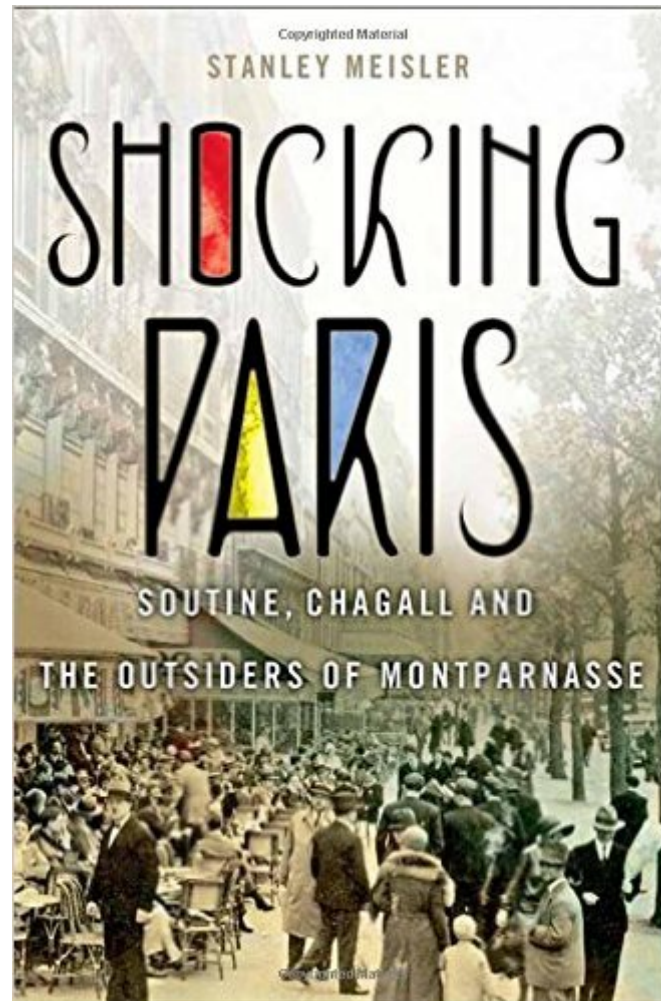


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# Shocking Paris: Soutine, Chagall And The Outsiders Of Montparnasse



## Synopsis

For a couple of decades before World War II, a group of immigrant painters and sculptors, including Amedeo Modigliani, Marc Chagall, Chaim Soutine and Jules Pascin dominated the new art scene of Montparnasse in Paris. Art critics gave them the name "the School of Paris" to set them apart from the French-born (and less talented) young artists of the period. Modigliani and Chagall eventually attained enormous worldwide popularity, but in those earlier days most School of Paris painters looked on Soutine as their most talented contemporary. Willem de Kooning proclaimed Soutine his favorite painter, and Jackson Pollack hailed him as a major influence. Soutine arrived in Paris while many painters were experimenting with cubism, but he had no time for trends and fashions; like his art, Soutine was intense, demonic, and fierce. After the defeat of France by Hitler's Germany, the East European Jewish immigrants who had made their way to France for sanctuary were no longer safe. In constant fear of the French police and the German Gestapo, plagued by poor health and bouts of depression, Soutine was the epitome of the tortured artist. Rich in period detail, Stanley Meisler's *Shocking Paris* explores the short, dramatic life of one of the most influential artists of the twentieth century.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A nicely done and concise survey of the School of Paris. Not simply an art book, but one that helps the reader understand the severe problems faced by emigre Jewish artists living in France during the unsettled times leading up to World War II. Before, I had no knowledge of Chaim Soutine, so Mr. Meisler's book helped fill a gap (or canyon) in my learning. It also has spurred me to make a long

neglected visit to Philadelphia's Barnes Foundation. As for the title: I doubt if Paris was shocked.

I find this period of history that takes place in Paris extremely interesting. I was excited to read this book since I love the work of Chagall and some of the others. I found that from reading this book I got a good idea of the type of "bohemian" lifestyle that many of the artists lived and created their art in. There was the constant fear of the French police and the German gestapo that the Jewish immigrants had to work under. I was however disappointed that this book's main focus was on Soutine with very little information about the other artists. While I found the novel interesting I thought the title a bit deceiving. It is more like a biography of Soutine with inclusion of the others as they touched his life. The writing was very precise and the characters well drawn. I did have a little trouble finishing the book as I felt there was some repetition of facts such as Soutine's Russian accented French and his escapades in the Modigliani's cafe. I think this book is best suited to art history students and those seeking information about Soutine's life. I gave it 4 stars for the writing which was excellent.

"Shocking Paris" focuses on several artists who worked in the Montparnasse district of Paris in the early part of the 20th century. A generation younger than the impressionists, they tended to be Jewish emigres from both Russia itself and the Czarist-controlled "Russian Pale" satellites of Lithuania, Belarus, and Poland, although one prominent member of their circle was the Italian Jew Amedeo Modigliani. As the subtitle indicates, the book devotes its greatest attention to Chaim Soutine and Marc Chagall. Initially many of the impoverished painters who took up residence in Montparnasse were sustained by communal living arrangements at a building called La Ruche ("beehive") named after its unique architectural style. Then, as they established themselves, dealers and angels provided living expenses, until several gained wide fame. And an important boost to that initial fame came at the hands of the wealthy Dr. Albert Barnes of Philadelphia. Buying nearly 60 paintings by Soutine and other canvases as well, he catapulted the Montparnasse artists to international attention. However, their work at first elicited a negative reaction from professional critics in the United States, and this explains a lot about the limited access that Barnes would subsequently grant to his collection. In the book's concluding chapters, the drama increases further as the years leading up to and including World War II endangered the sometimes poorly-assimilated Jewish painters.

With the utmost satisfaction I wish to rate this book by Stanley Meisler with 5 stars. Mr. Meisler

wrote a superb work of art history, and to increase our understating, he weaved into his book the troubled period of European history in the first half of the Twentieth Century between both World Wars. Since most of the artists of the School of Paris are Jewish, he addresses the difficult issues of antisemitism, the origins of those artists, some born within the realm of urban sophistication (Modigliani) others born into despairing poverty in segregated areas (Soutine), rising up the ladder of art and society with their outstanding work. This book increased my understating of the works of art I admire when I visit Museums with my wife, and I strongly recommend it. Personal disclosure: Stanley Meisler is a great neighbor of mine!

Well written, captivating art history and personal insight to artists from the School of Paris time period. I learned so much about Soutine who I was unfamiliar with, as well as the other artists of this time period. The author was able to connect the impact of World War I and II, anti-Semitic rhetoric and fear on these immigrant artists all who had made Paris their home. If you have any interest in art or art history, I highly recommend this book.

Thoroughly enjoyed this book. I'm taking a star away because it would have been helpful to have some examples of the artists' work included with the text - I had to do searches on my tablet to be able to see the techniques the author was referring to. I had not previously heard of Soutine and am looking forward to seeing his paintings when I go to Paris next month.

So you want to be an artist? A Soutine type? Well think again - Stanley Meisler will surely bring you back to reality. This is an insightful book on the lives of the artists of the School of Paris set in the cultural milieu of the first part of the 20th century. Meisler lays out in forensic detail personal histories, relationships, struggles, and the traumas experienced. At times this is a painful and heroic overview of difficult and memorable lives of major artists leading to the 2nd World war and the demise of the School of Paris.

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