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Chagall for children

Five-year-old Jacob Yancy slipped a colorful cape over his head and instantly became part of artist Marc Chagall's whimsical world.

As circus music played in the background, Jacob spun in circles with his cape floating in waves around him as he transformed himself into a character in Chagall's painting "At The Circus." A camera captured Jacob in front of the giant piece of art and projected him on a television screen as a living part of the piece.

A joyful Jacob was just one of thousands of youngsters who have participated in the San Antonio Children's Museum's interactive exhibit called Chagall for Children.

"The exhibit is this very fanciful and imaginative experience for children that combines 15 works of Chagall with hands-on activities for each one that engage all of the senses," said Claudia Langford, the museum's marketing director.

"It really is a celebration of the art of this renowned 20th-century painter and allows children to stretch their imaginations to learn about composition and color and hopefully turn them on to art."

The traveling exhibit debuted in the Alamo City May 12 and will run until Sept. 9. It was developed by the Kohl Children's Museum of Greater Chicago and is underwritten by a gift from the Tobin Endowment.

Chagall was born in Russia in 1887 and lived in France and New York before his death in 1985 in his homeland. His work uses geometric shapes, sharp angles, bold colors and catawampus characters to create a detailed world of animals and humans intertwined with twisted landscapes.

E-N Video

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The display covers about 1,500 square feet of the museum's lower level. It is surrounded by a white picket fence that has children's own watercolor paintings mimicking those of Chagall hanging from its sides. The artist's giant signature greets curious youngsters as they enter the area filled with brightly colored learning stations. Each of the stations features a telephone that children can pick up to listen to information about the work of art in front of them.

"I love art, but his drawings are kind of funny. Like, I don't really know what that girl is doing in that one," said Lauren Sciabbarrasi, 8, as she cocked her head and pointed to a painting called "The Birthday."

Museum attendee Sierra Balencia, 11, said she loves all kinds of art.

"I like art that shows a lot of feeling, and I have never heard of Chagall, but his work is very creative," she said as she slowly walked across the yellow floor through the exhibit.

"My favorite so far is the painting 'Green Violinist' because it reminds me of my favorite artist, Picasso, who uses weird things, too."

Chagall's style is similar to that of Picasso, and both artists are considered cubists. Cubism is a style of art that appears to break objects into fragmented pieces and then haphazardly rearrange them.

Langford said playing and experimenting is how children learn about their world.

On Sunday, Jacob's sister Lauren, 7, did just that and created her own world while playing in the station for the painting "Paris Through the Window."

The famous painting features a cat sitting on a windowsill gazing out at the Eiffel Tower. Lauren thought the cat would look better sitting on top of the Eiffel Tower and moved the cutout magnet of the feline to suit her fancy.

"That is what art is about, expanding your boundaries and seeing different perspectives," said Catherine Yancy, Lauren and Jacob's mother.

Several of the activities are digital and utilize computers, cameras and television screens, while others are hands-on and engage all the senses. Children can arrange and smell flowers, weave tapestry, combine musical sounds or arrange blocks of stained glass to mimic works of Chagall or create their own imaginative interpretations.

"We hope that this strikes a chord within the children that helps create future artists and an audience to appreciate that art. We nourish our bodies, but you have to also feed your soul, and that is what art does," Langford said.

For more information, call the museum, at 305 E. Houston St., at (210) 212-4453 or visit www.sakids.org.

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(Photos by Jerry Lara/Express-News)

Aidan Garcia, 2, blends with Marc Chagall's print 'At the Circus' in the exhibit, which will run until Sept. 9. Several of the exhibit's activities are digital and utilize computers, cameras and television screens, while others are hands-on and engage all the senses.

Jack Keller, 1, and his mother, Lea, enjoy time at one of the interactive activities.

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