

PATRICK AND BEATRICE HAGGERTY MUSEUM OF ART

Marc Chagall The Bible Series

January 22 - March 21, 2004

The exhibition **Marc Chagall: The Bible Series** presents the complete set of 105 colored etchings given to the Haggerty Museum of Art by Patrick and Beatrice Haggerty in 1980 and *The Prophet Jeremiah* tapestry from the Milwaukee Jewish Federation.



The Prophet Jeremiah, 1973, tapestry, collection of the Milwaukee Jewish Federation.

One of the most successful artists of the twentieth century, Marc Chagall (1887-1985) came from a large devout Jewish family. He was a painter, printmaker and designer who also created theater sets and costumes, murals, stained-glass windows and tapestries. He was born in the small Russian town of Vitebsk, and studied art in St. Petersburg and Paris. After the Russian Revolution of 1917, he became Commissar for the Arts in Vitebsk and later stage designer for the Jewish State Theater in Moscow. In 1923, Chagall fled the Soviet Union and settled in France where he began working with the Parisian art dealer and publisher Ambroise Vollard. After commissioning Chagall to illustrate Nicolai Gogol's *Les Ames mortes* (Dead Souls) and Jean de La Fontaine's *Fables*, Vollard asked the artist to begin a series of prints based on the Bible.

Chagall worked on the *Bible* series etchings over a twenty-five year period, first painting the gouaches that served as models for the works while on a visit to Palestine in 1931. He completed sixty-six of the etching plates before Vollard's death in 1939. After a brief period of imprisonment under the Vichy government, Chagall made his way to New York where he lived until the end of the war. The artist settled permanently in France in 1948, and returned to *The Bible Series* project four years later, finishing the black and white portfolio in 1956.

The illustrated scenes come from twelve books of the *Bible* including *The Book of Genesis*, *Exodus*, *Numbers*, *Deuteronomy*, *Joshua*, *Judges*, *Samuel*, *Kings*, *Isaiah*, *Jeremiah*, *Lamentations* and *Ezekiel*. The majority of the etchings depict scenes from *Genesis* and adhere closely to the Biblical text.

In completing the series, Chagall chose to illustrate Biblical scenes that reflected the recent experience of the Jews in Europe. The later episodes of *The Bible Series* feature the Israelites' escape from Egyptian slavery, struggles led by Joshua, Saul, David and Solomon to establish a homeland for the Israelites, and the suffering and redemption of the Jews as told by the prophets Elijah, Isaiah and Jeremiah. In 1957, Chagall hand colored 100 sets of the entire series which was published by the Greek art critic Tériade, who produced the Chagall editions left unfinished when Vollard died. The Haggerty edition is number 65.

“Ever since early childhood, I have been captivated by the Bible. It has always seemed to me to be the greatest source of poetry of all time.”

Marc Chagall

In the early 1960s, Chagall, like many artists, had several of his designs reproduced as tapestries by major textile studios. He designed three tapestries for the Great Hall of the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) and one for the Musée National Message Biblique in Nice. These early tapestries were manufactured by the Gobelins studios in France. In 1964, Chagall met Yvette Cauquil-Prince, Belgium-born artist and world-renown tapestry weaver. The two artists

immediately began collaborating on large scale tapestries. They produced 29 tapestries over a 20 year period

In 1972, Chagall produced a gouache for *The Prophet Jeremiah*. Cauquil-Prince translated this watercolor painting into a cartoon, or full-scale rendering, on the warp threads of a loom. The tapestry commissioned by Evan Helfaer for the Milwaukee Jewish Federation's Evan and Marion Helfaer Community Service Building was manufactured by Turkish and Moroccan weavers. It took them eight months to produce the tapestry which became the first large-scale Chagall weaving in the United States.

Cauquil-Prince produced more than 80 tapestries for major twentieth-century artists. She studied painting in Paris before training as a tapestry weaver. In 1959, she opened a studio in Paris where she developed new techniques and directed an increasingly large group of weavers. She produced tapestries for Alexander Calder, Georges Braque, Max Ernst, Wassily Kandinsky, Roberto Matta, Niki de Saint-Phalle, Paul Klee and Pablo Picasso among others, but maintained the longest and most productive relationship with Marc Chagall.



David and Absalom

"So Joab came to the king, and told him; and when he called for Absalom, he came to the king, and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king: and the king kissed Absalom."
(2 Samuel 14:33)



The Bible Series, 1957, suite of 105 hand-colored etchings 24 X 18 in. each
Gift of Patrick and Beatrice Haggerty

Samson and the Lion

". . . and behold, a young lion roared against him. And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and he [tore] him as he would have [torn] a kid . . ." (Judges 14:5-6)



Samson Destroys the Temple

"And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood . . . And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people who were in it." (Judges 16:29-30)

Acknowledgments

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