

## Exhibition Focuses on Chaim Soutine's Intense Paintings of Slaughtered Animals

***Chaim Soutine: Flesh***

**May 4–September 16, 2018**

New York, NY, May 1, 2018 – The Jewish Museum presents an exhibition of 32 paintings by Chaim Soutine (1893–1943), the Expressionist artist known for his gestural and densely painted canvases, from May 4 through September 16, 2018. ***Chaim Soutine: Flesh*** highlights the unique visual conceptions and painterly energy that the artist brought to the tradition of still life. Soutine's remarkable paintings depicting hanging fowl, beef carcasses, and rayfish are now considered among his greatest artistic achievements. These works epitomize his fusion of Old Master influences with the tenets of painterly modernism. Virtuoso technique, expressive color, and disorienting and unexpected compositions endow Soutine's depictions of slaughtered animals with a striking visual power and emotional impact.

*Chaim Soutine: Flesh* presents works from the artist's early years in Paris through the 1940s, showing his development from more traditional conceptions to the impressive achievement of his paintings from the mid-1920s. Pushing the limits of the tradition of still life, in tableaux evocative of violent dislocations, these paintings offer a tour de force of visual expression and visceral effect.

Soutine's highly personal approach to the subject of still life and the depictions of hanging fowl and beef carcasses were influenced by his childhood memories growing up in a Jewish village in the Lithuanian part of western Russia (now Belarus). The strict Jewish observance of dietary laws, requiring the ritual slaughter of fowl and meat, provides a context for these emotionally charged images.

In 1913, at the age of 20, Soutine moved to Paris. He painted landscapes at various locations in France and created an important body of work in portraiture. Soutine's study of Old Master paintings in the Louvre impacted his dramatic and novel compositions of a single object isolated in space. Rembrandt's famous painting, *The Flayed Ox* (1655), and the still lifes of Goya, Chardin, and Courbet were of particular importance to Soutine.

Soutine painted directly from life. He would bring dead fowl and rabbits, and carcasses of beef, into his studio to use as subjects for his paintings. These subjects began to occupy the entire canvas, allowing the artist to engage with the images as a painted surface. Soutine's haunting imagery, energized brushstrokes, and rich paint have served as touchstones for subsequent generations of artists, from Francis Bacon, Willem de Kooning, and Jackson Pollock, to contemporary artists such as Frank Auerbach, Cecily Brown, and Damien Hirst.

The exhibition includes paintings from major public and private collections in the U.S. and abroad, including the Barnes Foundation; Albright-Knox Art Gallery; Art Institute of Chicago; The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Princeton University Art Museum; Kunstmuseum Bern; and Musée de l'Orangerie; Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, among others. It is organized

into four sections: "A Modern Still Life," "Fowl," "Flesh," and "The Life of Beasts."

The first section, "A Modern Still Life," showcases how Soutine embraced the modernist notion that gesture, material, and color are as much the subject of art as the objects depicted. *Fish, Peppers, Onions* (c. 1919) shows the rich play of warm, earthy tones that is an established tradition of the still-life genre, yet, the effect is jarring — while the peppers and spring onions are identifiable, other objects are difficult to interpret.

"Fowl" highlights Soutine's paintings devoted to this theme. While dead game birds are a staple of still life, the fowl Soutine painted are transformed in a way that departs from tradition. The bodies of the birds hang, pendulous, perhaps in motion. In these depictions, Soutine creates a powerful statement through his handling of paint. In *Dead Fowl* (c. 1926), the abjection and horror of the blood-spattered meat makes the viewer uneasy, but an expressive beauty is integral to the overall composition. In these paintings, Soutine focuses on capturing the moment between life and death, a fixation which develops throughout his work of the 1920s.

In reworking the established still-life tradition, Soutine freed himself from the artistic conventions of the genre, particularly in his use of expressive color and brushstroke and in his focus on the portrait-like images of a single animal. This section, "Flesh," reveals Soutine's mastery of observation and his visceral handling of paint. Soutine restaged Rembrandt's *The Flayed Ox* in his studio, working from direct observation rather than copying the masterpiece. In the resulting painting, *Flayed Ox* (c. 1925), Soutine reduced Rembrandt's realistic setting to a single object on a ground of contrasting hue, creating both an intense perception of quivering flesh and an abstract surface of tone and texture.

Finally, "The Life of Beasts" includes paintings from the late period of Soutine's life. At the outbreak of World War II, and due to the menace posed to France's Jews by the German occupation, Soutine sought refuge in the countryside to the west of Paris, where he created many of the works on view in this section. These small paintings of animals possess a naturalistic quality different from his earlier works. They also suggest a vulnerability that is particularly poignant in the context of the threatening world situation. The style of *The Duck Pond at Champigny* (1943) evokes the tradition of painting landscape outdoors, while the spirited brushwork and sensuality of surface anticipate abstraction. According to an inscription on the back of the painting, the work was painted in July 1943, a month prior to Soutine's death.

The exhibition is organized by Stephen Brown, Neubauer Family Foundation Associate Curator, The Jewish Museum, with consulting curators Esti Dunow and Maurice Tuchman, authors of *Chaim Soutine (1893-1943) catalogue raisonné* (1993). The exhibition is designed by Galia Solomonoff and Adriana Barcenás of SAS/Solomonoff Architecture Studio. Graphic design is by Topos Graphics.



## Program

### Lecture: Chaim Soutine: The Outsider as Insider

Wednesday, May 30, 2018, 6:00–7:30 pm

Kenneth E. Silver, Silver Professor of Art History, New York University, discusses Soutine's dual role as both radical innovator and conservative practitioner, a fluctuating identity dependent on the critical needs and prejudices of the interwar Parisian art world.

Tickets: \$18 General; \$15 Students and Seniors; \$12 Jewish Museum Members. Includes Museum Admission. The James L. Weinberg Distinguished Lecture is made possible by the Marshall M. Weinberg Fund, with additional support from Marshall M. Weinberg.

## Support

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## About the Jewish Museum

Located on New York City's famed Museum Mile, the Jewish Museum is a distinctive hub for art and Jewish culture for people of all backgrounds. Founded in 1904, the Museum was the first institution of its kind in the United States and is one of the oldest Jewish museums in the world. Devoted to exploring art and Jewish culture from ancient to contemporary, the Museum offers diverse exhibitions and programs, and maintains a unique collection of nearly 30,000 works of art, ceremonial objects, and media reflecting the global Jewish experience over more than 4,000 years.

Location: 1109 Fifth Avenue at 92nd Street, New York City  
Hours: Saturday, Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday, 11am to 5:45pm; Thursday, 11am to 8pm; and Friday, 11am to 4pm.  
Admission: \$18.00 for adults; \$12.00 for senior citizens; and \$8.00 for students. Free for visitors 18 and under and Jewish Museum members. Pay What You Wish on Thursdays from 5pm to 8pm. Free on Saturdays and select Jewish holidays  
Information: The public may call 212.423.3200 or visit [TheJewishMuseum.org](http://TheJewishMuseum.org)

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