

Chaim Soutine Biography

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Biography

Chaim Soutine (1894-1943), a Russian painter of the School of Paris, was the main representative in France of a dynamic expressionism.

Chaim Soutine was born in Smilovitch near Minsk, the tenth of 11 children of a poor village tailor. Life in Smilovitch was typical of the Jewish ghetto in prewar Russia, and young Soutine escaped from it, first to Minsk (1907) and then to Vilna, where he studied at the School of Fine Arts (1910-1913).

Soutine then went to Paris. After studying briefly at the Atelier Cormon, he began to work on his own. He never exhibited the pictures of his early period; he often destroyed and sometimes repainted them. Only the exhibition of the Indépendants in 1937 disclosed the range and power of this ecstatic visionary who depicted the tragic melancholy of being.

Without the help of the art dealer Leopold Zborowski, to whom Soutine was introduced by his painter friend Amedeo Modigliani, Soutine might have despaired of his vocation. In 1919 Zborowski sent him to Céret in the Pyrenees, where Soutine stayed for 3 years and executed 200 paintings. Here he freed himself from the impact which Tintoretto, El Greco, Gustave Courbet, and, in particular, Rembrandt had made upon his sensitive mind, and here he created the series of frenetically painted landscape visions which established his name, such as *View of Céret* (ca. 1919) and *Gnarled Trees* (ca. 1921). The expressionist style is also typical of his portraits and still lifes, mainly dead fowl and carcasses, which, by their very subject matter, are symbols of mortality, for example, *Woman in Red* (ca. 1922) and *Carcass of Beef* (ca. 1925).

In 1925 Soutine was in Cagnes, where he suffered an emotional crisis. In 1927 he painted his famous series of choir boys. In 1929 Monsieur Marcellin Castaing and his wife offered Soutine a home in their castle near Chartres; here for a time he found peace of mind. His gift for portraiture is again seen in the fine portrait of Madame Castaing (ca. 1928).

Although Soutine traveled a great deal in France, he always returned to Paris. The German occupation worsened his already Kafkaesque state of anxiety, and he fled to the village of Champigny-sur-Vende in the Touraine to escape deportation. He died on Aug. 9, 1943, in Paris after an operation for stomach ulcers.