

The Museum of Modern Art

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MAJOR SHOWING OF CHAGALL'S PRINTS AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

In tribute to the successful twenty-year collaboration of famed artist Marc Chagall with publisher Gerald Cramer and printer Jacques Frélaud, The Museum of Modern Art is presenting an exhibition of Chagall's recent monotypes, woodcuts, and etchings, November 22, 1979 through January 28, 1980. The first major showing at the Museum of Chagall's prints since 1958, CHAGALL: PRINTS, MONOTYPES, ILLUSTRATED BOOKS is being directed by Riva Castleman, Director of the Department of Prints and Illustrated Books. Ms. Castleman is also the author of the publication that accompanies the exhibition.*

CHAGALL: PRINTS, MONOTYPES, ILLUSTRATED BOOKS will feature the first public showing anywhere of the thirty etchings for Chagall's newly published Psaumes de David. These were completed late in 1978, just after the artist's ninety-first birthday. They are, as Ms. Castleman notes, "rather personal and intimate in scale," dedicated "to a private and mystically reverent illumination of his [Chagall's] favorite sections of the Psalms of David." These Psalms and their illustrations were brought together into a book form that, like a medieval breviary, can easily be kept at hand, picked up and opened to an inspirational or comforting passage. Chagall's Psaumes follow other of his religious works to be exhibited at the Museum, including his Bible, projects for his windows at the Hadassah-Hebrew University Medical Center in Jerusalem, and the windows for the Union Church of Pocantico Hills.

*Marc Chagall: Prints, Monotypes, Illustrated Books, available in the Paul J. Sachs Galleries.

For more than twenty years, Chagall has worked closely with Cramer and Frélaud to produce an outstanding group of printed works. "In effect," says Ms. Castleman, "this exhibition is about the creative interaction of three devoted people." That collaboration began in 1958 when Cramer, a Genevan publisher of prints, came to Chagall to ask him to design a cover for his annual catalogue. Later that year, Jacques Frélaud, who printed hundreds of Picasso's etchings and is now patron of the famed Montmartre printshop, Lacouriere et Frélaud, was called upon by Cramer to work with Chagall. Typical of the spirit that this exhibition seeks to underscore are Chagall's monotypes. It was Cramer who, in 1961, suggested to the artist that he explore this form of printing, a method that had rarely been imaginatively pursued since the late nineteenth century. Between 1961 and 1975, Chagall, working with Frélaud, produced 308 of these works. As Ms. Castleman writes, "The rapport between Chagall, enthusiastically determined to succeed, and Frélaud, responsive to the great artist and sure of his own craft, was perfect." A large selection of these monotypes will be on view in the exhibition. Also featured will be etchings and aquatints, a number of them in successive states.

Similarly, Chagall's turning to woodcuts again after a hiatus of many years has the quality of a joint endeavor. It was Cramer who suggested that Chagall do an edition of his own poems, written between 1909 and 1965. The result was Poèmes of 1967, illustrated with twenty-four woodcuts. "The appearance of the colorful woodcuts and the warm poetry of the artist revealed unexpected facets of his imagination and skill," observes Ms. Castleman. "An element of Russian folkloric representation...is transported by Chagall with intelligence and wit into illustrations at once nostalgic and contemporary."

"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," writes Ms. Castleman. "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." This exhibition displays not only the results of this association for art, but also Chagall's continuing vigorous powers as a graphic artist.

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