

Chagall: Love and the Stage 1914-1922

Susan Compton

Susan Compton, Editor

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"Man is like a tree," the painter Marc Chagall wrote, "his roots lie in the earth of his country. Then the branches may spread out over the whole world." His art, with its poetic synthesis of his Russian Jewish heritage, was testimony to his belief and nowhere as eloquently depicted as in the murals he painted for the auditorium of the Jewish Chamber Theatre in 1920. These murals, completed in less than two months and considered by some the most original work of his career, formed the centerpiece of an exhibition mounted July 2 - October 4, 1998 at the Royal Academy of Arts in London. This book is the accompanying catalogue to the exhibit, curated by Dr. Susan Compton.

Amplly illustrated and thoughtfully designed, the book chronicles the eight years Chagall spent in Russia from 1914 to 1922. The essays of this volume present the complex background to these productive Russian years. Returning to his native country at the age of 27 after four years in Paris, Chagall had already developed a mature artistic style and had begun to produce paintings that combined a brilliant use of color with fantasy, Jewish folklore and the Cubist pictorial influences he had absorbed in Europe. His return to Russia and his hometown of Vitebsk provided him the opportunity to re-explore tradition, which would continue to inspire his work until his death at the age of 98. The essays of this book examine these themes, as well the symbiotic relationship of theater and painting in his work, and the political and artistic environment of Jewish cultural expression in the revolutionary Russia of this time.

Well written and researched, with beautiful fold-out reproductions of his work for the Jewish Chamber Theater as well as paintings, drawings, and costume and set designs from this productive period. This book documents and preserves an essential period of Chagall's life and these critical works-almost lost to the world.

KELLEY FLYNN (January / February 1998)

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