

Exhibition: *Chagall: Fantasies for the Stage*

On View: July 31, 2017–January 7, 2018

Location: Resnick Pavilion



Image captions on page 7

(Los Angeles—June 5, 2017) The Los Angeles County Museum of Art presents *Chagall: Fantasies for the Stage*, the first U.S. exhibition to spotlight the principal role that music and dance played in Marc Chagall's artistic career. Concentrating on four theatrical productions created over a quarter century (*Aleko*, *The Firebird*, *Daphnis and Chloe*, and *The Magic Flute*), the exhibition comprises 145 objects, including 41 vibrant costumes; nearly 100 preparatory sketches; rare 1942 film footage of the original performance of *Aleko*; musical accompaniments for each section; and a selection of paintings depicting musicians and theatrical scenes.

Chagall: Fantasies for the Stage is adapted from the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts exhibition *Chagall: Colour and Music* (January 29–June 7, 2017), initiated by the Cité de la musique - Philharmonie de Paris (October 13, 2015–January 31, 2016), and La Piscine – Musée d'art et d'industrie André Diligent, Roubaix (October 24, 2015–January 31, 2016), with the invaluable support of the Chagall estate. LACMA's presentation is organized by Stephanie Barron, senior curator of modern art, together with the museum's costume and textiles curators. Opera designer Yuval Sharon and projection designer Jason H. Thompson have created the exhibition design.

Artists have long been inspired to expand their practices by engaging in compelling collaborations with the ballet, theater, and opera, and Chagall was at the forefront of such interdisciplinary efforts among modern artists in creating inventive visual environments for the stage. Working with theatrical companies and opera houses in Russia, Mexico, New York, and Paris, Chagall created fantastical and cutting-edge designs. He collaborated on sets for Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes as early as

1911, and his deep and far-reaching engagement with music and dance continued throughout his long career.

“In bringing together Chagall’s well-known paintings and his innovative theatrical designs, *Chagall: Fantasies for the Stage* will enhance our understanding of the artist’s expansive body of work,” said LACMA CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director Michael Govan. “By engaging both the visual and the performing arts, it also fosters a dialogue that reaches across the disciplines of art, music, theater, dance, and even fashion design.”

“By focusing on these four productions created during and after his wartime exile in New York, this exhibition brings to the public’s awareness a lesser known but riveting aspect of Chagall’s career, which began in pre-Revolutionary Russia and traversed the breadth of the 20th century,” said Barron. “Chagall’s work for the stage is an important early chapter in the history of visual artists who have engaged in similar interdisciplinary collaborations that have immeasurably enriched the history of modern art.”

Exhibition Overview

Organized chronologically, *Chagall: Fantasies for the Stage* features the artist’s four theatrical productions: the ballets *Aleko* (1942), *The Firebird* (1945), and *Daphnis and Chloe* (1959), and the opera *The Magic Flute* (1967). In each, Chagall achieved a remarkable fusion between the boldly colorful scenography and original costumes he created. LACMA’s exhibition highlights this important and under-examined aspect of the artist’s extraordinary oeuvre through five main sections.

The exhibition opens with 11 costumes and 18 preparatory studies from Chagall’s production of *Aleko*, from 1942. Chagall and his family, who were Jewish, emigrated to New York in 1941 fleeing persecution from Nazi-occupied France. The following year, the Ballet Theatre of New York (now the American Ballet Theatre) commissioned him to design the scenery and costumes for *Aleko*, a new ballet based on an 1824 poem by Alexander Pushkin and set to Pyotr Tchaikovsky’s *Trio in A Minor*. The ballet was choreographed by Léonide Massine, a fellow émigré and former member of the Ballets Russes, with famed dancers Alicia Markova and George Skibine dancing the lead roles. Chagall’s work premiered at the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City on September 8, 1942, before opening at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York a month later. Chagall came to Los Angeles in the summer of 1943, when the ballet was performed at the Hollywood Bowl.

Aleko was meant to debut in New York, but union rules would have prevented Chagall from painting the backdrops himself, so he and the Ballet Theatre completed work on the production in Mexico. Chagall hand-painted the *Aleko* costumes and backdrops and they have retained their vivid colors more than 70 years later. The costumes for the characters Zemphira, the Fortune Teller, and a Candle Bearer show that Chagall drew inspiration from Mexican styles of dress and traditional textile motifs, as well as from the music, folklore, and poetry of his native Russia. His use of abstract shapes and patterns also testifies to the modernist influence of artists such as Henri Matisse, whose work Chagall had encountered in New York.

In 1945, Chagall received his second commission from the Ballet Theatre when the performing arts impresario Sol Hurok decided to restage Igor Stravinsky's iconic ballet ***The Firebird***, which had premiered in Paris in 1910 at the Ballets Russes. Chagall re-envisioned the stage curtain, sets, and costumes for the ballet, which debuted at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York on October 24, 1945. Chagall's designs were met with great critical acclaim, and his production of *The Firebird* is still performed today, appearing as recently as the 2016 season of the New York City Ballet. This section of the exhibition presents eight costumes and 32 works on paper.

Chagall's beloved wife Bella had died the year before Hurok approached the artist to design the ballet. In a profound state of grief, Chagall had ceased making art. His work on *The Firebird* marked both his reengagement with the art world and the beginning of a new phase in his scenography. The more than 80 costumes Chagall made for the ballet were his most experimental and avant-garde to date, particularly those for the fantastical animals and monsters that abound in the ballet's narrative. Working with his daughter, Ida, Chagall employed new materials and fabrication techniques, including a combination of diaphanous and heavy, richly colored fabrics, collage-like appliqués, and intricate embroidery that resulted in voluminous, sculptural forms.

Eight years after Chagall returned to Paris in 1948, the Ballet de l'Opéra de Paris commissioned him to design new sets and costumes for Maurice Ravel's ballet ***Daphnis and Chloe***, which was based on a story attributed to the second-century Greek poet Longus. The motifs and color palette of blues and earthy ochers of Chagall's stage designs were inspired by two trips he took to Greece, which is the setting for the ballet's narrative. Chagall's production of *Daphnis and Chloe* was choreographed by George Skibine (who also danced the role of Daphnis) and

premiered at the Paris Opera in May 1959. The artist's work on this ballet is represented by eight costumes and 28 drawings.

Chagall worked closely with Skibine and the other Ballet de l'Opéra de Paris dancers to harmonize his costumes with their movements and gestures. His designs incorporated shimmering layered appliqués on sheer fabric, and he painted bold swaths of color onto the costumes while the dancers were wearing them in order to emphasize the fluid lines and dynamism of the dance. Chagall envisioned the dancers as mobile elements of his paintings, mirroring the figures he depicted in flight across his backdrops.

Chagall: Fantasies for the Stage features 14 costumes and 16 sketches from Chagall's production of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's ***The Magic Flute***, commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera House for its inaugural season at Lincoln Center in New York in February 1967. Widely praised, this was Chagall's only work for opera, and he spent three years designing the 14 sets and dozens of costumes. Challenged by the complexity of the opera's numerous scene changes, stage machinery, and the large number of singers, Chagall conceived aesthetic solutions that emphasized strong color contrasts and striking geometric forms to construct scenic space and communicate *The Magic Flute's* dramatic narrative. Whimsical and highly imaginative animals similar to those Chagall created for *Aleko* and *The Firebird*—and that populate paintings throughout his oeuvre—played an important role in the artist's production of *The Magic Flute*. He sculpted each costume by layering richly dyed textiles with colorful fabrics and embroidered lines to emphasize movement.

In addition to Chagall's stage designs, the exhibition includes a small selection of iconic paintings, many of which are on loan from museums around the world. The works on view include *Self-Portrait with Seven Fingers* (1912) from the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; *Green Violinist* (1923–24) from the Guggenheim Museum, New York; *The Violinist* (1911–14) from the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf; and *Violinist on a Bench* (1920) from LACMA's permanent collection.

Augmenting the exhibition will be a series of video interviews featuring contemporary artists, costume designers, and opera professionals, selected reviews of Chagall's productions, and a reading room.

About Marc Chagall

Born in Vitebsk, Russia (present-day Belarus) in 1887, Chagall came to global prominence early in his career, which lasted for more than seven decades and spanned Russia, France, the United States, and Mexico. Although aspects of Fauvism, Russian Avant-garde, Cubism, Symbolism, and Surrealism are evident in his varied output, Chagall's lyrical style is uniquely his own. He remained committed to figurative and narrative art, portraying imagery rooted in personal history, Eastern European folklore, and Jewish and Russian musical traditions. Given his enduring engagement with the human figure, it is no surprise that Chagall was interested in adapting his work to performance, and saw the stage as a platform for artistic experimentation.

About the Exhibition Designers

Yuval Sharon founded and serves as artistic director of The Industry in Los Angeles, an acclaimed company devoted to new and experimental opera that has brought opera into moving vehicles, operating train stations, and various "non-spaces" such as warehouses, parking lots, and escalator corridors. Yuval conceived, directed, and produced the company's acclaimed world premieres of *Hopscotch*, *Invisible Cities*, and *Crescent City*. He also devised and directed the company's two "performance installations": *In C* at the Hammer Museum and *Nimbus* at Walt Disney Concert Hall. He is currently an artist-in-residence at the Los Angeles Philharmonic. **Jason H. Thompson** is a visual artist designing projections and lighting for opera, dance, theater, theme parks, and commercial, architecture, and corporate events worldwide. His collaboration with Sharon includes nine unique projects over the course of the past five years.

Exhibition Catalogue

Chagall and Music

Edited by Ambre Gauthier and Meret Meyer

\$50 | Member Price: \$45

Available in-store or online at thelacmastore.org

Public Programming

Conversation with Chagall's granddaughters Meret Meyer and Bella Meyer and LACMA's senior curator of modern art Stephanie Barron

Tuesday, July 25 at 7 pm | Bing Theater

Lecture by noted Chagall scholar Susan T. Goodman, senior curator emerita of The Jewish Museum, New York

Saturday, July 29 at 2 pm | Bing Theater

In conjunction with the special exhibition, *Chagall: Fantasies for the Stage*, Susan T. Goodman addresses the artist's importance in the story of modern art. Her talk will enable visitors to understand how images and experiences from Marc Chagall's early years in Vitebsk, Russia, were perpetuated and provided inspiration for life. Goodman has published many scholarly books and catalogs, and has organized numerous exhibitions, most recently *Chagall: Love, War, and Exile* (2013–2014) at the Jewish Museum in New York.

Visit lacma.org in the coming weeks for additional related programming.

Credit

Organized by the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts in collaboration with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Initiated by the Cité de la musique - Philharmonie de Paris, and La Piscine - Musée d'art et d'industrie André Diligent, Roubaix, with the support of the Chagall estate.

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About LACMA

Since its inception in 1965, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) has been devoted to collecting works of art that span both history and geography, in addition to representing Los Angeles's uniquely diverse population. Today LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection that includes more than 130,000 objects dating from antiquity to the present, encompassing the geographic world and nearly the entire history of art. Among the museum's strengths are its holdings of Asian art; Latin American art, ranging from masterpieces from the Ancient Americas to works by leading modern and contemporary artists; and Islamic art, of which LACMA hosts one of the most significant collections in the world. A museum of international stature as well as a vital part of Southern California, LACMA shares its vast collections through exhibitions, public programs, and research facilities that attract over one million visitors annually, in addition to serving millions through digital initiatives such as online collections, scholarly catalogues,

and interactive engagement. LACMA is located in Hancock Park, 30 acres situated at the center of Los Angeles, which also contains the La Brea Tar Pits and Museum and the forthcoming Academy Museum of Motion Pictures. Situated halfway between the ocean and downtown, LACMA is at the heart of Los Angeles.

Location: 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA, 90036. lacma.org

Image captions:

Left: Marc Chagall, *Backdrop for Aleko: A Wheatfield on a Summer's Afternoon* (Scene III), 1942, gouache, watercolor, and graphite on paper, 15 1/4 × 22 1/2 in., Museum of Modern Art, New York, Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest, 1945, © 2017 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris, digital image © 2017 The Museum of Modern Art/licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY

Center, left: Marc Chagall, *Costume for The Firebird: Blue-and-Yellow Monster from Koschei's Palace Guard*, 1945, wool/synthetic knit with polyurethane, wool/synthetic knit appliqués, wood beads, silk plain weave (chiffon), and animal hair, New York City Ballet, New York, © 2017 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris, photo © 2017 Museum Associates/LACMA

Center, right: Marc Chagall, *Costume Design for The Firebird: Blue-and-Yellow Monster from Koschei's Palace Guard*, 1945, watercolor, gouache, graphite, and india ink on paper, 18 5/16 × 11 7/16 in., private collection, © 2017 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris, photo © 2017 Archives Marc et Ida Chagall, Paris

Right: Marc Chagall, *Costume for The Magic Flute: Green-Faced Monster* (with Reproduction Mask), 1967, cotton knit, painted, with synthetic/lurex plain weave appliqués, silk plain weave (chiffon) appliqués, synthetic knit, painted, and papier-mâché, Metropolitan Opera Archives, New York, © 2017 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris, photo © 2017 Museum Associates/LACMA

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