

A Fashion Fantasia  
Chagall's Dazzling Stage Tableaux  
By Jody Zellen



**Chagall: Fantasies for the Stage**  
**Los Angeles County Museum of Art**  
**July 31, 2017 – January 7, 2018**

***Chagall: Fantasies for the Stage*** is an intoxicating experience where images in the mind's eye by the renowned Russian, Jewish painter **Marc Chagall** (1887-1985) take on a new dimensionality. The exhibition presents costumes and sets from four productions: ***Aleko*** (1942), ***The Firebird*** (1945), ***Daphnis and Chloé*** (1958), and ***The Magic Flute*** (1967). Accompanying the lavishly surreal costumes and props are short clips from these productions where Chagall's imaginative interpretations of the stories come to life. Included in the exhibition are hundreds of objects— 41 costumes and close to 100 preparatory sketches, giving viewers insight into Chagall's process.

Arranged chronologically, the exhibition unfolds more like a costume display than traditional art exhibition as the installation includes projections, videos clips, and rotating stages that provide viewers the opportunity to see the costumes in the round. The best way to view the exhibition is to traverse back and forth among the studies, costumes and films to digest the nuances of Chagall's interpretations in the four productions.

Chagall's works often depict fantastical places filled with swirling colors, floating figures in worlds where animals and humans co-exist. The translation from two to three-dimensions however, is mind boggling, as seeing flat forms embodied in the flesh exceeds expectations. It is impossible not to be awed by the large-scale projection of a backdrop from the *The Magic*

*Flute* in front of which stand Chagall's intricately detailed costumes and masks for the blue striped animal, green faced monster, alligator and Queen of the Night. It seems as if the dancers' bodies are still inside and ready to leap across the stage. Behind this tableau are preparatory drawings for the production tracing the process of the costumes' realization.

Chagall's stage curtains, sets and costumes for **Stravinsky's** ballet ***The Firebird*** originally commissioned in 1945 are still used in contemporary performances. The works Chagall created for this production were his most avant-garde to date, incorporating contrasting textures and elaborate designs that extended from the actual clothing and headdresses to the surrounding sets and props. At LACMA, one can imagine the sensation of seeing the performers move across the stage in these disguises.

This immersive installation invites viewers to wander, watch and imagine. It takes them back in time but also situates them in the present. While it is impossible to separate the personal from the political, it is clear that the events in Chagall's life influenced the work he created. It is still evident that he was able to use his artistic skills and sensibilities to transcend time and place, taking viewers into believable fantasy worlds. While the exhibition contextualizes Chagall's costumes and stage designs by presenting selected paintings and works on paper, seeing the 3D works makes the paintings and drawings more memorable and understandable, giving them greater resonance.

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