

Chagall's paintings arrive from Jerusalem

National Art Museum opens *Marc Chagall: Life and Love* from the Israel Museum

By Victor Mikhailov

The exhibition in Minsk may be one of the most striking events marking the 125th anniversary of the birth of the famous artist. Organised by the Israel Museum at the initiative of the Ministry of Culture of Belarus (and with its financial support), the exhibition was facilitated by the Belarusian Embassy to Jerusalem and by the Israeli Embassy to Belarus.

Speaking at the exhibition launch, the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of France to Belarus, H.E. Mr. Michel Raineri, stressed that Chagall is one of the most interesting and well-known artists of the 20th century. He noted that he lived and worked in France for many years but that the French do not forget that he was born in Belarus. He remarked on Belarus lacking any of Chagall's works until a few years ago but noted that his influence and spirit lives on in Belarus. He thanked everyone for organising the exhibition and requested that sponsorship be found to organise more such events — especially concerning the showing of works by Chagall. He views this as a new stage and a new step in the cultural life of Belarus: a fair and objective assessment.

Speaking of Chagall's time in Paris in the 1920s, it was an age in which the French capital was filled with artists from Europe and America. They rented studios on Montparnasse, meeting in cafes and taking part in thematic balls. Paris gained a reputation for nurturing the most innovative and artistic personalities. The communal 'Beehive' (La Ruche) was a hub of inspiration, filled with artists from different countries, creating a haven for masters of the Paris school. Representatives from Belarus included Zadkine, Kikoïne, Lipschitz, Arkhipenko, Kremegne and Chagall. The intentions of

the creator of the 'Beehive', Alfred Boucher, went beyond the provision of housing (at a ridiculous fee of just fifty francs for a studio). "Besides, nobody is obliged to pay," recalled Chagall. Boucher's aim was to create a real cultural centre, as we imagine it today.

Chagall often recalled those happy days spent in the 'Beehive', saying, "Montparnasse life — it's great! I worked night after night."

In the next door workshop, an offended artist's model cried, the Italians sang to a mandolin, Soutine [an artist of the Paris School born in the Belarusian town of Smilovichi] returned from the market with a pile of rotten chickens for drawing, and I sat alone in my wooden cell, in front of an easel, by the light of a petroleum-lamp..."

While art was produced in the workshops, it was Par-



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Rotonde, at which masters of modern Belarusian art gather: Maria and Nikolay Isayonok, Nina Pilyuzina, Vladimir Kozhukh and Alexander Ksenzov. Those visiting the new exhibition have a wonderful opportunity to gain acquaintance with famous painters and to replicate one of the displayed works by Marc Chagall, under the guidance of an experienced master.

Marc Chagall: Life and Love continues the tradition of familiarising us with great masters. The National Art Museum of Belarus is hosting 89 paintings, sketches and prints from the Israel Museum, dating from 1910 to 1961. They show Chagall's landscapes, portraits, genre compositions and illustrations of works of literature and the Bible. Some were donated to the museum by

at the Marc Chagall Museum in Vitebsk. The event celebrated the anniversary of their grandfather's birth (July 6th, 1887) and the tradition continued for several years, until 2005, at the National Art Museum: *Marc Chagall. Works from the Mediterranean Period. Gouaches, Watercolours and Lithographs from 1949-1985* (1997); *Marc Chagall. Dedication to Paris* (2000); *Marc Chagall. Landscapes* (2002); and *Marc Chagall and the Scene* (2004). In 2005, *Marc Chagall. Colour in Black and White* was hosted by the National Museum of History and Culture and 2010 saw 15 lithographs presented at the National Art Museum's *Marc Chagall and European Avant-garde Artists* — on loan from the Marc Chagall Museum in Vitebsk.

Belarusian audiences have had a unique opportunity to see the multifaceted artistic legacy of their compatriot. However, the current exhibition is unique in showing Chagall's full diversity of genres.

The Walk is a self-portrait with his wife, Bella; his beloved soars through the sky while Chagall stands on his toes below, looking as if he is about to join her. Tatiana Sirakovich, the Head of the Department of Prints and Drawings at the Israel Museum, tells us, "Marc Chagall's Palestine visit in 1931 was a highlight of his life, which he spoke of as a fairy tale." Also on show are *The Praying Jew*, *Synagogue in Sadef* and *The Lovers*. There are also illustrations: of Bible stories and of the fables of La Fontaine; of the autobiographical book *My Life*;



89 paintings, sketches and prints from the Israel Museum on display



M. Chagall's Self-portrait

of Bella Chagall's *Burning Lights*, *First Encounter* and *From My Notebooks*; and of Gogol's *Dead Souls*.

According to the Director of the National Art Museum of Belarus, Vladimir Prokoptsov, 2012 is a landmark for fans, with *Marc Chagall: Life and Love* proving a worthy gift. He notes, "We're grateful to the Israel Museum, since its co-operation has made this exhibition possible in the artist's homeland of Belarus. Now, visitors will be able to assess great works by the world famous Belarusian artist on loan from the Israel Museum. I think that all fans of Chagall's art and creativity will be delighted by the exhibition."

Marc Chagall: Life and Love is one of the largest projects to date in Belarus dedicated to the creative work of the famous artist, noted the Minister for Culture, Pavel Latushko, at the opening of the exhibition at the National Art Museum. He believes the timing of the event is significant, being the 125th anniversary of the birth of Marc Chagall — who belongs to world culture. "Opening this exhibi-

tion in Belarus, we want to emphasise again that Marc Chagall belongs to Belarus and its people," he said. He views the exhibition as a successful example of public-private partnership in the field of culture. It is a sphere developing well in Belarus and he is optimistic that further projects will be forthcoming. "It's very important that our country hosts more such events," he noted.

The Israeli Ambassador to Belarus, Yosef Shagal, considers it highly symbolic that the Chagall exhibition has opened in Belarus during the year of the 20th anniversary of diplomatic relations between our two countries. "Marc Chagall's paintings bring closer two peoples who were close to him: Belarusians, among whom he grew up and matured; and Jewish people, to whom he was directly related. This is the real triumph of art, which rises above politics and sometimes guides politics. I'm delighted," he said.

Marc Chagall: Life and Love will be at the National Art Museum for three months and may later tour other venues in Belarus.



Works from the exhibition *Marc Chagall: Life and Love*

is café La Rotonde in which the restless artists gathered, sharing their hopes, ideas and aesthetic views. "In the evening, the room was filled and there was a great commotion: arguments about painting, declaimed poems, discussions on where to get five francs, fights and peace-making."

Minsk now has its own museum art café called La

the artist himself or by his daughter Ida while others have come from private collectors across Europe, America and Israel.

Fifteen years ago, Belarusian audiences first saw original works by Chagall, when his granddaughters Bella and Meret Meyer organised an exhibition at the National Art Museum of the Republic of Belarus and