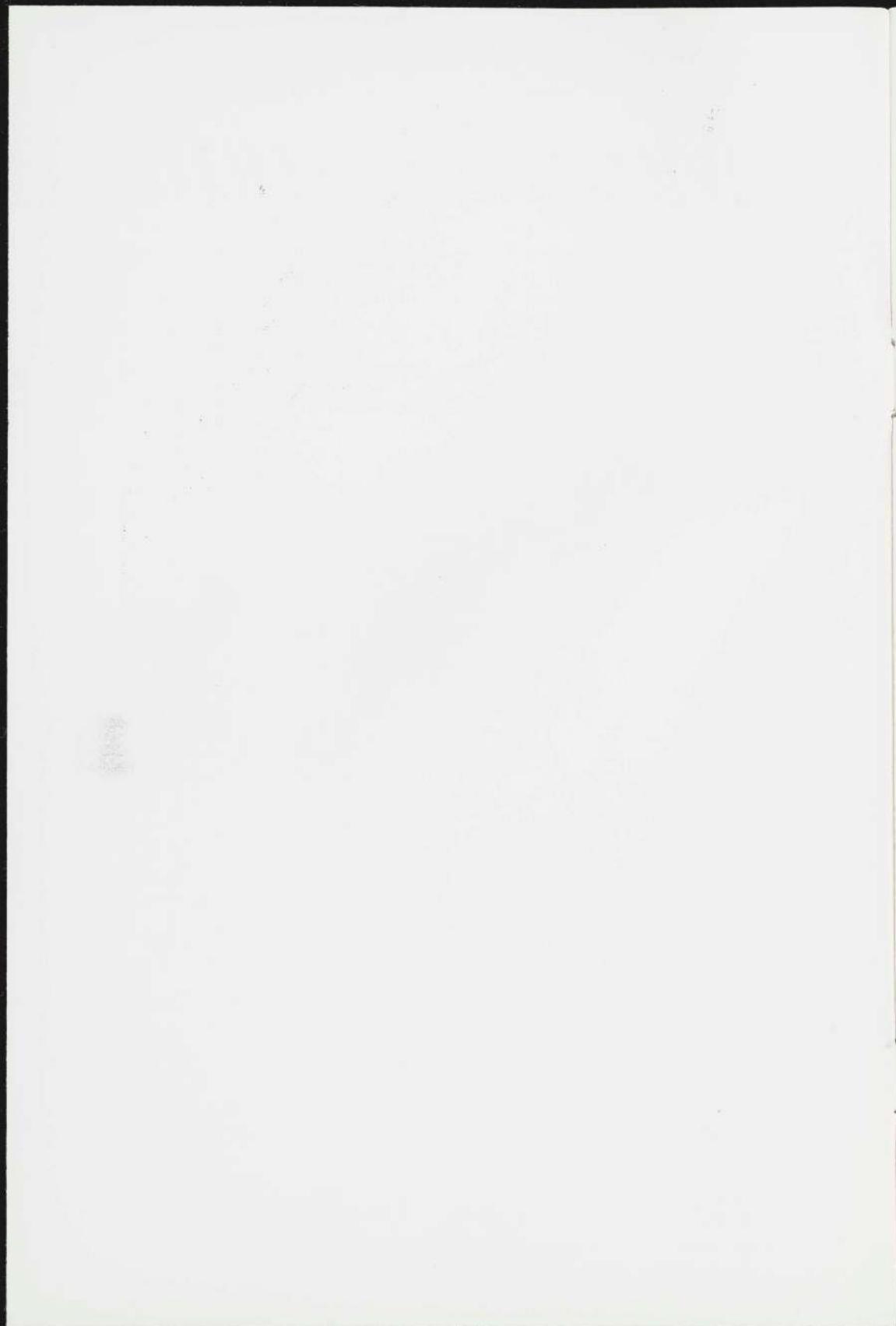
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Marc Chagall



Prints · Monotypes · Illustrated Books



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Published by Gérald Cramer · Printed by Jacques Frélaud



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Cover: 54. Psalm 5 from Psaumes de David.

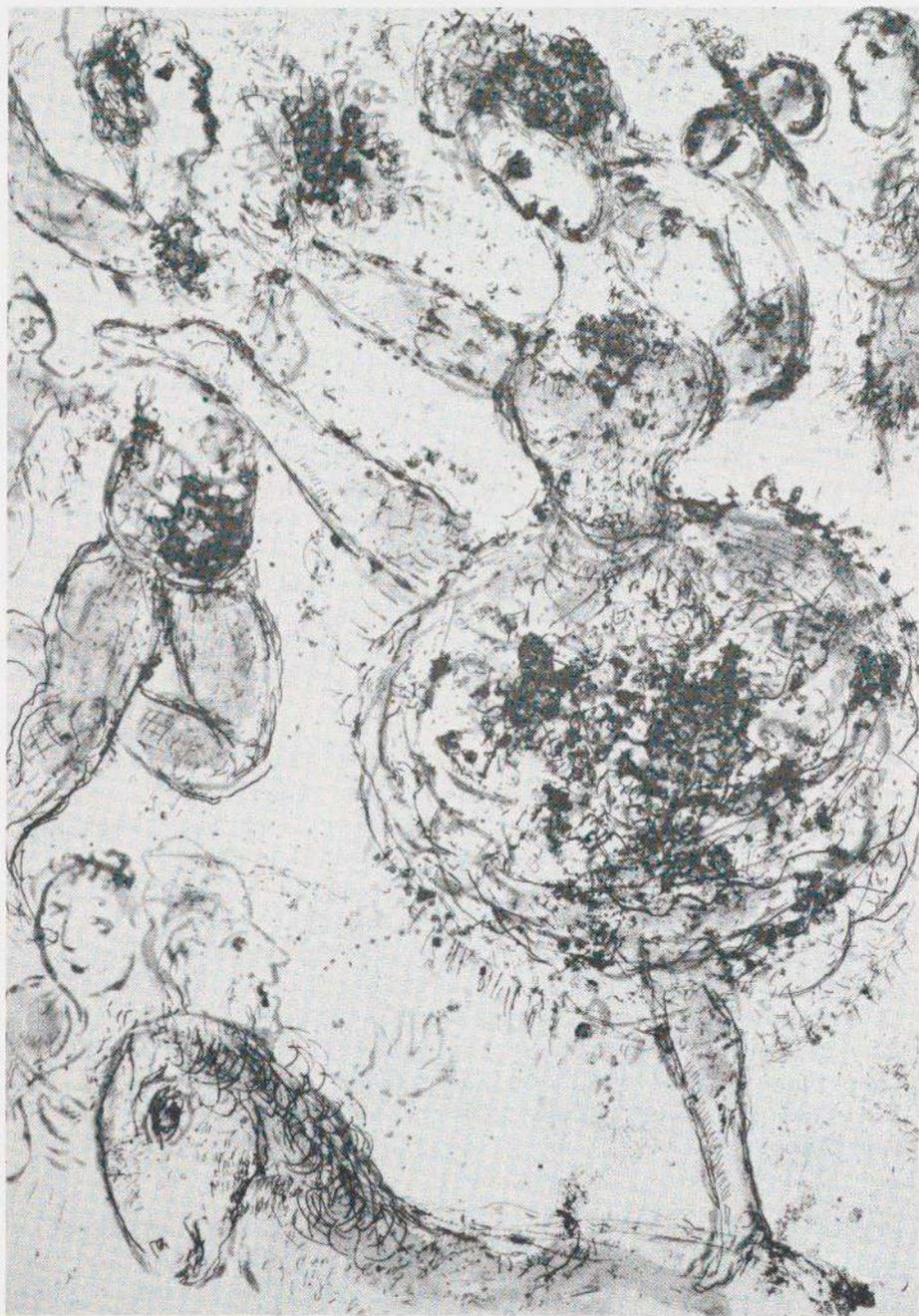
Title-page: 10. Artist and His Painting.

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I love to make prints," explained Marc Chagall. He had just shown his publisher, Gérald Cramer, fifty copper plates that he had filled with the unhesitating, forceful scratches that were to comprise the etched illustrations for two works: Psaumes de David (Psalms) and Les Songses (Dreams). Awaiting the expert collaboration of the printer Jacques Frélaud to etch and proof the two sets of plates, Chagall excitedly described his physically exhausting work on them during a few weeks in 1978, just after his ninety-first birthday. Left in Chagall's printing studio by Frélaud at Cramer's request, twenty-eight of these plates had remained in the racks for more than a decade before the artist decided to draw on them. The twenty-eight small plates were rather intimate and personal in scale, and these he chose to dedicate to a private and mystically reverent illumination of his favorite sections of the Psalms of David. These Psalms and their illustrations would be brought together into a book form that, like a medieval breviary, could easily be kept at hand, picked up and opened to an inspirational or comforting passage.

The relationship between the painter and the Swiss publisher began in 1958, when Cramer asked Chagall to design a cover for his annual catalog. In the same year Cramer issued an unusual publication by Joan Miro, a book of woodcuts illustrating and accenting the text of Paul Eluard, A toute épreuve. Jacques Frélaud, the gifted printer of Lacourière et Frélaud in Paris, had carried out the printing. Cramer hoped to duplicate the success of Miró's book with a publication in the same medium by Chagall. Other projects were pursued and completed before Chagall finally finished the twenty-four woodcut illustrations to his own Poèmes in 1967.

Frélaud, the printer of hundreds of Picasso's etchings, upholds a long tradition of expert etching and printing. His father and Roger Lacourière - the founder of the shop near Sacré-Coeur where Jacques worked, became a partner, and is now the patron - were both superb craftsmen in a medium where the great practitioners have been few. He first worked with Chagall on a set of ten illustrations to Jean



18. The Large Dancer.

Paulhan's text, De mauvais sujets, in 1958, the artist's first color etchings. Shortly thereafter, in response to Cramer's urging, Frélaud and Chagall began to experiment with woodcuts, attempting to find the means most suitable to Chagall's style of achieving color prints in the medium.

Before they evolved the best way to create woodcuts, Frélaud and Chagall established a very close working relationship during several sessions when they worked against time in the painting and printing of monotypes. In 1961 Cramer had suggested this form of printing to the painter, a method that had rarely been imaginatively pursued since Degas and Gauguin. Most of the major artists who created monotypes in the twentieth century used only black ink, while the technique was one in which color could be brilliantly utilized. It was an ideal medium for a painter who could work rapidly and directly, without erasures or overpaintings. Speed was important since the oil paint, directly brushed onto a gleaming copper plate, must remain liquid enough to be transferred entirely to paper during the printing. The rapport between Chagall, enthusiastically determined to succeed, and Frélaud, responsive to the great artist and sure of his own craft, was perfect. Seven sessions of monotype painting and printing from 1961 to 1975 produced 308 works. A few times it was possible to take a second print from the remaining ink which Chagall then used as a base for hand-coloring. The luminosity of the color, which remains thin and translucent, is the most characteristic quality of color monotypes, and this is a consistent achievement in the works of Chagall.

In 1965, during their third session of monotype creation, Chagall produced his first etching for Cramer, in the easy linear drawing style familiar from his much earlier work in that medium. This etching, Apparition, was to be added to the deluxe copies of a book documenting his monotypes by Jean Leymarie, published by Cramer. In 1967 he completed twenty-four more black-and-white etchings for Cramer. Sixteen other compositions, executed the following year, were enhanced with color highlights, a method Chagall

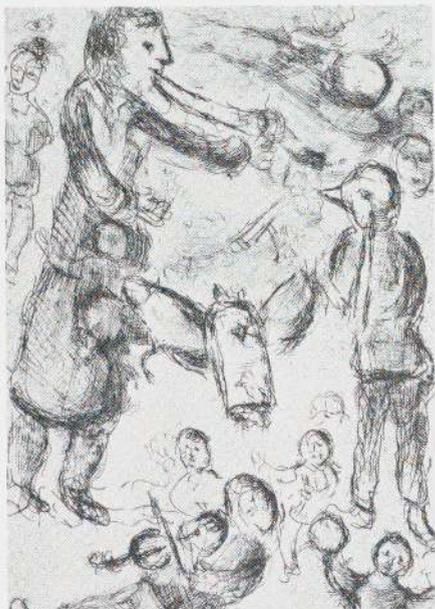


13. Violinist in Love.

initiated during the production of his Arabian Nights lithographs in America in 1946. In those prints, professionally color-separated by hand by Albert Carman after Chagall's preparatory gouaches, the painter had added spots and specific shapes of bright color to increase the intensity of the color, which had lost its first-hand brilliance in its translation to lithography. Later, for the separate suites of black-and-white etchings added to copies of his great Fables de La Fontaine, he illuminated each print with dabs of color. Throughout his late work Chagall has often used color independently of his surrounding linear passages. It was, therefore, quite natural for him to work with Frélaud in creating aquatinted plates containing the color notes that would embellish his black-and-white etchings. Cramer suitably issued the prints both with and without the color additions in 1968.

About the time that Chagall was working on these etchings Cramer had Frélaud prepare for him a set of twenty-eight copper plates for future use. These plates were meant to carry illustrations for a book, Cramer's ideal project for all the artists with whom he has collaborated. A year earlier Chagall had finished cutting the woodblocks for his first book project for Cramer, the volume of his own poems written between 1909 and 1965. Frélaud, though an intaglio printer, was inventive and thoroughly capable of printing woodblocks, while Chagall, whose first woodcuts were done around 1923, enjoyed the process of carving. As the woodcuts were to be in color, Frélaud and Chagall spent some time in Paris at a shop on Rue Berthe (where Miró's woodcuts had also been printed), carving, inking, and proofing the blocks. The appearance of the colorful woodcuts and the warm poetry of the artist revealed unexpected facets of his imagination and skill. An element reminiscent of Russian folkloric representation, still evident in prints made in the U.S.S.R., is transported by Chagall with intelligence and wit into illustrations at once nostalgic and contemporary.

The following ten years were filled with many projects: at least half a dozen commissions for stained-glass



54. Psalm 18 from Psaumes de David.



54. Psalm 13 from Psaumes de David.



55. Psalm 16 from the album Psaumes de David.

windows; the founding and construction of the museum of his Biblical Message paintings, constant travelling to dedicate his windows, mosaics, and tapestries in Israel, Switzerland, Germany, and America; and a momentous journey back to Russia after fifty-one years' absence. In 1974 and 1975 Chagall completed with Frélaud nearly a hundred monotypes, which again were cataloged by Cramer. Two etching projects for his French dealer, Aimé Maeght - illustrations to books by Louis Aragon and André Malraux - kept Chagall and Frélaud busy through 1977.

After the last monotype session came to an end, Chagall and Cramer discussed the subject of Mein Leben (Chagall's early autobiography and theme of his very first prints in 1922-23). Cramer had Frélaud prepare twenty-two varnished copper plates for Chagall to use in either recalling those early memories or creating a new suite based on later events. When he finally chose to work on the plates, concurrently with the Psalms, Chagall returned to his traditional themes and signs. These he conveyed as dreams, and as of this writing the album that will be called Les Songes is still awaiting the artist's finishing touches.

The Psalms, however, have been completed. In December 1978 Cramer and Frélaud joined Chagall in his studio to uncover the message of the twenty-eight copper plates drawn four months before. Frélaud had to etch each plate in acid, and after taking each proof, the three men would discuss the course of action to follow. Chagall would then take the trial proofs and mark or color them, indicating reinforcements and other changes. Discussions about the format of the book punctuated the other work. The artist had quite specific ideas about the content and appearance of this quite personal and spiritual undertaking. He chose to place a "warm sand" aquatinted tone behind his black lines, and he added four more plates. Cramer suggested that the binding be made quite simply of soft parchment and undertook much of the planning relevant to the text and format. When Cramer and Frélaud left, Chagall and his wife Vava were satisfied that the book would be all that they wished.

Although Chagall had specific Psalms in mind when he made his etchings, a choice of translation and verses had to be made. A Protestant minister and scholar, Professor Robert Martin-Achard, who was familiar with the Hebrew text, suggested the French translation made by the Benedictine monks of Saint-Lambert-des-Bois, a humble and simply worded version, and selected the appropriate passages for Chagall's compositions.

Frélaut had to turn to other business, particularly preparing for the opening in May 1979 of the large exhibition at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris of hundreds of works that he and Roger Lacourière had printed. He continued to prepare the aquatint plates for the Psalms in Paris, however. Chagall had colored the black proofs, lightening and darkening the single tone to reinforce the sense of awe and miracle in each composition, and Frélaut's task was to capture this subtle play of light. In June another working session of the three principals in the project produced agreement on most plates and decisions about the size of the edition and the album of plates without text which was to be printed on larger sheets of Japan paper (two compositions not used in the book would accompany the thirty plates from the book). Chagall still saw small imperfections in some of the plates, and Frélaut continued to take proofs. After Chagall had placed his signature and bon à tirer ("approved for printing") on each acceptable proof, Frélaut could return to Paris, where the edition of Chagall's spiritual gift, Psaumes de David, would be completed on the printing press "that loves to print Chagall."

The creative artist who alone can convey into visual terms the message of the spirit is often encouraged and supported from varied quarters of society. To make works that reach beyond the walls of museums and rich collectors, artists produce prints. The artisan and businessman provide the means for printing and disseminating the artist's image but also become partners with the artist in the works themselves. Cramer has convinced artists to work in new media, encouraged them to undertake projects that would challenge them to express their ideas in fresh ways, and has quietly and capably seen to the basic but

critical duties that make a project perfectly executed. Inspired by the example of Ambroise Vollard who drew the important artists of his time into the production of illustrated books, Cramer has endeavored to continue this tradition at its highest level with Chagall, Miró, and Henry Moore. He is the first to admit that without the inspired and sensitively attuned craftsmanship of Jacques Frélaud his work with these artists would have been impossible. The artist not only derives a sense of security from the good printer - a certainty that nothing he has created will be lost or destroyed - but also he is able to try new techniques and discover new solutions. Frélaud, serious but genuinely warm and encouraging, has given this support in its most valuable form, superb craft and intelligent collaboration, to Chagall.

Over twenty years ago Chagall's long-awaited Bible was shown at The Museum of Modern Art. The product for the most part of his middle age, it was his first prolonged enterprise on a religious theme. Many others have followed, two of which, projects for the Jerusalem windows and the windows for the Union Church of Pocantico Hills, have been exhibited here. Both were the work of Chagall's old age. Now the Museum is privileged to show for the first time another profoundly religious expression of this artist who, perhaps because of his rapport with the Biblical prophets he so often represents, appears to have become ageless.

Riva Castleman
Director
Prints and Illustrated Books

CHECKLIST

Dimensions are given in inches and centimeters, height preceding width: plate size for etchings and monotypes; composition for woodcuts; page size for books. Dates in parentheses do not appear on the works.

PRINTS

1. Apparition, State I. (1965). Etching, 8 1/4 x 6 1/8" (21.0 x 15.6 cm). Private Collection.
2. Apparition, State II. (1965). Etching, 8 1/4 x 6 1/8" (21.0 x 15.6 cm). Private Collection.
3. Apparition, State III. (1965). Etching, 8 1/4 x 6 1/8" (21.0 x 15.6 cm). Private Collection.
4. Apparition, cancelled copper plate. (1965). 8 5/16 x 6 1/8" (21.1 x 15.6 cm). Lent by Gérald Cramer, Geneva.
5. King David with Harp, State I. (1967). Aquatint, 8 1/4 x 6 1/8" (21.0 x 15.5 cm). Private Collection.
6. King David with Harp, State II. (1967). Aquatint, 8 1/4 x 6 1/8" (21.0 x 15.5 cm). Private Collection.
7. King David with Harp, State III. (1967). Aquatint, 8 1/4 x 6 1/16" (21.0 x 15.5 cm). Private Collection.
8. King David with Harp, Final State. (1967). Aquatint, 8 1/4 x 6 1/16" (21.0 x 15.4 cm). Private Collection.
9. King David with Harp, cancelled copper plate. (1967). 8 1/4 x 6 1/8" (21.0 x 15.6 cm). Private Collection.
10. Artist and His Painting. (1967). Etching and aquatint, 9 5/16 x 12" (23.6 x 30.5 cm). Lent by Fondation Gérald Cramer, Geneva.
11. Village Cellist. (1967). Etching and aquatint, 9 3/4 x 12 7/16" (24.8 x 31.7 cm). Lent by Fondation Gérald Cramer, Geneva.

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12. Village. (1967). Etching, 13 5/8 x 9 3/4" (34.6 x 24.8 cm). Lent by Fondation Gérald Cramer, Geneva.
13. Violinist in Love. (1967). Etching and aquatint, 12 1/8 x 9 1/4" (31.0 x 23.5 cm). Lent by Fondation Gérald Cramer, Geneva.
14. Village Acrobats. (1967). Etching and aquatint, 9 3/8 x 12 3/16" (23.9 x 31.0 cm). Lent by Fondation Gérald Cramer, Geneva.
15. Small Balancing Donkey. (1967). Etching and aquatint, 7 7/8 x 6 1/16" (20.0 x 15.4 cm). Lent by Fondation Gérald Cramer, Geneva.
16. Apocalyptic Vision. (1967). Aquatint, 14 3/8 x 13 1/4" (36.6 x 33.6 cm). Lent by Fondation Gérald Cramer, Geneva.
17. Way of the Cross. (1967). Aquatint, 13 1/2 x 14 5/8" (34.3 x 37.2 cm). Lent by Fondation Gérald Cramer, Geneva.
18. The Large Dancer. (1967). Etching and aquatint, 13 3/4 x 9 3/4" (34.9 x 24.7 cm). Lent by Fondation Gérald Cramer, Geneva.
19. Acrobat and Violinist. (1968). Etching and aquatint, printed in color, 13 5/8 x 15 1/2" (34.5 x 39.4 cm). Lent by Fondation Gérald Cramer, Geneva.
20. Cocks upon a Housetop. (1968). Etching and aquatint, printed in color, 13 5/8 x 15 1/2" (34.5 x 39.4 cm). Lent by Fondation Gérald Cramer, Geneva.
21. Still Life and Large Bird. (1968). Etching and aquatint, printed in color, 8 3/4 x 6 11/16" (22.2 x 17.0 cm). Lent by Fondation Gérald Cramer, Geneva.
22. Lovers in a Tree. (1968). Etching and aquatint, printed in color, 17 3/8 x 24 1/8" (44.0 x 61.2 cm). Lent by Fondation Gérald Cramer, Geneva.
23. Marriage. (1968). Etching and aquatint, printed in color, 24 3/16 x 17 1/4" (61.2 x 44.0 cm). Lent by Fondation Gérald Cramer, Geneva.

24. The Seated Musician. (1978). Trial proof from the unpublished album Dreams (Les Songs). Etching and aquatint, printed in color, 12 x 9 3/8" (30.5 x 23.8 cm). Private Collection.
25. The Lovers. (1978). Trial proof from the unpublished album Dreams (Les Songs). Etching and aquatint, printed in color, 12 1/8 x 9 3/8" (30.5 x 23.8 cm). Private Collection.
26. Moses. (1978). Trial proof from the unpublished album Dreams (Les Songs). Etching and aquatint, printed in color, 12 1/8 x 9 7/16" (30.8 x 24.0 cm). Private Collection.
27. King David and the Angels. (1979). Etching, 15 9/16 x 11 13/16" (39.5 x 30.0 cm). Private Collection.
28. The Tower of David. (1979). Etching, 15 9/16 x 11 3/4" (39.5 x 29.9 cm). Private Collection.

MONOTYPES

29. Artist. (1962). 12 15/16 x 9 3/8" (32.9 x 23.8 cm). Lent by Gérald Cramer, Geneva.
30. Landscape from Studio. (1963). 19 11/16 x 15 3/4" (50.0 x 40.0 cm). Private Collection.
31. Artist in Profile. (1963). 8 1/4 x 5 3/4" (21.0 x 14.6 cm). Private Collection.
32. Blue Table. (1963). 9 15/16 x 12 5/8" (25.4 x 32.1 cm). Lent by Editions Gérald Cramer, Geneva.
33. Vava in a Checked Jacket. (1963). 9 13/16 x 7 1/2" (24.9 x 19.1 cm). Private Collection.
34. Awakening. (1965). 15 3/4 x 19 5/8" (40.0 x 49.8 cm). Private Collection.
35. Rose-colored Horse. (1965). 15 11/16 x 19 5/8" (39.9 x 49.8 cm). Private Collection.

36. Yellow Fish. (1965). 12 5/8 x 9 15/16"
(32.1 x 25.3 cm). Private Collection.
37. King David. (1965). 15 11/16 x 11 3/4"
(39.9 x 29.9 cm). Private Collection.
38. Large Self-Portrait. (1965). 25 1/2 x
19 11/16" (64.8 x 50.0 cm). Private Collection.
39. Milkmaid. (1966). 11 7/8 x 16 1/2"
(30.2 x 41.9 cm). Private Collection.
40. Christ of the Village. (1966). 19 9/16 x
15 3/4" (49.7 x 40.0 cm). Lent by Editions Gérald
Cramer, Geneva.
41. Lovers in the Skies of Paris. (1966). 11 13/16 x
16 7/16" (30.0 x 41.7 cm). Private Collection.
42. Cello. (1974). 16 7/8 x 11 7/8" (42.9 x 30.2
cm). Lent by Editions Gérald Cramer, Geneva.
43. Mother and Child with Bouquet. (1974). 24 3/8 x
17 3/4" (61.9 x 45.1 cm). Lent by Editions Gérald
Cramer, Geneva.
44. Large Red Nude. (1974). 24 3/8 x 17 3/4" (61.9
x 45.1 cm). Lent by Editions Gérald Cramer, Geneva.
45. The Betrothed. (1975). 15 5/8 x 11 13/16"
(39.7 x 30.0 cm). Private Collection
46. Peasant with a Lamb. (1975). 12 9/16 x 9 3/8"
(31.9 x 23.7 cm). Private Collection.

ILLUSTRATED BOOKS

47. Poèmes by Marc Chagall. Geneva, Cramer Editeur,
1968. 24 color woodcuts. 14 1/2 x 11 1/4" (36.8 x
28.6 cm). Lent by Editions Gérald Cramer, Geneva.
48. Woodblock for page 45 of Poèmes. 1968. 12 7/8 x
9 7/8" (32.7 x 25.1 cm). Private Collection.

49. Black and white impression of page 45, from the album Poèmes. 1968. Woodcut, 12 1/16 x 9 13/16" (31.8 x 24.9 cm). Lent by Fondation Gérald Cramer, Geneva.
50. Bon à Tirer impression of page 45 of Poèmes. 1968. Woodcut, 12 11/13 x 9 3/4" (32.2 x 24.8). Lent by Gérald Cramer, Geneva.
51. Woodblock for page 49 of Poèmes. 1968. 12 7/8 x 9 7/8" (32.7 x 25.1 cm). Private Collection.
52. Black and white impression of page 49 from the album Poèmes. 1968. Woodcut, 12 1/16 x 9 5/16" (30.6 x 23.7 cm). Lent by Fondation Gérald Cramer, Geneva.
53. Woodblock for page 93 of Poèmes. 1968. 12 7/8 x 9 7/8" (32.7 x 25.1 cm). Private Collection.
54. Black and white impression of page 93, from the album Poèmes. 1968. Woodcut, 12 5/8 x 9 13/16" (32.1 x 24.9 cm). Lent by Fondation Gérald Cramer, Geneva.
55. Psaumes de David. Geneva, Cramer Editeur, 1979. 30 etchings with aquatint, printed in color, 8 3/16 x 5 7/8" (20.8 x 14.9 cm). Lent by Editions Gérald Cramer, Geneva.
56. Psalm 16, from the album Psaumes de David. Etching and aquatint, printed in color, 5 7/8 x 8 1/4" (14.9 x 21.0 cm). Lent by Editions Gérald Cramer, Geneva.
57. Psalm 48, State I, from Psaumes de David. December 6, 1978. Etching with pencil additions, 6 15/16 x 5 1/4" (17.6 x 13.4 cm). Private Collection.
58. Psalm 48 State II, from Psaumes de David. December 9, 1978. Etching, 6 15/16 x 5 1/4" (17.6 x 13.4 cm). Private Collection.
59. Psalm 72, State I, from Psaumes de David. December 6, 1978. Etching with pencil additions, 8 1/4 x 5 7/8" (21.0 x 14.9 cm). Private Collection.

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60. Psalm 72, State II, from Psaumes de David
December 8, 1978. Etching, 8 $\frac{1}{16}$ x 5 $\frac{7}{8}$ " (20.5 x
15.0 cm). Private Collection.
61. Psalm 105, from the album Psaumes de David. Etch-
ing and aquatint, printed in color, 5 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 7" (13.5 x
17.7 cm). Lent by Editions Gérald Cramer, Geneva.
62. Psalm 147, State I, from Psaumes de David.
December 6, 1978. Etching with pencil additions,
8 $\frac{1}{16}$ x 5 $\frac{13}{16}$ " (20.5 x 14.8 cm). Private Collection.
63. Psalm 147, State II, from Psaumes de David.
December 8, 1978. Etching, 8 $\frac{1}{16}$ x 5 $\frac{13}{16}$ "
(20.5 x 14.8 cm). Private Collection.

The Museum gratefully acknowledges the generous cooperation of the artist and Gérald Cramer. The recollections and technical information given by Jacques Frélaud have been most valuable. Preparation of the exhibition and its catalog have been ably coordinated by Hiram Carruthers Butler, Curatorial Intern in the Department of Prints and Illustrated Books, Cherie Summers, Associate Registrar, Francis Kloeppel, Senior Editor, and Nora Sheehan, Graphics Designer.

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[The text on this page is extremely faint and illegible. It appears to be a list or a series of entries, possibly a table of contents or a directory, but the specific details cannot be discerned.]