

Chagall in German Switzerland

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Ghagall in German Switzerland

The Fraimünster which stands on the banks of the Limmat in Zürich was once a Carolingian Minster; it is now the Parish church of a wealthy district in a prosperous city. Sometime after the year 1250 a rectangular chancel was added to the old sanctuary and in 1960 the church council decided that this should be restored.

During the nineteenth century various wooden structures had been erected and once these had been removed the real beauty of the building became apparent. The walls were found to be decorated with paintings from different periods of the Middle Ages; the choir stalls were of the fifteenth century and a late Gothic rood screen closed off the chancel from the nave.

Then as the wife of the parson Irmgard Vogelsanger writes in her guide to the church, "a desire rapidly emerged to decorate the newly-recovered space with a representative work by a contemporary artist. For a church which has boasted windows of coloured glass as far back as the ninth century, a coloured design for the five chancel windows seemed a most suitable idea. But two competitions in which a number of Swiss artists participated failed to produce results of the standard hoped for. So the plan was abandoned for the time being and the Fraumünster congregation began to build up a fund in the hope of being able to put it into effect later."

The Chagall exhibition in the Zürich Kunsthhaus in 1967 brought a decision. Some of the people interested in

By Kathleen Watts

the plan saw the original version of the Jerusalem windows displayed and became convinced that Chagall was better qualified than any other contemporary artist to create a cycle of windows with a religious message which would be comparable to the importance of the edifice.

Chagall was no longer young — he was born in 1887; it was known that he was heavily committed and there seemed little hope that he could be persuaded to accept. However with a certain amount of misgiving the parson went to visit the great painter in his home in St. Paul-de-Vence.

From then on the story reads like a modern fairy story. It so happened that for many years Chagall had been looking for a place of worship where he could find an effective setting for his cycle of biblical pictures and so he agreed to make the journey to Zürich.

It was love at first sight! Chagall entered the Fraumünster and far more than falling in love with it he had a complete vision of it as it was before it

had been reformed. He saw the glittering altar and behind it the walls covered with mosaics and five Gothic chancel windows painted in brilliant colours. He was deeply impressed by the dignity and solemnity — indeed as he himself said, the holiness — of the place.

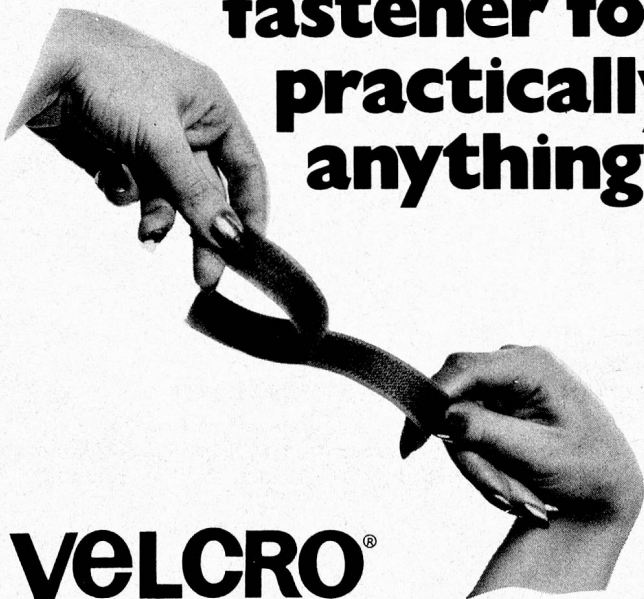
It was pointed out that already the painting of the windows was a big commitment — mosaics would really be too expensive and perhaps apart from the cost might still not quite be in keeping with the temperament of the parishioners. But the deal was clenched and Chagall returned to Provence. Before a week had gone by the entire price of the work had been donated anonymously, by an art-loving married couple in Zürich; the first account had been paid by the churchwardens from the congregation's fund.

Modern Art

And so the windows were made by the Jacques Simon glass painting studios in Rheims. The artistic director of this old firm with its long tradition is Charles Marq who of recent years has kept in close touch with modern artists.

Apart from the windows at Plateau d'Assy Charles Marq has executed all Chagall's work on glass. The windows took a year to make. In spite of the fact that Marq himself is an artist and designer and went to infinite pains to find the best

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methods of reproducing Chagall's highly individual colouration and ideas there was still much work for the artist himself and so he went to Rheims personally and painted the figures and shadows on the prepared glass surfaces in grisaille.

As a child brought up in strictly Orthodox Eastern Jewish surroundings he knew all the figures of the Old Testament intimately. Russian Icon painting taught him the symbols of the Christian religion and he was certainly influenced by this form of art which showed him how to express a religious subject through painting. The pictures in these windows tell very clearly and with great simplicity in the full tradition of medieval art the message that Chagall has to give to mankind.

"Love" window

It is simply that only peace through love can save the world, and so the attention is immediately drawn to the central window — *The Christ Window* — where the life of Christ is portrayed. Beginning at the bottom with; Mary appears in the branches of the Tree of Jesse with the child in her arms; Elizabeth is at her side. Then follows the life and parables of Jesus; the Crucifixion and finally at the topmost part of the window Christ in glory, resurrected, the cynosure of all eyes.

On the north side, *The Prophet's Window* tells the story of Elijah, the oldest of the prophets being carried away in a chariot of fire drawn by three fiery steeds towards heaven, whilst Elisha, his successor is shown as a solitary figure in the bottom corner. Then also from the Old Testament comes the story of Jeremiah and the prophetic visions of Ezekial; above them in majesty is God the Creator. *The Jacob Window* comes next with Jacob dreaming — his struggle with the angel and then his dream of the ladder to heaven.

The Zion Window on the right of the *Christ Window* begins with King David, the singer of the psalms with his harp — Bathsheba is shown behind him with her son, King Solomon — the seven-branch candlestick above her head. Then the Old Testament is connected with the New with the New Jerusalem descending from heaven to earth, an inspiration from the Revelation of St. John.

Jewish ritual

The window on the south wall conforms with Jewish ritual — the north wall, "the Prophets" — the south wall, "the Law". Here perhaps the message is most plainly given. Beginning at the top Moses sits upon his throne with the tablets of stone in his hand. The Law has been given and the people have but to obey or disobey. Disobedience brings war and suffering. Fugitives follow a horseman bearing the torch of war and a cross bearer symbolizes, as is so often the case with Chagall, in whom echoes of his war experience still resound, the suffering of

mankind as a whole.

But for the first time in history there is a ray of hope with the prophecy of the coming of the Messiah which will be followed by a Kingdom of Peace.

"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them."

In the final picture Isaiah received the message from the angel who turns the head of the prophet away from the Law upon his knees. Isaiah stretches out his arm and points over the head of David to the Child Christ in his mother's arms springing from the roots of the Tree of Jesse.

To those of us who have only seen the "profane" pictures of Chagall in exhibitions these windows come as a complete revelation. To quote Irmgard Vogelsanger again:

"It seems to us that Chagall, in this great creation of his later years, has once more transcended himself, once more passed beyond every threshold to bring the joyous tidings of the Bible to everyone irrespective of human frontiers, in a great synthesis of light and colours formed by his pious spirit and artistic skill into pictures that are unforgettable. This hymn of praise in magnificent colour prompts a paraphrase of St. Augustine: "Light and colour, of Thy Creation, shall praise Thee."

FAIRS AND EXHIBITIONS IN SWITZERLAND DURING THE MONTH OF OCTOBER 1978

- 1st — 4th October — Lausanne SERATEX — Buying Week for Ladies, Gentlemen and Children's Wear.
3rd — 7th October — Basle: NUCLEX 78 — 5th International Nuclear Industries Fair.
6th — 16th October — Lugano: ARTECASA — 15th Ideal Home Exhibition.
8th — 10th October — Berne: BESPO 78 — Summer Sports and Textile Fair..
12th — 22nd October — St. Gall: OLMA — Swiss Agricultural and Dairy Farming Fair.
15th — 17th October — Zürich: MODEXPO — International Ladies Fashion Fair (1979).
15th — 27th October — Zürich: Swiss Purchase Weeks for Leather and Travel Articles.
19th — 22nd October — Berne: Swiss Caravan Exhibition 78.
25th — 5th November — Geneva: Ideal Home — International Exhibition.

TRAFFIC ON SWISS AIRPORTS IN 1977

	Zurich		Geneva		Basle	
		variation in % compared with 1976		variation in % compared with 1976		variation in % compared with 1976
Flights	114,937	+3	72,755	+5	22,877	-1
Passengers	7,485,950	+10	4,368,339	+10	799,658	+2
Freight (t)	139,208	+10	34,691	-5	21,505	+22
Mail (t)	9,452	+11	6,483	+9	2,678	+13
Companies	45		35		10	
Destinations (SODT)	126		86		28	

INDEX OF PRICES IN SWITZERLAND AT THE END OF MAY 1978

	Wholesale price 1963 = 100	Difference in relation to	Retail price Sept. 1977 = 100 (Sept. 1966 = 100)	Difference in relation to
End of May 1978	144.0		100.8 (170.0)	
End of April 1978	143.8	+0.1%	100.7 (169.8)	+0.1%
End of May 1977	149.5	-3.7%	(167.3)	(+1.7%)
Evolution of the prices of	... raw materials, semi- manufactured products and consumer goods.		... main consumer goods and services included in the family budgets of wage-earners.	