





Marc Chagall  
*Blue Lovers*. 1914  
Gouache and pastel on paper mounted  
on cardboard. 49 x 44 cm



Nathan Althman  
*Landscape. LaRuche*. 1911  
Oil on canvas mounted  
on cardboard. 43.5 x 35 cm

**M**arc Chagall and his real and fantastical works are famous worldwide. He spent a significant portion of his life in different countries: France, Germany, and the United States. His paintings beautify many museum exhibitions, and his stained glass windows and murals decorate churches and theatrical spaces. Both France and the USA claim Chagall as their own, but he was born in Vitebsk (now in Belarus), which was then a small provincial city of the Russian Empire. This place remained in his heart and on his canvases right up to the artist's death. Chagall received his first lessons in painting and drawing there, in Vitebsk, from his teacher Yehuda Pen, to whom he dedicated the poem "First Teacher" and various pages in his book *My Life*, written after he had left Russia. After moving from Vitebsk to the then-capital, St. Petersburg, Chagall continued his studies with artists who are well known to the public: Mstislav Dobuzhinsky and Léon Bakst.

In 1910, the talented youth left for Paris, and lived there in a building called *La Ruche de Arts* ("the Beehive"), depicted at that time by Nathan Althman. In Paris, Chagall met French poets and artists, including Guillaume Apollinaire, who dedicated poems to him, and absorbed the then-fashionable cubism.

He lived with others from Russia: Nathan Althman, David Shterenberg, Joseph Shkolnik, Antoine Pevsner, Chaim Soutine, Naum Gabo, Sonia Delaunay, and others. Naturally, they all spent time with one another and showed each other their works.

After spending four years in Paris, Chagall returned to Russia, which was buzzing with creative debate at that time. The voices of the so-called non-objectivists could already be loudly heard: the abstractionist Wassily

Kandinsky, the Suprematist Kazimir Malevich, and the constructivist Vladimir Tatlin. Each of these had their followers and like-minded artists. But Chagall did not side with any of these extravagant avant-garde movements. He remained true to himself, creating the world from his unique perspective; a world in which reality, imagination, and fairy-tale fantasy converged.

Chagall's uniqueness and his lack of resemblance to others were immediately noted by viewers and critics. Some were indignant and denied the artistic value of his work. Others noted that his works were more contemporary than all the others on show at exhibitions labelled with "-isms." For example, at exhibitions in 1915 and 1916, Chagall was exhibited alongside works by Mikhail Larionov, Natalia Goncharova, Olga Rozanova and other representatives of neo-primitivism or even Suprematism, like Malevich. According to the recollections of participants in these events, it was Chagall the public paid attention to; crowds surrounded his paintings, which sold out.

The success of Chagall's works with the public, from his very first exhibitions, immediately made the artist famous and in demand. Works from his Russian period went to different owners but, even nowadays, catalogues do not always provide accurate information on titles, dimensions or even names of buyers. The location of many of these works is still unknown; many were lost in attics and basements, forgotten or hidden between the 1930s and 1970s from the eyes of those who censured anything not painted in the spirit of socialist realism.

By the 1970s, Chagall himself had turned to Russian collectors and asked them to find his works.