



# Lady in Blue

Chaim Soutine

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**On display**

**Title/Description:** Lady in Blue

**Artist/Maker:** Chaim Soutine

**Born:** 1931 c.

**Object Type:** Painting

**Materials:** Canvas, Oil paint

**Measurements:** Unframed: (h. 812 x w. 651 x d. 2 mm) Framed: (h. 100 x w. 835 x d. 60 mm)

**Accession Number:** 19

**Historic Period:** 20th century

**Production Place:** France

**Credit Line:** Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

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Soutine was born in the Lithuanian village of Smilovitch, a predominantly Jewish community of such orthodoxy that the artist's early efforts at drawing were severely punished. At the age of sixteen, with money paid in compensation for the brutal beating administered by the family of a Rabbi whom Soutine had asked to sit for him, he went to Minsk to study painting. In 1910 he was admitted to the School of Fine Arts in Vilna, and in 1913 he arrived in Paris, where he joined Chagall, Zadkine, Archipenko and other 'compatriots' in the Montparnasse building nicknamed *La Ruche*. He met Modigliani in 1915, and a strong friendship developed between these two extremely difficult personalities. After ten years of appalling hardship, Soutine's life was transformed in 1923 by his being 'discovered' by the idiosyncratic American collector, Dr Alfred Barnes, who bought a large number of his paintings, and thereby encouraged others to collect the work of this hitherto unknown artist.

Soutine's expressionistic style, with its distortions of form and exaggerated colour, was a direct result of his own tortured mental state. 'There is hardly a description of Soutine in existence that fails to mention the malodorous squalor of his way of life, and of his person' (Giise, 1982:107). Until about 1929, whether painting landscapes, human beings or flayed carcasses, his images seem to dance and writhe as if in some sort of ecstatic agony.

By 1930 Soutine had begun to acquire a measure of restraint in his canvases. Colours cooled, forms relaxed and solidified, angry torment was replaced by sadness. *Lady in Blue* is a superb example of Soutine's later approach. Distortions are few and subtle; colour and composition are quiet and straightforward. Even so, the work is no more a portrait of an individual than are the renderings of uniformed servants that Soutine produced at this time. *Lady in Blue* is a type; a properly dressed young woman whose image is a vehicle for the artist's own mood of poetic melancholy.

Entry taken from Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection 3 volume catalogue, edited by Steven Hooper (Yale University Press, 1997).

TO-BE-REPLACED-WITH-A-GAP

Chaim Soutine was born into a world of woe in Tsarist Russia - in the Pale of Settlement, an area stretching across parts of today's Belarus, Lithuania, Ukraine and Poland, in which a majority of the world's Jews were then regulated and persecuted.

But Soutine's vocation as an artist got him into most trouble with the Jewish Orthodoxy of his home village, where representations of the human form were banned. A request to a rabbi to sit for a portrait earned him a beating from the model's outraged kin, but the compensation paid for art tuition in Minsk. In 1913 he joined fellow émigrés such as Chagall, Zadkine and Archipenko in Paris, in La Ruche (The Beehive), the Montparnasse centre of avant-garde creativity.

Soutine remained a deeply tortured soul, communicating that anguish via agonised images in tormented pigment. But by the time of this haunting canvas, and with the support of important patrons, the madness had subsided into sadness. *Lady in Blue* is an imaginary figure - a portrait of the artist's poetic melancholy.

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Ian Collins, journalist and writer

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## Provenance

Formerly in the collection of Paul Guillaume. Acquired by the Sainsbury Family in 1939. Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.

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