

LEADERS & SUCCESS

Marc Chagall Beat Back Oppression With His Explosions Of Color

By **MARY O'NEILL**, FOR INVESTOR'S BUSINESS DAILY

Posted 12/09/2010 04:35 PM ET

Email Print Comment

Tweet LinkedIn



Marc Chagall fled France for America in 1941, surviving to install monumental works in more than a dozen countries. [AP View Enlarged Image](#)

In the thick of so many upheavals of the 20th century— not as a detached observer or disinterested theorist, but as a target, a prisoner, an artistic dynamo — was Marc Chagall.

He was trapped when the Russian borders closed on him at the outbreak of World War I in 1914.

He dodged political ploys after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.

He escaped to America during the Nazi occupation of Paris in 1941.

Through these crises, and the attendant miseries of death, famine and exile, Chagall painted.

The only disruption in an 80-year career was the loss of his beloved first wife. Chagall outlasted every danger and came to embody the 20th century: multicultural, inventive and resilient.

Danger was inherent for Chagall (1887-1985) because of his position as an outsider. He was born (as Moyshe Shagal) and raised in Vitebsk — now in Belarus but then a key city in the Pale of Settlement, an area of Russia reserved for Jews, outside of which they could not legally reside.

The forced isolation fostered a communal spirit in certain areas of the Pale. Vitebsk revolved on an axis of shared orthodoxy, language, music and folk stories, and the vibrancy of Chagall's hometown is woven into every one of his works. It is ever present in his art, the filter through which he saw the world.

"In a way, he's a historian," Michael Taylor, curator at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, told IBD. "He wanted to give a visual language specifically to the Jewish culture."

Chagall's Keys

One of the foremost modern

Hi, M My IBD » Sign Out

My Routine Modify »

The Big Picture	Markets Update
Stocks On The Move	IBD 50
eIBD	Online Courses
Stock Checkup	IBD TV
Screen Center	Daily Stock Analysis

[My Biggest Price Movers](#) My Stock Lists »

Investing Tip

Don't buy stocks based only on IBD ratings.



Most Popular

Most Viewed

All | Articles | Media

- [Obama Loss Would Put U.S. Back On The Reagan...](#)
- [The Terrifying Line in Obama's Speech That E...](#)
- [Ann Romney And Chris Christie Land A One-Two...](#)

That visual language is dreamlike: figures hovering in the sky, shooting flames, purple cows, transparent wombs peopled with upside-down peasants, Yiddish and French lettering, somersaulting acrobats, red-headed mermaids.

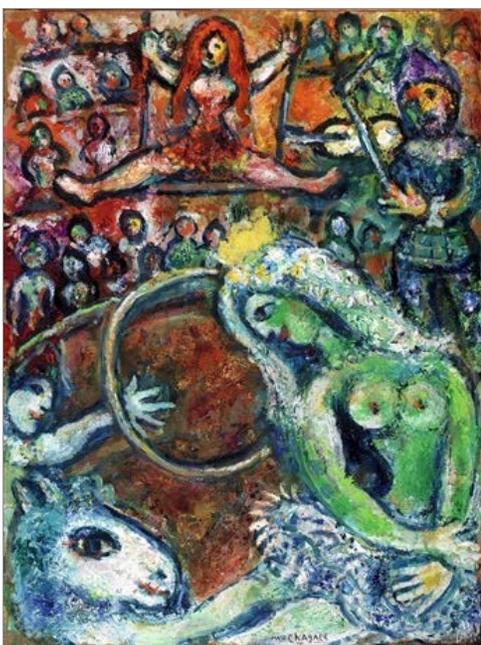
Fired Up

These are emotional rather than literary symbols, enigmatic and personal to Chagall. They are meant not to narrate, but to reflect what he remembered as the "mystical, poetic and artistic" atmosphere of Eastern European society.

At the turn of the century, that society included religious fervor as well as a new generation of enterprising, urbane Jews looking optimistically and eagerly toward revolution.

"There was a heightened intensity at the time, and he came up with a way to capture the excitement and immediacy of all that," said Taylor. "It gave him the right to think in terms of a hallucinatory aesthetic. He didn't feel the need to have things make sense in his paintings."

"I don't know where he gets those images," said his rival Pablo Picasso. "He must have an angel in his head."



The modernist Chagall came out with "The Green Circus Rider" in 1961.
[AP View Enlarged Image](#)

Chagall's nonrational approach to painting, which mushroomed in France a generation after his debut, made him a bastion of modern art.

Though his motifs are peculiar — why is a goat playing the violin? — his art is surprisingly approachable. His simple forms and especially his keyed-up colors are a warm invitation to the viewer to suspend any demand for logic and enjoy the vision.

"You know my style — the one who paints with violet," he told a curator.

He might have included emerald green, claret red and deep blues.

Though rooted in Vitebsk, Chagall needed a wider orbit. After training at a local school, he moved in 1907 to St. Petersburg, where he learned that Paris was the epicenter for modern painters.

"Paris!" Chagall wrote. "No word sounded sweeter to me!"

With a surplus of ambition and a nearly empty wallet, Chagall struck out for France. He quickly absorbed the latest movements, but never abandoned his own character or instincts in favor of the going trends.

"Had he gone to Paris and tried to assimilate, he would've been one of many aspiring artists," said Taylor. "His background was what made him different, made him stand out.

painters, he worked in nearly every medium to sustain an 80-year career.

"If I create from the heart, nearly everything works; if from the head, almost nothing."

[Six Enormous Stakes In Presidential Election](#)

[Stocks Bounce Higher As Leaders Attract Fast...](#)

11/02/2012 09:00:26 PM ET

He kept his identity, yet his work became synonymous with Paris."

As abstraction — removing all recognizable objects from an image — became the calling card of the avant-garde, Chagall went in the opposite direction, creating scenes from the Bible, mythic figures or pedestrian life. He could risk what seemed a backward choice because of his facility with color — luminous, forceful and engaging. "It still looks fresh 100 years later," said Taylor.

Chagall's true risks began in 1914, when he left Paris to fetch his fiancée from Vitebsk. Intending a short trip, he became entangled in the chaos of World War I and the Russian Revolution.

Even So

His paintings during that chaos may be his most optimistic. Chagall's "Double Portrait with a Glass of Wine" from 1917 shows his elation at marrying his muse, Bella.

Besides, he had reason to hope that Jews would have a role in the new Russian regime. Chagall did have a role. He was named commissar of art for his region (he turned down the national position) and created a prestigious art academy.

Westward

Disillusionment with the government's agenda for the arts — and starvation — drove him back to Paris. Although Chagall was thrilled to be with kindred spirits in what became his adopted country, serious threats were germinating.

Anti-Jewish laws stripped him of his new French citizenship. He likely couldn't forecast the enormity even when four of his paintings were selected for the Degenerate Art Exhibition in Munich in 1937. Surrounded by Nazi quotes, modernist art was propagandized as examples of madness and treachery.

By 1941, it was nearly too late. On the same day Chagall and his wife evacuated to New York, police trucks swept their neighborhood in Marseilles, looking for Jews to deport for forced labor.

The exile only widened his exposure. In the U.S., he had major shows in Chicago and New York, as well as a cherished commission to design the stage sets and costumes for a Tchaikovsky production at the New York Ballet Theater.

These successes couldn't compensate for his losses. From a 1941 population of 240,000 in greater Vitebsk, only 118 survivors remained by 1944. The sustaining connection to his homeland ruptured for good when Bella died in 1945.

After a period of despair that paralyzed his work, he resuscitated.

In "Chagall: A Biography," Jackie Wullschlager wrote, "From now until the end of his life, Chagall would be irresistibly drawn to a stage, a ceiling, a wall, a cathedral window." As he aged, Chagall's field expanded from the easel to large-scale, public works.

Though he created sculpture, tapestries, mosaics and ceramics, Chagall's stained-glass windows — started when he was 70 — are the most popular testament to this late stage of his career. Their international appeal — 86 installations span the globe — contrasts sharply with his early experience as an outcast.

"Of all of those new avenues, for an artist who is so sensitive to color, stained-glass windows were a perfect vehicle for him," said Stephanie D'Alessandro, curator at the Art Institute of Chicago. "Once light goes through the stained glass and activates it, the colors are enveloping, all encompassing."

Award Winner

In 1963, when he was nearly 80, he was commissioned to update the 1,800-square-foot ceiling of the Paris Opera. A redo of a jewel of French culture would be a daunting assignment for any painter; it was especially significant for Chagall, a nonnative. His mural tribute to composers, actors and dancers earned him the Legion of Honour.

Chagall called stained-glass windows "the transparent partition between my heart and the heart of the world." His creativity was the most potent response to the difficulties he endured, outliving even war.

✉ Email 🖨 Print 💬 Comment



Sponsored Links

[Analyze Any Stock FREE with VectorVest!](#)

Sign up to receive a free report from VectorVest! This is the only report that tells you what a stock is really worth, how safe a stock really is and whether a stock is a Buy, Sell or Hold.

www.VectorVest.com

[Watch Your VW Story](#)

Watch stories from Volkswagen owners at whyvw.com now!

www.whyvw.com

[Watch Your VW Story](#)

Watch stories from Volkswagen owners at whyvw.com now!

www.whyvw.com

See Also

[Top Venture Capitalist Bill Draper Focuses On People](#) 02:13 PM ET

[Web Retailers And Publishers Get Help For Sure Growth](#) 02:13 PM ET

[William Randolph Hearst Sparked A Media Empire](#) 11/01/2012 01:58 PM ET

[Manage Assets Wisely To Survive, Thrive In Business](#) 11/01/2012 01:58 PM ET

[Fundraising, Marketing Skills Crucial For Success](#) 10/31/2012 02:07 PM ET

Comments ()

Research	News	Editorials	IBD University	IBD TV	eIBD	Leaderboard	Store
IBD Charts	Investing	Andrew Malcolm	Online Courses				
MarketSmith	Business	Cartoons	Workshops				
Stock Checkup	Economy	Capital Hill Blog	Homestudy				
Screen Center	Technology	On The Left	Forums				
Options Center	Management	On The Right	Meetups				
ETF Center	Politics	Viewpoint	Events				
IBD Indexes	Special Reports	Perspective	Ask IBD				
	Click Tech Blog	Polls	Financial Dictionary				
	Economic Calendar		Educational Videos				

[Get Quote](#) [Search Site](#)

GET eIBD AND START USING THE #1 INVESTING STRATEGY
GET IT NOW!

[Home](#) | [About IBD](#) | [Advertising](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Classifieds & Partner Offers](#) | [Retail Locations](#) | [IBD Editorials](#) | [CAN SLIM Advisors](#)

INVESTOR'S BUSINESS DAILY™

Notice: Information contained herein is not and should not be construed as an offer, solicitation, or recommendation to buy or sell securities. The information has been obtained from sources we believe to be reliable; however no guarantee is made or implied with respect to its accuracy, timeliness, or completeness. The information and content are subject to change without notice. You may use IBD's Services and Subscriber-Only features solely for personal, non-commercial use. Removal or alteration of any trademark, copyright or other notices will result in legal action taken to protect our rights. You may not distribute IBD's Services or Subscriber-Only features to others, whether or not for payment or other consideration, and you may not modify, copy, frame, reproduce, sell, publish, transmit, display or otherwise use or revise any portion of IBD's Services or Subscriber-Only features. For information regarding use of IBD's Services for any purpose, please see our [Terms and Conditions of Use](#). © 2000-2012 Investor's Business Daily, Inc. All rights reserved. Investor's Business Daily, IBD, CAN SLIM and corresponding logos are registered trademarks of Investor's Business Daily, Inc. [Copyright and Trademark Notice](#) | [Privacy Statement](#)

WILLIAM O'NEIL + CO.

© 2012 William O'Neil + Co. Incorporated. All Rights Reserved. The William O'Neil + Co. Database and all data contained herein are provided by William O'Neil + Co. Incorporated and are used by IBD under license agreement. Daily Graphs and Daily Graphs Online are trademarks of William O'Neil + Co. Incorporated or its subsidiaries.

MARKETSMITH

© 2012 MarketSmith, Incorporated. Charts provided by MarketSmith are used by IBD under license agreement. MarketSmith is a registered trademark of MarketSmith, Incorporated.

Select market data is provided by Interactive Data Corp. Real Time Services. Price and Volume data is delayed 20 minutes unless otherwise noted, is believed accurate but is not warranted or guaranteed by Interactive Data Corp. Real Time Services and is subject to Interactive Data Corp. Real Time