Chagall: A Life
Gilden’s Art Gallery is delighted to present a series of works on paper from the Modern Master, Marc Chagall (1887-1985). Taking inspiration from the artist’s own biography, “Mein Leben” [My Life], started in 1911 and completed in 1922, the exhibition expands upon the major themes in the artist’s colourful life.

We begin with the artists’ formative years in the Russian town of Vitebsk, now in modern-day Belarus and the lifelong impact his beloved wife Bella had on his works. Fleeing the Nazi invasion of France, the Chagalls sought refuge in the United States of America – the second exile of their lives – as they were never to return to Russia.

Following Bella’s tragic death in America, Chagall fulfilled his promise to her that he would return to Paris and did so in the late summer of 1948, it would be the beginning of a new age in the Parisian art world and Chagall was celebrated once more in his much-loved adoptive city.

As the years passed he moved to the South of France and made numerous trips to Greece, inspired by his close friend and publisher Efstratios Eleftheriades (Tériade). The light of the Mediterranean from the Bay of Angels to the Island of Lesvos would forever be remembered in Chagall’s stunning blues.

Throughout his life, faith would always be present – a reminder of his identity and of those that came before him. Symbols of Judaic and Christian storytelling were woven seamlessly together to create a narrative so distinctively Chagall.

We are delighted to welcome you to the gallery to enjoy these beautiful works.
Marc Chagall was born on 6th July 1887 Shagal, Mark, Zakharovich, Moses in the suburb of Peskovatik in Vitebsk. The sights, sounds and smells of the neighbourhood would remain etched in the artist’s memory and he took them with him across the world. The village motifs mixed with his desire to remember the uniquely Jewish culture of Vitebsk have given us some of the most iconic imagery of Chagall’s oeuvre. Rabbis, shtetl houses and folk music are all recurrent in the artist’s prints from the beginning to the end of his career. He drew inspiration from his colourful family and their habits as well as the figures he passed in the streets of Vitebsk.

The shtetl, from the Yiddish, was a Jewish village or town in Eastern Europe that could vary greatly in size. They were also defined as microcosms of Jewish life with families coming from all walks of life. In the case of Peskovatik, the neighbourhood was full of small wooden houses, closely packed together. Animals were kept in the yards and the sense of the countryside was never far away. Over time the distinctive Russian village architecture gives way to the villages of Provence, but still the artist’s childhood is evoked.

Russia

The House | La Maison, 1922/23
Original Hand Signed and Numbered Wood Engraving on Japan Paper
33 x 47.5 cm / 13 x 18.7 in.
Reference: Kornfeld 32
The oil painting “The Praying Jew” on which this work is based is held in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago. This, along with one other version in oil held by the Ca’ Pesaro, Venice, were created in 1923 upon the artist’s return to Paris following the First World War. On his arrival in Paris it became clear much of the works he had created before the outbreak of war had not survived and so Chagall created these two paintings based on an oil he created in Vitebsk in 1914.

The central figure was a beggar in Vitebsk who the artist had paid to wear his father’s prayer clothes in an attempt to capture what Chagall felt were fast disappearing traditions.

The composition although solemn in choice of palette shows the influence of Cubism on Chagall – proving that even the most traditional subjects from the artist’s life in Vitebsk can be viewed alongside the burgeoning Parisian Avant-garde.
Peasant with Bouquet | Paysan au Bouquet, 1968
Original Hand Signed and Numbered Lithograph in Colours on Arches Wove Paper
57.5 x 41 cm / 22.6 x 16 in.
Reference: Mourlot 550

Little Peasants II | Petit Paysans II, 1968
Original Hand Signed and Numbered Lithograph in Colours on Wove Paper
60 x 48 cm / 23.6 x 18.9 in.
Reference: Mourlot 547
After Winter, from: Beyond the Mirror | Après l’Hiver, from: Derrière le Miroir 1972
Original Hand Signed and Numbered Lithograph in Colours on Arches Wove Paper
51 x 66 cm / 20.1 x 26 in
Reference: Mourlot 651

The Blue Village (Second State) | Le village Bleu (2e État), 1974
Original Hand Signed and Numbered Lithograph in Colours on Japan Nacré Paper
56 x 43 cm / 22 x 16.9 in
Reference: Mourlot 729
It was on a late September afternoon of 1909 that Berta Rosenfeld first laid eyes on Marc Chagall. An aspiring actress and an accomplished writer she first described the artist’s eyes in such a way that the reader can imagine clearly their affection and their love at first sight.

“When you did catch a glimpse of his eyes, they were as blue as if they’d fallen straight out of the sky. They were strange eyes - long, almond-shaped - each seemed to sail along by itself, like a little boat.”

She was by the artist’s side through the challenging relocations of their married life from Vitebsk, to Petrograd (Saint Petersburg), Vitebsk once more, spells in Lithuania, Paris and ultimately New York, where they had both fled with the help of Solomon Guggenheim in order to escape the spread of Nazism throughout Europe. It was in France, during the 1920s that she changed her name to Bella believing it to be more befitting of the wife of a French artist.

It is often recalled that Bella was not only Chagall’s first wife but also his most inspiring muse and his unending love for her would see her portrait appear all through the rest of the artist’s life even though Bella had departed this world in New York in September 1944. Her distinctive profile can be seen in many of the couple’s portraits.
STILL LIFE WITH BOUQUET | 
*NATURE MORTE AU BOUQUET, 1960*

Original Hand Signed and Numbered Lithograph in Colours on Arches Wove Paper
74 x 58 cm. / 29.2 x 22.8 in.
Reference: Mourlot 299

EASEL WITH FLOWERS | 
*LE CHEVALET AUX FLEURS, 1976*

Original Hand Signed and Numbered Lithograph in Colours on Arches Wove Paper
76 x 31 cm. / 30 x 12 in.
Reference: Mourlot 838
The Open Window | La Fenêtre ouverte, 1971
Original Hand Signed and Numbered Lithograph on Arches Wove Paper
76 x 56 cm. / 29.9 x 22 in.
Reference: Mourlot 637

Self-Portrait with Easel | Autoportrait au Chevalet, 1979
Original Hand Signed and Numbered Etching on Wove Paper
64 x 49.5 cm. / 25.1 x 19.5 in.
The Artist (self-portrait), with Bouquet of Flowers, 1975

Original Signed and Dedicated Drawing in Crayon with Pen and Ink on Paper and Original Colour Lithograph on Paper:
27.8 x 28.4 cm. / 10.9 x 11.2 in.
Reference: Mourlot 728
Provenance: Collection Neuman, St Paul de Vence;
Bequeathed by Neuman to the Leo Baeck College.
The Song of Songs | Le Cantique des Cantiques, 1975
Hand Signed and Numbered Lithograph in Colours on Arches Wove Paper 71 x 53.5 cm / 28 x 21 in. Reference: C. Sorlier 47

Dedication | Dédicace, 1968
Original Hand Signed, Inscribed and Numbered Lithograph in Colours on Arches Wove Paper 62.5 x 47.5 cm / 24.6 x 18.7 in. Reference: Mourlot 557
Marc and Bella Chagall arrived in New York on the evening of 21st June 1941, having left behind their only daughter Ida and her husband Michel in France. Funds for their passage had been raised by Solomon Guggenheim and they began their new life in exile with much apprehension. Chagall repaid his sponsors by giving lectures on his early works and the son of Henri Matisse, Pierre, mounted numerous exhibitions of Chagall’s paintings. Ida and Michel eventually made it to safety in New York to join her parents and quite incredibly was able to bring many of his paintings on the more than 40 day journey across the Atlantic.

Whilst finding his feet in the unfamiliar city, Chagall was approached by another Jewish émigré from Europe – the publisher Kurt Wolff who had also fled with his wife Helen through the assistance of Varian Fry. Wolff enticed Chagall to illustrate the series “Four Tales from the Arabian Nights” for his newly founded publishing house, Pantheon Books. These were not only the first lithographs in colour created by the artist, who would later go on to be revered for his colour lithography, but were considered to be amongst the finest lithographs in colour ever created up to that point by any artist. They were so revered that they won the Graphic Prize at the Venice Biennial in 1948, the same year they were published.
Then the Boy displayed to the Dervish his bosom..., from: Four Tales from the Arabian Nights, 1948
Original Hand Signed and Numbered Lithograph in Colours on Laid Paper
43 x 33 cm. / 16.9 x 12.9 in.
Reference: Mourlot 36; Cramer 18

When Abdullah got the Net Ashore..., from: Four Tales from the Arabian Nights, 1948
Original Hand Signed Lithograph in Colours on Laid Paper
43 x 33 cm. / 16.9 x 12.9 in.
Reference: Mourlot 43; Cramer 18
Return to Paris

Paris was Chagall’s spiritual home in France. It was here that he and Bella had made their lives following the Russian Revolution and the city which it pained them to leave during the War. Chagall’s return to his home was bittersweet, without Bella, but with a new wave of enthusiasm for the Modernists that had survived the war. Those that had survived, resisted, fled and returned were feted in the Post War Parisian art scene. This new embrace was precisely what Chagall had hoped for to heal his wounds and allowed him to begin to re-imagine the city around him. A retrospective in 1947, was built upon with greater vigour by the dealer Aimé Maeght – who mounted the now famous Paris Series exhibition in 1954.

To coincide with this exhibition, Maeght published an edition of his celebrated *Derrière le Miroir*, which was dedicated exclusively to the works of Chagall’s Paris Series. The lithographs within contain some of the most beautiful imagery of Chagall motifs against the backdrop of recognisable Parisian sights. Yet these sites occupy a smaller part of the composition than his pre-war works, now the figures were centre stage. The music, the bouquets, the circus characters were back to breathe new life into Paris, much as the city would rejuvenate Chagall.

The Painter’s Bouquet | *Le bouquet de peintre*, 1967
Original Hand Signed and Numbered Lithograph in Colours on Arches Wove Paper
76 x 57.5 cm / 29.9 x 22.6 in
Reference: Mourlot 483
Marc Chagall began to produce monotypes only when Gerald Cramer, his Swiss publisher at the time suggested it to him in the late 1950’s. From that point, Chagall worked with Cramer and the printer Jacques Frelaut to produce an outstanding group of etchings, aquatints, woodcuts and monotypes including our works “Femme-oiseau” and “Le Repos”.

In fact, an exhibition of examples from that body of works was presented at the MOMA (Museum of Modern Art) in New York between November 1979 and January 1980. Riva Castleman, Director of the Department of Prints and Illustrated Books at the MOMA, interestingly noted at the time that, “This exhibition is about the creative interaction of three devoted people”.

Chagall would apply the printing inks directly onto either Perspex or copper in order to create the monotype. As it is only possible to make a single impression from this process, it was imperative that the artist was satisfied with the composition before proceeding to print.

**Monotypes**

Bird-Woman | Femme-oiseau, 1962
Original Hand Signed Unique Monotype in Colours on Japan Nacré Paper
38.5 x 28 cm / 15.1 x 11 in.
Mother and Child before Notre Dame, from: *Visions of Paris | Visions de Paris*, 1952
Original Lithograph in Colours on Wove Paper
35.5 x 26.5 cm / 14 x 10.4 in
Reference: Mourlot 82

Place de la Concorde, from: *Visions of Paris | Visions de Paris*, 1952
Original Lithograph in Colours on Wove Paper
35.5 x 26.5 cm / 14 x 10.4 in
Reference: Mourlot 83
St. Germain-des Prés, from: Derrière le Miroir, 1954
Original Lithograph in Colours on Wove Paper
38.2 x 27.6 cm / 15 x 10.9 in.
Reference: Mourlot 100

The Carrousel of the Louvre, from: Derrière le Miroir | La Carrousel du Louvre, 1954
Original Lithograph in Colours on Wove Paper
38.2 x 27.6 cm / 15 x 10.9 in.
Reference: Mourlot 103

The Panthéon, from: Derrière le Miroir | Le Panthéon, 1954
Original Lithograph on Wove Paper
38.2 x 27.6 cm / 15 x 10.9 in.
Reference: Mourlot 95

Mother and Child at the Eiffel Tower, from: Derrière le Miroir | Mère et enfant à la Tour Eiffel, 1954
Original Lithograph on Wove Paper
38.2 x 27.6 cm / 15 x 10.9 in.
Reference: Mourlot 94
Eiffel Tower with Donkey: Derrière le Miroir | La Tour Eiffel à l’Âne, 1954
Original Lithograph in Colours on Wove Paper
38.2 x 27.6 cm. / 15 x 10.9 in.
Reference: Mourlot 97

Sunday, from: Derrière le Miroir | Le Dimanches, 1954
Original Lithograph in Colours on Wove Paper
38.2 x 27.6 cm. / 15 x 10.9 in.
Reference: Mourlot 98
Inspired | L’Inspiré, 1963
Original Hand Signed and Numbered Lithograph in Colours on Arches Wove Paper
46 x 32.5 cm / 18.1 x 12.8 in.
Reference: Mourlot 398

Fantastic Composition 1st State | Composition Fantastique IroÉtat, 1976
Original Hand Signed and Numbered Lithograph in Colours on Arches Wove Paper
84 x 66 cm / 33 x 24.8 in.
Reference: Mourlot 896
Bouquet with Bird | Bouquet à l’Oiseau, 1960
Original Hand Signed and Numbered Lithograph in Colours on Arches Wove Paper
49 x 35 cm. / 19.3 x 13.8 in.
Reference: Mourlot 297

The Poppies | Les Coquelicots, 1949
Hand Signed and Numbered Lithograph in Colours on Arches Wove Paper
63 x 48.2 cm. / 24.8 x 19 in.
Reference: Charles Sorlier 2
Circus Woman | Femme de Cirque, ca. 1960
Hand Signed and Numbered Colour Lithograph and Pochoir on Arches Wove Paper
79.2 x 63.7 cm / 31.2 x 25.1 in.

Branch with Flute Player | Branche aux Joueurs de Flute, 1957
Original Hand Signed and Numbered Lithograph on Canson grey paper
65.3 x 50 cm / 25.7 x 19.6 in.
Reference: Mourlot 180
When Chagall and his new wife Vava moved from Paris to Vence, he was following in the footsteps of a long line of Modernists who had sought comfort in the calmer Mediterranean coast. It was a short journey to Nice and Vallauris – both centres of creativity. The better weather and most importantly the light of the Mediterranean were gently nurturing for Chagall. It would be here that he created his famed series Nice and the Côte d’Azur, anchored around the beautiful Bay of Angels.

Prior to that, in 1959, Tériade persuaded Chagall to undertake a new project, the illustration of the prose romance Daphnis & Chloe. The idea of reviving and illustrating this story, which had been widely popular primarily in France and England throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, is one that greatly appealed to Chagall. He began his preparation by making two trips to Greece, travelling there to absorb the inspiration of the Greek landscape. It was an important and extended honeymoon with Vava and provided respite from Vence. Over the course of three years, Chagall worked on this project creating forty-two lithographs. These have since been heralded as one of Chagall’s greatest graphic achievements. In the introduction to the set in the Mourlot catalogue raisonné it is referred to as “the most important graphic work that Marc Chagall has created thus far.”
Echo, from: Daphnis and Chloe | L’Echo, 1961

Original Hand Signed and Numbered Lithograph in Colours on Arches Wove Paper
53.6 x 75.5 cm / 21 x 29.7 in.
Reference: Mourlot 140; Corner 46
Sirene and Fish, from: Nice and the Côtes d’Azur | Sirène et Poisson, 1964
Hand Signed and Numbered
Lithograph in Colours on Arches Wove Paper
74 x 52.5 cm / 29.1 x 20.7 in
Reference: Charles Sorlier 28

The Bay | La baie, 1962
Original Hand Signed and Numbered
Lithograph in Colours on Arches Wove Paper
48 x 65 cm / 18.9 x 25.6 in
Reference: Mourlot 356
And you tied around your Tender Neck Intoxicating Garlands... from: The Land of the Gods | Et tu nouais de ton tendre col d’enivrantes guirlandes... : Sur la terre des Dieux, 1967
Original Hand Signed and Numbered Lithograph in Colours on Arches Wove Paper
65 x 50.5 cm / 25.6 x 19.9 in.
Reference: Mourlot 534; Cramer 72

Blessed Husband... from: The Land of the Gods | Bienheureux époux...: Sur la terre des Dieux, 1967
Original Hand Signed and Numbered Lithograph in Colours on Arches Wove Paper
65 x 50.5 cm / 25.6 x 19.9 in.
Reference: Mourlot 540; Cramer 72
Faith

The Vitëbsk of Chagall’s childhood was a thriving provincial centre, where Judaism and Christianity mingled side by side – the skyline dotted with the domes and towers of more than 30 churches and 60 synagogues. It is therefore unsurprising that the imagery of both cultures should mingle in Chagall’s mind. The Abrahamic faiths linked with the stories of the Bible, the figures being recognisable to a wide audience and having layers of symbolism.

Chagall was invited to illustrate the Bible by both Ambroise Vollard and by Tériade – responding in very different ways to each project. Each project one in etching and the other in lithography have been regarded as a passion project for Chagall, imbued with meaning. He was also able to harness the most powerful stories from the Bible as well as figures such as the Angel of Judgement and the Prophet Moses to reflect on the turbulent and testing times of the twentieth century.

This work, ‘Le Repos’, has many typical aspects of iconography associated with Chagall such as the mother and child, the village (shtetl), the bird and bull, all of which are framed by the warmth of the red sun. It is likely that the Christian story ‘The Flight into Egypt’, with which Chagall was familiar, would have been the basis of this composition, but as always the elements have been treated in such a way that he tells a story aside from heavy symbolism. ‘The Rest on the Flight into Egypt’ is as much a visual story of a family journey, based in Christian narrative, but with a wider appeal, which is masterfully retold by Chagall.
Angel with Sword, from: The Bible | L’ange à l’épée, 1956
Original Hand Signed and Numbered Lithograph in Colours on Arches Wove Paper
38 x 27 cm. / 15 x 10.6 in.

The Angel of Judgement | L’Ange du jugement, 1974
Hand Signed and Numbered Lithograph in Colours on Arches Wove Paper
72.5 x 55 cm. / 28.5 x 21.7 in. Reference: Charles Sorlier 45
The Magic Flute II | La Flûte Enchantée II, 1972
Original Hand Signed and Numbered Lithograph in Colours on Arches Wove Paper
59 x 44 cm. / 23 2 x 17.3 in.
Reference: Mourlot 665

The Descent Toward Sodom, from: Bible | Descente vers Sodome, from: Bible, 1956
Original Hand Coloured Etching with Watercolour on Arches Wove Paper
53.5 X 39 cm. / 20.9 X 15.35 in.
Reference: Vollard 210; Cramer 30
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Chagall
a life

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Dimensions listed refer to the sheet size.
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Front cover:
The Angel Violinist | L’Ange violoniste, 1975