

Press Kit: Chaïm Soutine. Against the Current

Chaïm Soutine. Against the Current
Sep 2, 2023 — Jan 14, 2024
K20

Press conference and preview
Wednesday, August 30, 2023, 12 noon, K20

With:

- Susanne Gaensheimer, Director Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf
- Susanne Meyer-Büser, Curator
- Anjouna Novak, Assistant Curator of Education

Content

K21

Press Text Exhibition	2
Opening, Supporting Program	4
Exhibition Preview	5
Annex	7

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#K20ChaïmSoutine
#ChaïmSoutine
#K20

Chaïm Soutine. Against the Current – Comprehensive Exhibition dedicated to the Famous Painter

From September 2, 2023, the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen will present a comprehensive exhibition of the works of Chaïm Soutine (Smilavičy 1893–1943 Paris). His expressive paintings shed light on his life as a Jewish emigrant and at the same time bear witness to an unstable existence on the fringes of society. With some sixty paintings, the exhibition at K20 deliberately concentrates on the artist's early masterpieces, focusing on the various series created between 1918 and 1928. The experience of flight and migration, which profoundly shaped Soutine's life, resonates in his works and thus creates a bridge to the present day.

Chaïm Soutine is one of the great painters of early modernism. His unique paintings are at once sensitive and drastic. With tempestuous brushstrokes, explosions of color, and distortions of form, he creates declarations of love for life and the people who surrounded him. Bellboys, chambermaids, cooks, altar boys, and choir boys are his models. With them, as with his paintings of swaying landscapes and slaughtered animals, he creates striking images for an entire era—a generation marked by war, social ills, and the relentless conflict between religious and political worldviews. The people and motifs depicted are deeply moving because their vulnerability also points to existential anxieties that still seem real today.

Soutine grew up in a shtetl near Minsk in what is now Belarus. He was the tenth of eleven children. Although poverty and discrimination marked his childhood, he managed to take painting lessons at the age of fourteen, first in Minsk, then at the academy in Vilnius, and from 1913 in Paris. The French metropolis became his surrogate home, but Soutine remained an outsider who initially had a poor command of the language and was unfamiliar with social conventions. Among his few friends was the Italian artist Amedeo Modigliani. He ignored artist groups as well as the leading trends of Surrealism and Cubism. The poverty that had dominated his everyday life since his youth seemed to catch up with him again in Paris. His socialization and a serious stomach ailment made it difficult for him to participate in social life. Nothing changed when, in the winter of 1922/1923, the American collector Albert C. Barnes purchased fifty-two paintings by the hitherto almost unknown painter, and Soutine's financial situation improved virtually overnight.

When he moved to Paris, Soutine studied the old masters in the Louvre and created extensive series of works based on motifs by El Greco, Diego Velázquez, Rembrandt van Rijn, and Jean Siméon Chardin. He devoted himself with great passion to color as a medium and vehicle of expression in his paintings. The exhibition shows that Soutine forged an individual path between abstraction and figuration earlier than other contemporaries. While Soutine's solitary nature made him an anomaly of modernism during his lifetime; after his death, he was elevated to the status of the forefather of Abstract Expressionism and New Figuration. Subsequent generations of painters revered him and referred to him as a role

model and source of inspiration. These included Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, Jean Dubuffet, and especially Francis Bacon. Later, they were joined by Georg Baselitz, Marlene Dumas, Amy Sillman, Anish Kapoor, and others.

While in France and North America, Soutine is considered one of the key representatives of modernism, in Germany he is known primarily in artist circles. Apart from the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, only a few other museums in Germany have paintings by Soutine in their collections. The last museum exhibition took place in 1981 in the Westfälisches Landesmuseum in Münster.

Even today, Soutine's name is mentioned unusually often when contemporary artists are asked about key figures in their biographies. Although Soutine's work was created around 100 years ago, his painting seems to be fascinatingly timeless in terms of technique and subject matter. One of the pivotal points of this exhibition is therefore the question of the topicality of Soutine's painting. As a bridge between modernism and the present, a special interview film was produced by Louisiana Channel to accompany the exhibition. It explores the question of what accounts for the unbroken fascination with the works and the person of this special artist to this day. Dana Schutz (1972, US), Amy Sillman (1955, US), Emma Talbot (1969, GB), Leidy Churchman (1979, US), Jutta Koether (1958, DE/US), Thomas Hirschhorn (1957, CH/FR), Chantal Joffe (1969, US), and Imran Qureshi (1972, PK) talk about the influence Soutine has had on their careers.

K21

Curator: Susanne Meyer-Büser

The exhibition is a cooperation between the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, and the Kunstmuseum Bern.

The exhibition is sponsored by the Cultural Foundation of the German Federal States.

The exhibition is supported by the Friends of K20K21.

Media Partner of the exhibition
Weltkunst

Media Partner of the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen
Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung

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Catalog

Chaïm Soutine. Against the Current

Edited by: Susanne Gaensheimer and Susanne Meyer-Büser, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen

Texts by Claire Bernardi, Marta Dziawańska, Catherine Frèrejean, Sophie Krebs, Susanne Meyer-Büser, Pascale Samuel

Hatje Cantz, Berlin

Separate German and English editions

176 pages, hardcover

32 euros

Audio guide to the exhibition—available exclusively and free of charge with the admission ticket!

André Kaczmarczyk (b. 1986) inspires both theater and film audiences as an actor and director and now lends his voice to the audio guide for the comprehensive Chaïm Soutine exhibition at K20 – Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen. He studied at the Ernst Busch Academy of Dramatic Art in Berlin and has been an ensemble member of the Düsseldorf Schauspielhaus since 2016. Since 2021, he has been investigating as the first gender-fluid chief detective, Vincent Ross, in the television series *Polizeiruf 110*.

K21**K+ Digital Guide – Digital booklet accompanying the exhibition**

<https://www.kunstsammlung.de/en/soutine/>

In addition to the exhibition, there is a comprehensive digital accompanying booklet online with a wealth of information on the artist and the art historical context.

Supporting Program

Opening of the Exhibition

Friday, September 1, 2023, 7pm

K20

Speakers:

- Susanne Gaensheimer, Director Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf
- Leopold Freiherr von Diergardt, Chairman, Freunde der Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen
- Susanne Meyer-Büser, Curator

Sneak Peek – Preview for Young Adults

Friday, September 1, 2023, 4:00 – 5:30 pm

Free admission with student ID card

Registration required

Guided Tours

The exhibition at a glance

An Overview of the Exhibition

Sundays and holidays, 3:00 – 4:00 pm

Registration required

For the exhibition *Chaim Soutine. Against the Current*, the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen offers multilingual guided tours in German, English, and French, as well as easy-to-understand language and for the deaf.

For detailed information on our accompanying program, please visit:

<https://www.kunstsammlung.de/en/calendar/>

Gallery Talk in English

Wed, 6.9., 6 – 7 pm

Wed., 1.11. 6 – 7 pm

Free entry as part of the KPMG art evening

Exhibition Preview

Isaac Julien

September 16, 2023 – February, 2024

K21

Press conference: Thursday, September 21, 2023, 11 am at K21

K21 presents the first survey exhibition in Germany dedicated to the British artist Isaac Julien (b. 1960 in London, lives and works in London and Santa Cruz/California). It is a groundbreaking body of work that pushes the boundaries of film and art through expansive cinematographic installations. Julien's cinematic imagination, critical thinking and activist engagement with decolonial aesthetics are expressed both in his early films of the 1980s as well as in the exceptional cinematic images of his large, internationally acclaimed film installations of the last twenty years. At once radically political and highly aesthetic, the works bring to the fore overlooked issues and restore forgotten archive material. Using poetry, dance, aesthetics, architecture, and music, Julien explores the possibilities of film as a medium and disrupts traditional notions of linear history, space, and time. At the heart of his pioneering work is the demand for equality, and his work remains as fiercely experimental and politically charged as it was forty years ago. "I'll tell you what freedom is to me. No fear"—this quote by the American jazz singer and civil rights activist Nina Simone inspired Isaac Julien's subtitle for this exhibition.

K21

The exhibition was conceived in cooperation with the Tate Britain, London, where it was shown from April 26 to August 20, 2023. Following the station at K21, the exhibition will travel to the Bonnefantenmuseum in Maastricht, where it will be on view from March 8 to August 18, 2024.

Curator: Isabella Maidment (previously at Tate Britain); Nathan Ladd (Tate Britain). Curator of the exhibition at K21: Doris Krystof. Organised in conjunction with Isaac Julien Studio in London (Juanita Boxill, James Keith, Vladimir Seput, Paul Smith). Exhibition design Adjaye Associates.

The exhibition "Isaac Julien. What Freedom Is To Me" at K21, Dusseldorf is supported by the Ford Foundation ; got2b; The Arts Division, The University of California, Santa Cruz, and proAV.

With the generous support of Victoria Miro.

Media Partner of the Exhibition
Monopol Magazin

Andrea Büttner**No Fear, No Shame, No Confusion****Oct 28, 2023— Feb 18, 2024****K21****Press conference: Thursday, October 26, 2023, 11 am at K21**

In her artistic practice, Andrea Büttner (b. 1972 in Stuttgart) combines art history with social and ethical issues.

Her research-based works focus on wide-ranging themes such as poverty, shame, work, craft, religion, ascription of value, vulnerability, community, botany, philosophy, and art, which she examines in terms of their ambivalent tension between aesthetics and ethics. The internationally renowned artist uses various conceptual methods, materials, and media—from woodcut, painting, drawing, printing, and photography to installation, video, sculpture, glass art, and ceramics—to pose fundamental questions about the relationship between intimate artistic production and public exposure, between mechanisms of representation and ascriptions of value in art and society.

With the exhibition at K21, Andrea Büttner aims to bring together the various strands of her current research and work. Thematically, she focuses on the structural connection of shame, labor, power and the question of value creation processes and valuation systems, art historical images of so-called shame punishments and their contemporary relevance, arts and crafts as a political field and its ambivalent role for national and religious identity formation, and fascist continuities in the ecology movement. The exhibition will be accompanied by a publication conceived by the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen in cooperation with the Kunstmuseum Basel.

The exhibitions in the Bel Étage of K21 are supported by the Stiftung Kunst, Kultur und Soziales der Sparda Bank West.

Hilma af Klint and Wassily Kandinsky**Dreams of the Future****Mar 16 – Aug 11, 2024****K20****Press conference: Thursday March 14, 2024, 11 am at K20**

Two great artists are considered the guiding stars of Western abstraction: on the one hand, Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), the Russian painter, co-founder of the “Blauer Reiter” in Munich, and teacher at the Bauhaus in Weimar and Dessau; on the other, Hilma af Klint (1862-1944), the Swedish artist whose visionary work has only recently been rediscovered and who has since inspired a large audience.

With the exhibition at the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, the works of af Klint and Kandinsky will be united for the first time in a comprehensive exhibition. It offers the unique

opportunity to view and compare the paintings, watercolors, drawings, and notes of both artists. Af Klint and Kandinsky, who lived almost simultaneously, have in common that, with abstraction, they strove to invent much more than a new style of painting. Both dreamed of a future, to which art would point the way.

The exhibition is curated by Julia Voss, author of „Hilma af Klint: A Biography“, and Daniel Birnbaum, co-editor of „Hilma af Klint: Catalogue Raisonné“

The exhibition is supported by the Karin und Uwe Hollweg Stiftung

Annex

Biography

1893

Chaïm Soutine was born in Smilovitchi, in the vicinity of Minsk (in what is Belarus today). He was the tenth of eleven children. His father was a shoemaker.

Smilovitchi was a shtetl—a town that was predominantly Jewish.

Soutine grew up in a deeply religious environment.

His parents wanted him to become a craftsman, but he decided to dedicate his life to painting.

1903–1913

Soutine went to Minsk to take drawing lessons.

In 1910, he portrayed an orthodox Jew. Not all religious Jews accepted portraits, and he was badly beaten by the man's sons. Soutine's parents pressed charges and received financial compensation, which enabled him to attend the academy of art in Vilnius, Lithuania.

1913

Soutine traveled to Paris, Europe's capital of art at the time.

He immediately went to the artist colony La Ruche (The Beehive) in Montparnasse. He spoke only Yiddish and had no financial means.

In the summer of 1913, he began studying at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris.

Soutine was impressed by the big city, especially the collection in the Louvre and the works of Jean Fouquet, Jean Siméon Chardin, and Gustave Courbet.

1914–1915

World War I broke out on August 4, 1914. Because he was a Russian immigrant, Soutine was able to avoid mobilization. He then volunteered but was rejected because of a stomach illness.

Soutine moved to the artist colony Cité Falguière where he got to know Amedeo Modigliani. They became close friends.

1916–1918

Modigliani convinced his art dealer Leopold Zborowski to represent Soutine as well. In exchange for the exclusive rights to his works, he received a minimal daily allowance.

German troops bombed Paris in March 1918. Zborowski advised Soutine and Modigliani to go to Vence, Cagnes-sur-Mer, and Céret.

1919

In the Céret phase, 1919 to 1922, Zborowski sent Soutine to paint in Céret—a small town in the Pyrenees.

He created numerous landscapes and portraits of the town's inhabitants, including the work *Le Pâtissier*.

1920

In January while still in southern France, Soutine learned of Modigliani's death, which left him in shock.

1922

At the end of 1922, Soutine returned to Paris with roughly 200 works, many of which he destroyed in the following years.

During the winter of 1922–1923, his life took a radical turn. The American art collector Albert C. Barnes was looking for works in Paris for a collection he planned to establish in Philadelphia.

He was thrilled by Soutine's work *Le Pâtissier*, and he bought the painting and another 51 works for the price of 15 to 30 dollars per picture.

This extraordinary story of Soutine's success spread quickly in Paris.

1923

During the Cagnes phase, 1923 to 1925, Soutine created further portraits of pastry makers along with many landscapes with bright colors and unified forms.

In January 1923, the first article on Soutine was published in the magazine *Les Arts à Paris*, and an exhibition of Soutine's works was presented in Guillaume's gallery.

1924

After Barnes bought Soutine's works, his value on the art market increased. This enabled him to become financially independent, while earning him personal and artistic recognition.

Soutine continued to visit the Louvre frequently. At this time, he created the series of still lifes of stingrays.

1925

Soutine moved into his own apartment. His large studio was close by on the Rue du Saint-Gothard. In the following years, he would continue to change his residence several times a year.

Soutine traveled to Amsterdam to study Rembrandt's works at the Rijksmuseum.

He began painting the series of slaughtered oxen, bellboys, and altar boys.

1927

Soutine's first solo exhibition took place at the Galerie Henri Bing in Paris. Because he felt uncomfortable among people, he did not take part in exhibition openings.

In the US, his works were presented in group shows in New York and other cities.

1928

The art critic Waldemar George published the first monograph about Soutine in the series *Les artistes juifs* by Editions Le Triangle in Paris.

1929

Soutine painted the series *Les Arbres de Vence*.
 He visited Élie Faure in Bordeaux, who was publishing a monograph about him.

Soutine received treatment for his ulcer in Châtel-Guyon in the Auvergne region.

1930–1932

The financial crisis weakened the art market in Paris, and Zborowski could no longer represent Soutine.

Marcellin and Madeleine Castaing became Soutine's patrons. They supported him both financially and in his daily life. In return, they received the exclusive rights to his works.

With some interruptions he lived with them in Lèves in the Centre-Val de Loire region until World War II broke out in 1939.

1935–1936

Soutine's first comprehensive exhibition took place at the Art Club of Chicago.

The Sullivan Gallery and the Valentine Gallery, which also represented Piet Mondrian, organized solo exhibitions of Soutine's works in New York in 1936.

1937

Soutine got to know Gerda Groth, née Michaelis, a German Jew living in exile.

The couple moved to Villa Seurat in the 14th arrondissement. Salvador Dalí, Henry Miller, and Chana Orloff were his neighbors.

Soutine could not work due to severe pain.

1939

When World War II broke out, Soutine lived in the village of Civry in the Bourgogne-Franche-Comté region together with Gerda Groth. Both were registered as refugees.

1940

In the summer, German troops occupied Paris.

Anti-Jewish restrictions and violence increased.

In May, Gerda Groth was deported by the German Army to the Gurs camp in the Pyrenees. She remained there for three months. She would never see Soutine again, although he tried to help her financially.

In Paris, Soutine got to know his new partner, the painter Marie-Berthe Aurenche, who had been together with Max Ernst.

1941

Soutine moved to Paris again. He was forced to wear the Jewish badge.

The couple found refuge in Champigny near Chinon in the Centre-Val de Loire region.

1943

Soutine's health declined dramatically. He was transferred to a hospital in Paris. The three-day journey through occupied Departments was very risky.

Soutine underwent an emergency operation for a perforated ulcer but died two days later on August 9, 1943.

Soutine's burial at the Montparnasse cemetery was attended by Picasso, Max Jacob, and Jean Cocteau.

Wall Texts

Introduction

Chaim Soutine (1893 – 1943) is an exceptional artist with an extraordinary life story. He grew up in a shtetl near Minsk and moved to Paris in 1913. The art metropolis became his second home and the painter Amedeo Modigliani his best friend. Yet Soutine never joined an artists' group, and he remained an outsider all his life. He painted figuratively and expressively, thus swimming against the current. He never warmed up to abstract art movements, fashionable trends of the 1920s, or social conventions.

His paintings are unique: They are sensitive, vigorous, beautiful, and drastic all at once. He portrayed bellboys, chefs, altar boys, and choirboys with tremendous, highly emotional explosions of color. These were people who, like him, were often overlooked in society. In these portraits and in his pictures of swaying landscapes and slaughtered animals, he created poignant images that capture an entire era and a generation that was defined by war, social ills, and the relentless antagonism of various religious and political ideologies. His paintings are made with thick layers of paint and in an energetic rush of colors. Their painting style and subjects are very touching, because their power and vulnerability express the existential fears of our time. They hint at Soutine's social background and his life as an immigrant, and they are also testimonies to an existence at the margins of society.

Soutine had a significant influence on painting after 1945. In France and North America, he is regarded as one of the main representatives of modernism, while in Germany, he is greatly admired by artists. Our exhibition specifically concentrates on the early masterworks by the artist and presents more than 60 works from series that were painted between 1918 and 1928.

La Ruche and the École de Paris

In 1913, Soutine traveled from Vilnius to Paris, following the same path Marc Chagall had taken two years before. The train journey was two thousand kilometers (roughly 1,242 miles) long and took several days, which he spent in fourth class. Soutine spoke only Yiddish. He found a place to stay in La Ruche, an artist colony with roughly 100 studios that

offered little in the way of comfort and was located near the Vaugirard slaughterhouses. Because rent was cheap there, the neighborhood mainly attracted foreigners who were in a precarious financial situation. Many Jewish artists from Eastern Europe were among them: Marc Chagall, Henri Epstein, Léon Indenbaum, Michel Kikoïne, Moïse Kisling, Pinchus Krémègne, Jacques Lipchitz, Jules Pascin, Ossip Zadkine, and many more. They came from places like Warsaw, Krakow, Lodz, Odessa, and Vilnius.

La Ruche was a transitional place between the world that the artists had left behind and the life in Paris, of which they would eventually become a part. After a few months, Soutine, who was rather a loner, moved to the artist colony Cité Falguière in Montparnasse, where the Russian sculptor Oscar Miestchaninoff took him in. There, he also met the Italian Amedeo Modigliani, who became his closest friend.

Foreign artists like Pablo Picasso, Max Ernst, Sonia Delaunay, and Piet Mondrian, in addition to those already mentioned, had a major influence on the very heterogeneous art scene in Paris at the time. This scene was called the *École de Paris*, or School of Paris, and included all the non-French artists and cultural figures who continued the tradition of the French School, each in their own unique way.

Rising up from La Ruche

Soutine's gallerist Léopold Zborowski sent him to Céret, a village near the Spanish border, in 1919. He was expected to paint and send him his works in exchange for cheap food and lodging, far away from the war. Céret was a legendary artists' village, where Henri Matisse and the Cubists Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso had their breakthroughs. Soutine, who spent three lonely years there, also experienced a time of remarkable artistic creativity. When he returned to Paris at the end of 1922, he brought back roughly 200 canvases with him. This was only part of what he had produced, however, because he tended to destroy works that he was even the slightest dissatisfied with. Among the works that his gallerist saved was *Le Pâtissier* (The Pastry Maker), which he painted in 1919. It would become one of the central works in Soutine's career.

During the winter of 1922–23, the American art collector Alfred C. Barnes (1872–1951) was also in Paris. He was looking for suitable paintings for his collection of European Impressionism, which he planned to establish in Philadelphia.

Apparently, Barnes saw *Le Pâtissier* by chance in a café in Montparnasse. Another version of the story claims that his agent, the art dealer Paul Guillaume (1891–1934), showed him the portrait of the pastry maker. In any case, Barnes was thrilled and asked around to find Soutine. When he did, he bought 52 works by the artist on the spot. This extraordinary story, which almost seems like a fairy tale, quickly made the rounds, especially after Guillaume wrote about it in his magazine *Les arts à Paris*. Soutine went from being unknown and penniless to famous overnight.

Jewish Immigrants in Paris

When Soutine went to Paris in 1913 to start over, he didn't know it would be a journey with no return. This was a fate he shared with roughly 100,000 Jews from Russia who settled in France between 1880 and 1925. There were different reasons why they left, such as anti-

Semitism, restricted access to education, as well as the rejection of visual art in their country of origin. In Soutine's family, painting was also regarded as a useless pastime. His parents would have preferred him to become a rabbi or craftsman.

For artists who arrived in Paris, the capitol was a place abuzz with energy and full of new artistic forms of expression. They could develop and emancipate themselves as full members of society and culture. Jews had regarded France as a hospitable country since the French revolution because it offered them access to all areas of political, economic, and cultural life. As a saying in Yiddish goes, one could "lebn vi got in frankraykh" ("live like God in France").

Soutine frequently moved his studio to new locations, and the different addresses trace a map of how he climbed the social ladder: from his arrival in Paris to his economic success. This personal progress was tarnished by the anti-Semitism and French nationalism expressed in the papers of the 1920s and 1930s. For example, Soutine was described as the archetypical "eternal" or "wandering Jew," or as an embodiment of the "cosmopolitan artist." Soutine's works do not depict any motifs or themes that are directly connected to Judaism, however. It was only due to his success that people envied him.

Soutine's Influence

After World War II, Soutine's works became accessible to a wider audience in Europe and the US through group exhibitions and monographic shows. More than any other show, however, the retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1950 enabled a new generation of artists to discover Soutine's work, after which they declared him a visionary and pioneer of gestural painting. Soutine's unique approach to his paintings confirmed the belief of the up-and-coming generation of painters of Abstract Expressionism and the School of London that the basis of art was found not only in the results of their work, but also in the event of the creative painting process itself.

Willem de Kooning, for example, was fascinated by the very corporeal relationship Soutine cultivated with his canvases and colors. Especially Soutine's freely applied paint and all the gestures and rituals that accompanied his work impressed him. Kooning also appreciated the respect with which Soutine represented his models, remarking about his use of distortions that "Soutine distorted the pictures but not the people. (...) The painting is the painting but he never destroyed the people."

Soutine's influence reached from Willem de Kooning, to Francis Bacon, Jackson Pollock, Jean Dubuffet, Georg Baselitz, Marlene Dumas, Anish Kapoor, all the way to many others. His effect is still visible in the works of figurative and abstract painters today.

Texts from the Audio Guide – English version

1. Nature morte aux harengs



Nature morte aux harengs

Still life with herrings

1915/16

Oil on canvas

64,5 × 48,6 cm

Gallery Larock-Granoff, Paris

K21

Still Life with Herrings from 1916 is the earliest painting in this exhibition. Chaim Soutine had been living in Paris since 1913. He was born in a little town near Minsk in what is Belarus today. Like many other artists of his time, he was full of hope when he came to the cultural metropolis. Soutine did not speak any French, but he got far with Yiddish, which he spoke with many colleagues from different countries in the artist colony La Ruche (which means “beehive” in English) in Montparnasse. The painter Pinchus Krémègne, a friend from his student days with whom he had attended the academy of art in Vilnius, took Soutine in. He lived in utter poverty during his first years in Paris, and hunger constantly gnawed at him.

Soutine was a student of the painter Fernand Cormon at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris for two years and kept his head above water with odd jobs. He often went to the Louvre to study the old masters. He was most impressed by the paintings of Jean Fouquet, Jean Siméon Chardin, Camille Corot, and Gustave Courbet.

In 1914, he moved to the Cité Falguière, another artist colony in the 15th arrondissement. He shared a studio with the sculptor Oscar Miestchaninoff.

When he created *Still Life with Herrings*, this modest arrangement could have represented a welcome feast for him. He painted it from a bird's-eye view. The bent forks are only marginally larger than the herrings themselves and their prongs, which look like claws, are waiting to divide the tiny uneven portions. With their big eyes and wide open mouths, the herrings are not more than a few slender fillets. An empty bowl next to them emphasizes that they are the most important and only component of this meal.

The motif and the dark local colors of the objects in the painting remind us of the almost monochrome Dutch still lifes of the 17th century, although in Soutine's picture, the subject is connected to a dark mood

2. Glaïeuls



K21

Glaïeuls

Gladioli

1919

Oil on canvas

56 × 46 cm

Paris, Musée de l'Orangerie, Collection Jean Walter et Paul Guillaume

bpk | RMN - Grand Palais | Hervé Lewandowski

During Soutine's first few years in Paris, when he lived in very precarious circumstances, he painted numerous pictures of flowers. Initially, they were only a part of complex still lifes, but the other objects and the décor became less and less prominent, and the bouquet of flowers was soon the sole subject of the paintings.

This is also the case with *Gladiolas* from 1919. Here, a small vase is placed in the lower right corner of the composition. The flowers are almost bursting with opulence, covering three-fourths of the pictorial surface. The dark background creates a stark contrast to the glowing red of the flowers. The broad, nervous brushstrokes that primarily sketch the outlines are part of the fiery dynamics of the composition.

Soutine not only established a thematic series of pictures for the first time through the group of *Gladiolas*—a working method that would be typical for him later—he also made the color red a central feature of his work. Today, we know of roughly fifteen gladiola pictures by the painter. The early paintings in the series were made with subdued hues, but after visiting southern France for the first time, he revised his technique to expressively represent the blossoming flowers in much more vibrant hues, as in this picture.

3. Les Maisons



Les Maisons

Houses

1920/21

Oil on canvas

58 × 92 cm

Paris, Musée de l'Orangerie, Collection Jean Walter et Paul Guillaume

bpk | RMN - Grand Palais | Hervé Lewandowski

The Houses was painted in Céret, a village in the French Pyrenees, where Soutine lived from 1919 to 1922. His gallerist Léopold Zborowski had sent him to the village near the Spanish border and promised him cheap food and lodging in exchange for his works. Céret is a legendary artists' village, where Henri Matisse and the Cubists Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso had their breakthroughs. Soutine, who spent three lonely years there, also experienced a time of remarkable artistic creativity.

The picture shows the houses on Rue de la République in a creamy painting style. The houses are distorted and elongated, like a single organic body, or like waves or fluid matter, tormented by a strong wind. The painting resembles a hallucinated vision. Soutine liked to work outdoors, and atmosphere was important to him. Sometimes he waited for hours for the right light, rain, or a gust of wind.

In a letter to a friend, Zborowski described Soutine's daily routine in Céret as such: "He gets up at three in the morning, and walks twenty kilometers with his paints and canvas to find a site that pleases him, and at night returns to his sty to sleep, quite forgetting that he has had nothing to eat. When he gets back, he takes the canvas out of the frame, puts it on top of the one he did the day before, and goes to sleep beside it."

Soutine destroyed many of his works from the Céret phase directly after making them or several years later with manic energy. Only 200 works have survived. *The Houses* is one of the works that his gallerist was able to save.

4. La Place du village, Céret



La Place du village, Céret

Village square in Céret

1920

Oil on Canvas

76 × 94 cm

The Israel Museum, Jerusalem

© The Israel Museum, Jerusalem by Avshalom Avital

K21

The world is unraveling. The work *Village Square at Céret* from 1920 shows the square with its magnificent trees. The scene is wobbling, like in an earthquake.

In the middle ground are the round Place de la Liberté and the white painted houses with their red roofs. The ground is keeling toward the lower right and the plane trees are bending in the same direction. A gigantic wave is about to crash over the square. The houses at the edge of the row are leaning toward the left, trying to keep their footing. A dark figure in the front of the picture seen from the back—standing upright, with hands on hips—observes the nightmarish scene.

The paint on the canvas is thick, in some places it is directly applied from the tube; it underlines the explosive forces of nature.

Although the world has come unhinged, historical photographs from this village show that Soutine's depiction is very close to the real situation. The square, which is the center of the village, is transformed into a symbol of the existential shock that World War I meant for people. This also applied to Soutine, who as an immigrant remained an outsider in French society his entire life.

Pictures like these early landscapes from Céret fascinated artists like Willem de Kooning, Francis Bacon, and other representatives of Abstract Expressionism and the School of London and encouraged them to pursue their own gestural painting style in the 1950s and 1960s.

5. L'Enfant au jouet



L'Enfant au jouet

Child with toy

Around 1919

Oil on canvas

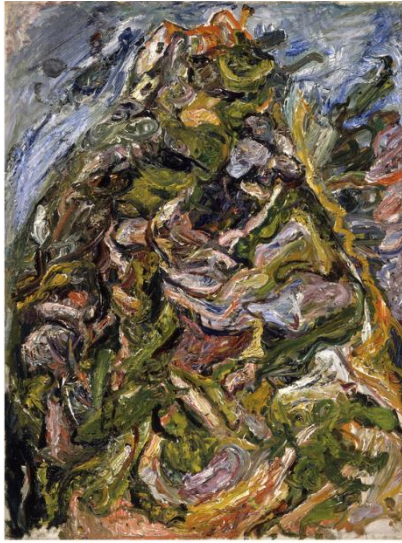
81 × 64,5 cm

Stiftung Im Obersteg, Depositum im Kunstmuseum Basel 2004

Kunstmuseum Basel / Photo Credit: Martin P. Bühler

In Céret, Soutine found models for his pictures in his neighborhood and on the streets. They were people who had time to sit for him: People who, like him, were not needed in a household or business. This perhaps explains why he painted so many children, young adults, and older people. Soutine also felt connected to people at the margins of society, because he also had the status of an outsider and stranger in the village community. Apart from a few exceptions, the people he portrayed remained anonymous. The picture titles label them as types of people (*The Woman in Red*, *The Old Actress*) or members of a profession or social group (*The Young Pastry Maker*, *Farm Girl*). Sometimes, he referred only to a small detail of the person's clothing or to an object. The titles were only meant as designations. Soutine avoided anything that could suggest an anecdote or a story. *Child with a Toy* has an air of threatening fragility. The clown-like, geriatric facial features, the posture, the shorts, the pointed cap, and the awkward right hand of the child are unsettling. The toy in the child's left hand cannot be identified clearly. It could be a doll that the child holds face down with its arms outstretched, its hair and head hanging down. The chair lets the entire composition tilt to the right and communicates emotional instability.

6. La Colline de Céret



La Colline de Céret

Hill in Céret

Around 1921

Oil on canvas

74,3 × 54,9 cm

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles

bpk / Los Angeles County Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY

K21

Hill at Céret is considered to be one of the greatest landscape paintings by Chaim Soutine. Paint has been applied as a thick, overlapping paste that is wriggling up a steep mountain, on the top of which a house rises up into the sky, half buried by the force of the paint. Our gaze moves upward toward a goal that is unreachably high and has no path leading there. This work is an icon of existential painting and was probably one of the key works that fascinated painters in the 1950s and 1960s—both the representatives of Abstract Expressionism as well as of a new realism—to such an extent that they used it as a starting point for their own impulsive painting styles.

The following quote by the American critic and writer Thomas B. Hess from 1950 reflects this fascination with Soutine's painting at the time:

“The very manipulation of pigment has pried the subject from nature into the personal sensation of terror, violence—and paint. Such a picture repays hours of examination, for it is fitted together as deftly as any Cubist portrait.”

7. Le Petit Pâtissier



Le Petit Pâtissier

The little confectioner

1922/23

Oil on canvas

73 × 54 cm

Paris, Musée de l'Orangerie, Collection Jean Walter et Paul Guillaume

bpk | RMN - Grand Palais | Thierry Le Mage

K21

The time between 1923 and 1925 is called the “Cagnes phase” in Soutine's work because, during this period, he spent his time in both Paris and Cagnes-sur-Mer in southern France, where he also painted this portrait of a pastry apprentice with his legs apart. This was shortly after the American collector Albert C. Barnes discovered another portrait by Soutine called *The Pastry Chef*, which he had painted in 1919, and made him famous by buying altogether 52 of his works. The success inspired Soutine to paint another six portraits of cooks, chefs, kitchen hands, pastry makers, and their apprentices up until 1925.

Soutine had lived in a cheap barn when he stayed in Céret, but from 1923 on he had the financial resources to rent a room in Cagnes and to eat in restaurants, which is where he probably found the models for his series of portraits. Soutine was incapable of painting without a model or landscape in front of him. David Sylvester writes: “Soutine had to have the thing he was painting out there in front of him. He couldn't invent. He couldn't paint from memory, even the memory of a motif he had worked from day after day.”

His vocabulary of forms became more unified and curvy in Cagnes. The contours are emphasized—a development that can also be seen in his landscape paintings from this time. What is striking is that the shoulders of the young pastry maker are not sagging here, but are curved upwards. His overall posture is expansive and he busts out of the confines of the picture. The forms correspond to the pastry maker's hat, which appears like a crown or a harlequin hat. The white of the young chef's uniform, with its gray and green highlights that correspond to the bright red of the scarf, is frantically painted with impasto paint.

8. Le Village



Le Village

The village

Around 1923

Oil on canvas

73,5 × 92 cm

Paris, Musée de l'Orangerie, Collection Jean Walter et Paul Guillaume

bpk | CNAC-MNAM | Adam Rzepka

The works that Soutine created in Cagnes are defined by light and luminous colors. Unlike the oppressive landscape pictures from Céret, the scene in *The Village* appears almost cheery. It seems as if we have entered a world of fairy tales. Like in his earlier landscapes, the trees and houses have a life of their own. They bend and sway in all directions, but they no longer tumble toward the beholders. They appear like large friendly beings. In these contorted landscapes, it is hard for us to keep our bearings. Any sense of perspective and balance seems to be suspended; everything is constructed through forceful movements of the brush.

The Village is part of a group of nine paintings that Soutine made between 1923 and 1924 in La Gaude, a village in southern France about eight kilometers from Cagnes. Three of these landscapes are presented in this exhibition. Soutine chose La Gaude for its houses and its mill, which stand in a tightly staggered formation at the foot of a large cliff.

Despite this cheery scene, Soutine was plagued by many contradictory feelings in southern France. At the end of 1923, he wrote to his dealer and patron Leopold Zborowski in Paris: "I'd like to leave Cagnes, I can no longer stand this landscape."

9. Nature morte à la raie



Nature morte à la raie

Still life with ray

1923

Oil on canvas

80,5 × 64,5 cm

The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of the Hanna Fund

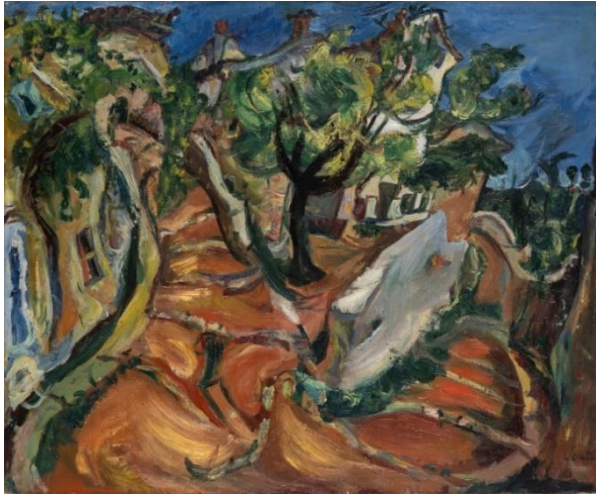
© Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Still Life with Rayfish from 1923 is an exceptional and unsettling still life. There are only a few paintings in art history with a stingray as a subject.

Soutine combines the exposed, bloody entrails of the fish with its mouth, which is frozen in a silent cry. The stingray is hung at two points, as if it were being tortured or crucified. It thus assumes an expression of almost human agony and becomes a powerful metaphor for suffering.

Soutine's picture of the stingray has a famous model. It was inspired by Jean Siméon Chardin's *The Ray* from 1725–26, which can be found in the Louvre. Soutine is certain to have seen it on one of his many visits to the museum, but he reinterpreted the theme in a turbulent and stirring manner. Every line and form is undulating as if it were permeated by an invisible power. With impasto, fluid brushstrokes and a dramatic juxtaposition of the colors white, brown, and red, he captures the moment of dying in a unity of terror and death, of human and animal.

10. Escalier à Cagnes



Escalier à Cagnes

The stairs of Cagnes

Around 1923/24

Oil on canvas

60 × 73 cm

Courtesy of David Lévy Gallery, Brüssel

© David Levy & ass. Brussels

K21

Although Soutine still had days of doubt and depression, his state of mind improved significantly after 1923. When the American collector Albert Barnes bought a large group of his paintings in the winter of 1922–23, he gained financial freedom and his art received much attention. Things seemed to have finally turned for the better for him. As a result, Soutine's palette in Cagnes is not only brighter and friendlier, but the views of landscapes and towns all reflect a more positive outlook on life. In the painting *Steps in Cagnes* from 1923–24, a street forms the center of the picture. It is steep like a staircase and winds up the hill. A person can be seen from behind, climbing up the steps. The scene appears like an allegory of Soutine's own life. It held so much significance for him that he used it in many other works during this time as well.

Unlike during the Céret phase in which the landscape is often seen from a very low vantage point and remains inaccessible, the streets and paths in his Cagnes pictures visually draw beholders into the composition. The swaying figure can be regarded as representing the emotional state of the artist while guiding our gaze into the picture.

11. Portrait du sculpteur Oscar Miestchaninoff



Portrait du sculpteur Oscar Miestchaninoff

The sculptor Oscar Miestchaninoff

1923/24

Oil on canvas

83 × 65 cm

Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne

bpk / CNAC-MNAM / Philippe Migeat

When Soutine arrived in Paris in 1913, he found refuge with his friends in La Ruche and in the Cité Falguière in Montparnasse. The Russian sculptor Oscar Miestchaninoff also took him in.

At the sculptor's place, Soutine got to know many other foreign artists, like the Russians Ossip Zadkine, Marc Chagall, Jacques Lipchitz, as well as Michel Kikoïne and Pinchus Krémègne, whom he had gotten to know in Minsk and Vilnius, respectively. He also met Jules Pascinaus from Bulgaria, Tsuguharu Foujita, who was born in Japan, Moise Kisling, who came from Poland, and later the Italian Amedeo Modigliani, who became one of his closest friends.

All of these people were regarded as members of the *École de Paris*, or the School of Paris. This term was coined by the art critic Roger Allard to describe all foreign artists who had been living in Paris as migrants for a long time and who continued the tradition of the French School.

The portrait of Oscar Miestchaninoff was painted ten years after they first met. The frontal view and the posture remind us of portraits of rulers from the 16th century, like Jean Fouquet's portrait of Charles VII. Soutine lets the sculptor sit enthroned on a chair like a king in an upright and stately poise. The curved forms of the chair's backrest resemble a crown and are repeated in the sculptor's shoulders. The red curtain in the background also refers to the repertoire of the portraits of rulers. Soutine gives the figure psychological depth through his asymmetrical representation of the face and the body forms. This is an approach that Soutine often used in his portraits.

12. Poulet et tomates



Poulet et tomates

Chicken and tomatoes

Around 1924,

Oil on canvas

92,5 x 45 cm

Staatsgalerie Stuttgart

bpk / Staatsgalerie Stuttgart

The work *Chicken and Tomatoes* is part of a series of pictures of slaughtered pheasants, chickens, and rabbits that Soutine painted around 1924 in Paris. In this composition, the plucked chicken is hanging in front of a dark hole in a crumbling brick wall in the artist's studio. The tomatoes decoratively arranged below the chicken indicate the cooking of the meat.

Some interpretations see this as being connected to the slaughters that Soutine saw as a child in his hometown. The journalist Emile Szyttia is reported to have said Soutine told him that: "Once I saw the village butcher slice the neck of a goose and drain the blood out of it. I wanted to cry out, but his joyful expression caught the sound in my throat."

Because Soutine left hardly any written documents, scholars have often relied on this as an interpretation of these pictures of carcasses, explaining them as a way to overcome a childhood trauma.

In terms of the painting style, Soutine's series of still lifes relates to the paintings by French and Dutch masters from the 17th and 18th centuries, especially Jean Simeon Chardin's still lifes. In Soutine's representation of the partially plucked, hung chicken with its wide open beak, the still life becomes a metaphor for human existence. The motif and the colors of the animal's body represent death and decay. The dynamic brushstrokes defining the outlines and structuring the body forms let us imagine the struggle of the dying animal.

13. La femme en rose



K21

La Femme en rose

Woman in pink

Um 1924

Oil on canvas

73 × 54,3 cm

Given by Sam J. Levin and Audrey L. Levin

The Saint Louis Art Museum

Vidimages / Alamy Stock Foto

The portraits that Soutine painted in Cagnes share certain stylistic features in common with his landscapes and still lifes from the same period: Their compositions are dominated by oval elements and curved lines. In this picture, even the brushstrokes are part of a swaying rhythm. The angular forms of his earlier paintings have been replaced here by rounder curvatures and swirls. Soutine let his models' hands rest in their laps during these years, making them appear to be the starting point from which all the other elements of the composition radiate.

Soutine could be rather demanding in the treatment of his models. He let them pose in the same posture for hours without allowing them to move. He waited for them to get tired and reveal a facial expression somewhere between sadness and gloom. In *Woman in Pink* from 1924, Soutine transformed this anonymous female model into a whirling mass of pink, coral-red, and yellow brushstrokes that fill the largest part of the canvas all the way to the edges. The golden chair doubles the curving lines, emphasizing the woman's soft, pliable forms. All the contours and lines that define the objects are rendered in streams of brushstrokes and broad bands of color that seem to swallow the materialities, the forms of the face and body, and the representations of surfaces. Although the color foregrounds corporeality, the body structure is, in reality, just an excuse for this painterly event. Soutine

continued to work with the overwhelming experience of colors, which he experiments with here, in his still lifes of the slaughtered and skinned oxen that he painted soon after.

14. Le Bœuf écorché



K21

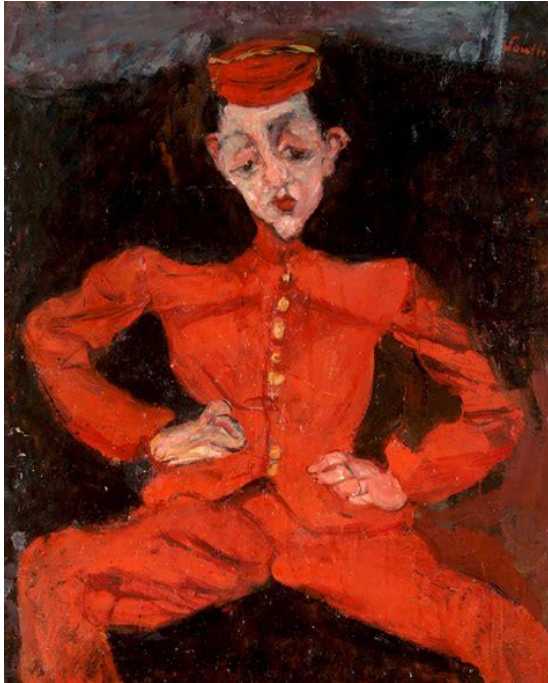
Le Bœuf écorché
 Skinned cattle
 1925
 Oil on canvas
 202 × 114 cm
 Musée de Grenoble
 Ville de Grenoble /Musée de Grenoble –J.L. Lacroix

In 1925, Soutine was able to afford a studio on Rue Saint Gothard in Paris. It soon earned the nickname "Soutine's Butcher Shop," because he also kept meat there that he needed for his series of beef and poultry paintings. Fascinated by the moment of transition between life and death and the sensuous quality of mortal flesh, Soutine painted a series of still lifes in which he addresses the tension between the representation of death and the vitality of his painterly approach. Because he could not work from memory, he had an actual carcass of an ox hanging in his studio for *The Skinned Beef*. When it began to decompose, he poured fresh blood over it.

Soutine regularly visited the Louvre museum. At first, he was fascinated by the works of Jean Fouquet, Jacopo Tintoretto, El Greco, Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres, and Gustave Courbet, then he became interested in the paintings of Rembrandt van Rijn. Especially his *Slaughtered Ox* from 1655 inspired Soutine to paint this motif in ten different variations. The depiction of a dead and gutted animal is a metaphor for existential suffering and is also a painterly challenge, consisting of characterizing a large surface with brushstrokes in variations of a single color. Soutine's fascination with this artistic problem can already be observed in his series of portraits of pastry makers. In these works, he lent the surface of the smocks and their many nuances of white a great luminosity. In the case of the slaughtered ox and the parallel series of pictures of bellboys, however, he changed to the symbolic

color red and turned the powerful, even violent presence of flesh into his new fundamental painterly theme. *The Skinned Beef* is the largest painting in the artist's oeuvre.

15. Le Groom



Le Groom

The page

1925

Oil on canvas

98 × 80,5 cm

Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne

bpk | CNAC-MNAM | Philippe Migeat

In 1925, Soutine began working on his series of portraits of bellboys, servants, waiters, chambermaids, choir boys, and altar boys. It is a long group of portraits of "regular people in their service uniforms" that started with the painting *The Pastry Chef* in 1919.

Soutine approached people who had no money and who lived at the lower margins of society. He was one of the few artists in France to work with this genre in the 1920s. Similar approaches were employed only in the painting of New Objectivity in Germany, which depicted representatives of different professions and people from the demimonde. Soutine's portraits are not defined by an explicit social criticism, however. Rather, he seems to have identified with these figures who he portrayed in a distorted way. Like him, they were torn between ambivalent emotions and oscillated between pride and defiance, between a grand demeanor and provoking postures. They were also marked by the toils and the burden of their occupations.

The feeling of not quite fitting a role, of being alien, was surely something Soutine knew well. The artist, who clearly enjoyed his sudden success, seemed to know that he was also serving the higher ranks of society and was dependent on them. Like the bellboys with their ill-fitting uniforms, Soutine remained an outsider who did not really fit predefined social roles.

16. Le Grand Enfant de chœur



Le Grand Enfant de chœur

Great choirboy

1925

Oil on canvas

100 × 55,9 cm

Le musée des Beaux-Arts de Chartres (Chartres)

Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne

bpk / CNAC-MNAM / Bertrand Prévost

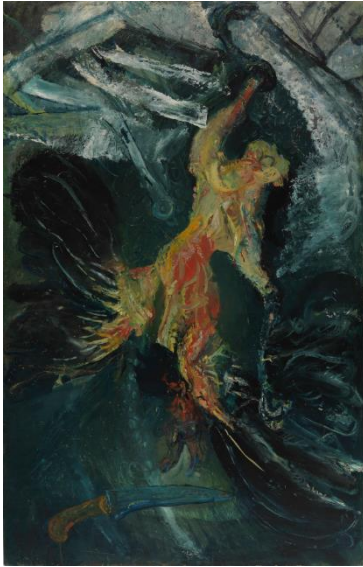
Soutine painted *Large Choir Boy* at the estate of his gallerist Leopold Zborowski in Le Blanc in the Loire region in 1925. The painting is the first of a series of choir boys whom he painted either sitting, standing, or as full-length portraits.

Like with the pastry makers and bellboys, Soutine's portraits of choir boys reveal the artist's great interest in people who wore standardized outfits or uniforms due to their activity or profession. While the individuality of the person depicted disappears behind the article of clothing, at the same time, it is emphasized by his unique painting style and by lopsided, almost grotesque facial features.

Perhaps it was Gustave Courbet's *A Burial at Ornans* from 1849–1850, which shows a procession with choir boys in red robes and white tunics, that inspired Soutine's interest in these figures of religious ritual. After all, the dress of the choir boy allowed him to use his two favorite colors of crimson red and white together in a painting, thus celebrating a feast for the eyes by juxtaposing their nuances.

Large Choir Boy was the first work bought by the collectors Madeleine and Marcellin Castaing. When Soutine's gallerist Leopold Zborowski died in 1932, the couple became important patrons for the artist. From 1930 on, Soutine regularly lived and worked at their estate in Lèves, near Chartres.

17. La Volaille pendue



La Volaille pendue

Hanging poultry

1925

Oil on wood

125 × 80 cm

Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne

K21

bpk / CNAC-MNAM / Philippe Migeat

When Soutine lived in Paris in the 1920s and 1930s, the city was becoming a center of abstract painting. In their reaction to Cubism, artists like Kazimir Malevich, Piet Mondrian, and Wassily Kandinsky showed many others a path toward non-representational art. Artist groups like Cercle et Carré and Abstraction Création were platforms where the representatives of different abstract movements came together. Soutine juxtaposed this with the materiality of painting, his energetic brushwork, and the image of decaying flesh.

Hanging Poultry is pure painting. We can hardly recognize the poultry hanging by one leg. Is the animal facing up or down? The head is missing, and the wings are spread like a fan. Just like the background, this provides an opportunity for Soutine's forceful, gestural painting technique. It is as if he were painting with a knife. This is about nothing less than tracing existence itself. For the painter Francis Bacon, who was deeply impressed by Soutine's work, the pictures of slaughterhouses and meat "belong very much to the whole thing of the crucifixion."

Soutine is interested in neither analysis nor theory. He engages in a very corporeal relationship with the canvas and the paint. After World War II, first Willem De Kooning then later Francis Bacon recognized their own painterly practice in Soutine's application of paint. His unique approach to his paintings confirmed the belief of a new generation of gestural painters that the basis of art was found not only in the results of their work, but also in the event of the creative painting process itself.

18. La Liseuse



La Liseuse

Reading woman

Around 1940

Oil on canvas

65 × 80,5 cm

Dated 1995

Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne - Centre de création industrielle
 bpk / CNAC-MNAM / Jacques Faujour

K21

When the German Army occupied Paris, Soutine remained in the city at first. Restrictions and violence against Jews increased, however, and artists like Marc Chagall fled abroad and immigrated to the US. Soutine was registered as a Jew, so in 1941, he fled to the countryside, where he lived under an assumed identity.

This period of his life—characterized by fear, financial problems, and illness—was nonetheless very productive. Soutine painted roughly 30 pictures in the remaining years before he died. *The Reader* was one of his last works. It shows an enclosed, intimate world represented by delicate, light hues of the dense application of paint. As in his earlier works, the colors and brushstrokes are means with which to represent a motif. Everything seems to be carefully composed within this narrowly, cropped image.

His friend, the collector Madeleine Castaing, wrote: "Soutine (...) demanded this miracle from every canvas he painted and was implacable toward anything that distracted him. One day he was painting a woman lying reading on a couch. The particular inspiration—a gesture, an attitude, a glance—he longed for and would seize upon, would not come. (...) As usual the pose he had insisted on was tyrannical and lasted until the moment when the woman, at the limit of her endurance, began to stare at the book as if it were an instrument of torture. This was the moment that inspired the painter and he grasped for it."

In 1943, Soutine's health declined dramatically, and he needed an urgent operation in Paris. The journey led through occupied Departments and was extremely risky. When he arrived in Paris, he was in a frightening condition. Although an emergency operation was performed, he died two days later on August 9 as a result of a perforated ulcer.