

Alfred Baker Fonds

Writings

Images for  
Words

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## IMAGES FOR WORDS

Alfred Bader

Much has been written about the many who fled from the pogroms in Eastern Europe and later from the Nazi tyranny. Some, like Albert Einstein, were already famous when they arrived in the United States. Many, like Herbert Brown whose 90<sup>th</sup> birthday we are celebrating, came here as children and received their education here. The intellectual, cultural, scientific and artistic life of this country has been greatly enriched by these many immigrants who became a vital part of America.



Laszlo (Laci) Matulay was born in Vienna in 1912; his birth certificate names him Laszlo Adolf Adorjan, born to Josef Adorjan and Hani (née) Weisz, a Jewish couple from Transylvania, which was then still part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. Shortly after his birth, his mother, a seamstress, eloped with an elegant Catholic cavalry officer and academic painter, Julius Matulay. Hani and Julius were married in Budapest in 1917 and Julius formally adopted Hani's two children, who always thought of him, perhaps correctly, as their father. Popular wisdom would have predicted that a married Jewess who eloped with a Catholic painter would come to a bad end. The opposite was true. Julius Matulay was a caring husband and father. He protected his wife from

deportation from Vienna when most Jews were sent first to Terezin and then to Auschwitz.

From 1924 to 1930 Laci Matulay attended a gymnasium in Vienna where he was a poor student. During the next five years, his life improved greatly. He enjoyed studying at the Kunstgewerbeschule (Academy of Applied Arts) from 1930 to 1935 and he fell in love with a brilliant and beautiful fellow student, Hertha Schwammer, who had come to Vienna from Czernowitz in Transylvania, which was by then part of Romania.

Both were active in the socialist student organization. He was frightened by the civil war in Austria in 1934 and by Hitler's rise to power in Germany with the intent of bringing Austria into a Nazi millennium. In 1935 an uncle on his mother's side living in New York offered to bring him to America. Matulay agreed. He was shattered when 'his girl' refused to go with him because she wanted to help to bring a communist utopia to Europe. Laci left but Hertha remained. She later married Lucretiu Patrascanu and returned with him to

Romania where he became Communist Minister of Justice between 1944 and 1948. Accused of Titoism and espionage, they were arrested. Patrascanu was executed in 1954, but Hertha survived. Matulay said later, “I changed my political views but still remain a humanist.”

When he reached America in 1935, aged 23, he had great difficulty finding employment as an artist. It was the depth of the depression and his work was considered “interesting, but too European”. Initially, he worked on textile designs, advertisements and typography. An able illustrator, Matulay was fortunate to join a group of Bauhaus artists who had left Nazi Germany. The leader of this group was Paul Rand, born Peretz Rosenbaum in 1914 to a Jewish family from Galicia. Rand had changed his name to avoid anti-Semitic prejudice in New York and would become one of the greatest creators of graphic images for corporations such as IBM.

Matulay’s first satisfying endeavors were for PM Magazine, Harper’s Bazaar and Esquire Magazine. He always tried to snatch time from commercial work for real art and, to his gratification, two of his oil paintings were exhibited in the 1940 World’s Fair Exhibition in the New Americans category.



From 1943 to 1946 he served in the US Army in the war in Europe. From the landings in Normandy through the liberation of Vienna, he acted as an interpreter, a draftsman and an intelligence contributor. A series of sketches in this exhibition details day to day activities during the war. Matulay was delighted to find his parents in Vienna in the same small apartment near the Prater. After seven years of Nazi tyranny they were still a loyal couple and so happy to see their son, who quickly brought them to the United States.

During the years that followed he held many posts as Art Director for advertising agencies. He designed the original format of *Prevention*, the health magazine still in print today. He

Watercolor sketch from Matulay’s wartime portfolio

illustrated over 75 books, some included in the exhibition, including several books by the noted syndicated newspaper columnist, witty Art Buchwald.

In the 1960's he illustrated Arabic and Spanish language comic books on family planning for semi-literate people, for distribution in Egypt and South America. The project was sponsored by the U.S. Agency for International Development, or A.I.D. For some twenty years he illustrated *The World Over*, a magazine seen regularly by Jewish Sunday school students.

In 1980 Alpine Fine Arts published Matulay's most ambitious work, *Then and Now*, a novel without words. The illustrated story describes his parents and life in Vienna before and during the world wars; his own first love, in detail that is intimate without becoming pornographic; and ends in 1946 with his parents in their old age. As his friend, Friedrich Bergammer, said in the foreword to *Then and Now*:

"Each of the 112 drawings in this work is complete in itself, with subtle connections which each "reader" will construct for himself. These deceptively simple black and whites tell a story and sum up a history. The story is the history and the history the story, narrative without dogmatic naturalism, rich in content without losing spontaneity. These are drawings that are hard to get away from."

Reflecting on his varied life experiences, Matulay wrote: "My spiritual forefathers are Rembrandt, Mozart, Charlie Chaplin and Louis Armstrong. And of course my father, Julius Matulay." As a painter, he saw himself as the inheritor of a somewhat Americanized Central European culture.

He always found drawing much easier than painting, but was challenged by painting and returned to it in any free time, producing many portraits of family and friends. We have none of his first wife, Kate Ryan, a beautiful Irish redhead and successful textile designer, to whom he was married briefly. Nor have we any of his elder sister, Marta Pruce, who married an American in 1937, graduated from medical school in Vienna and was a psychoanalyst first in New York and then in Atlanta. But there are many paintings of his second wife, Harriette, née Wallace, to whom he was married from 1948 until his death in 1999, and of their children, Emily and John. Harriette had previously been married to Paul Rand, who was then Art Director at Esquire Magazine, and it was while working with Rand that Matulay met her.



In one of his many ardent love letters to Harriette, written in 1948, two years after her divorce from Rand, Matulay wrote that he was teaching Rand how to draw: "First I am going to draw with him. He thinks I am the only one who can teach him how to draw. Well, fine, I think so too. That is the only thing that is lacking in his work and that is the only thing I can be of help to him because it is what I am most accomplished in, more than average. We're going to have every Thursday night 3 hours drawing after work. It will give me a heck of a lot too". A week later Matulay wrote: "Last night we had 3 hours sketching with Paul and it went very well. He isn't too stubborn and I admire his modesty. I don't know, but I can't see jealousy in him at all. I hope, baby, you have forgotten him. I want you to think that he was a medium for you to meet me".

Matulay had been searching for true love and he found that in Harriette. She was always by his side. When he gave up advertising to focus on pure art, Harriette's salary as a teacher helped materially. Late in life he suffered two strokes that damaged his eyesight, and he continued to paint with her help, using a jeweler's magnifying glass to see his model and his canvas. Harriette remained strong until his death in 1999 and died shortly thereafter.

Why is Matulay so little known as an artist? He is not listed in the standard reference books and had only a few minor exhibitions of his work. The answer is twofold: he had to work immensely hard to make a living as an illustrator and, while some of his illustrations are fine, many were produced hurriedly and were of mediocre quality. And he never really tried to promote his artistic work, never tied up with a major gallery in New York, and gave away many of his best works to family and friends.

Some of Matulay's works harken back to Oskar Kokoschka and other Viennese artists. His images of erotica, of which there are many, are less strident than Schiele's. And his humanism is so clear: the conflict between good and evil, love and war, the need for acceptance of all human beings. To quote Friedrich Bergammer again:

"Laszlo Matulay is a Viennese; that entitles him to be a Hungarian as well, and something more than an Austrian. His work is shot through with traces of his origins, the heritage of Austria: Hungarians, Viennese, Orthodox Jews, Roman Catholics, Social Democrats; World Wars, Rebellions. He is an American, and his work reflects what he is, what he was and what he has become in the decades of his life in America."

above: *Portrait of Harriette*, oil on canvas, 1950



*The Scholar*, relief print, undated

*The Immigrants*, relief print, 1984



*O. Karsch*, intaglio print, undated,  
collection of Carl and Irene Auvil



Watercolor sketches from Matulay's wartime portfolio







*The Carpenter*, ink drawing, undated



*Girl with 'Cap. Cardoni,'* mixed media drawing, undated,  
collection of David and Michelle Bader

*... With arrogance and charity to none*



*... With arrogance and charity to none*, mixed media drawing, 1986, collection of Dr. Robert Steinman



*Two Dancers*, ink drawing, 1985, collection of Dr. Robert Steinman



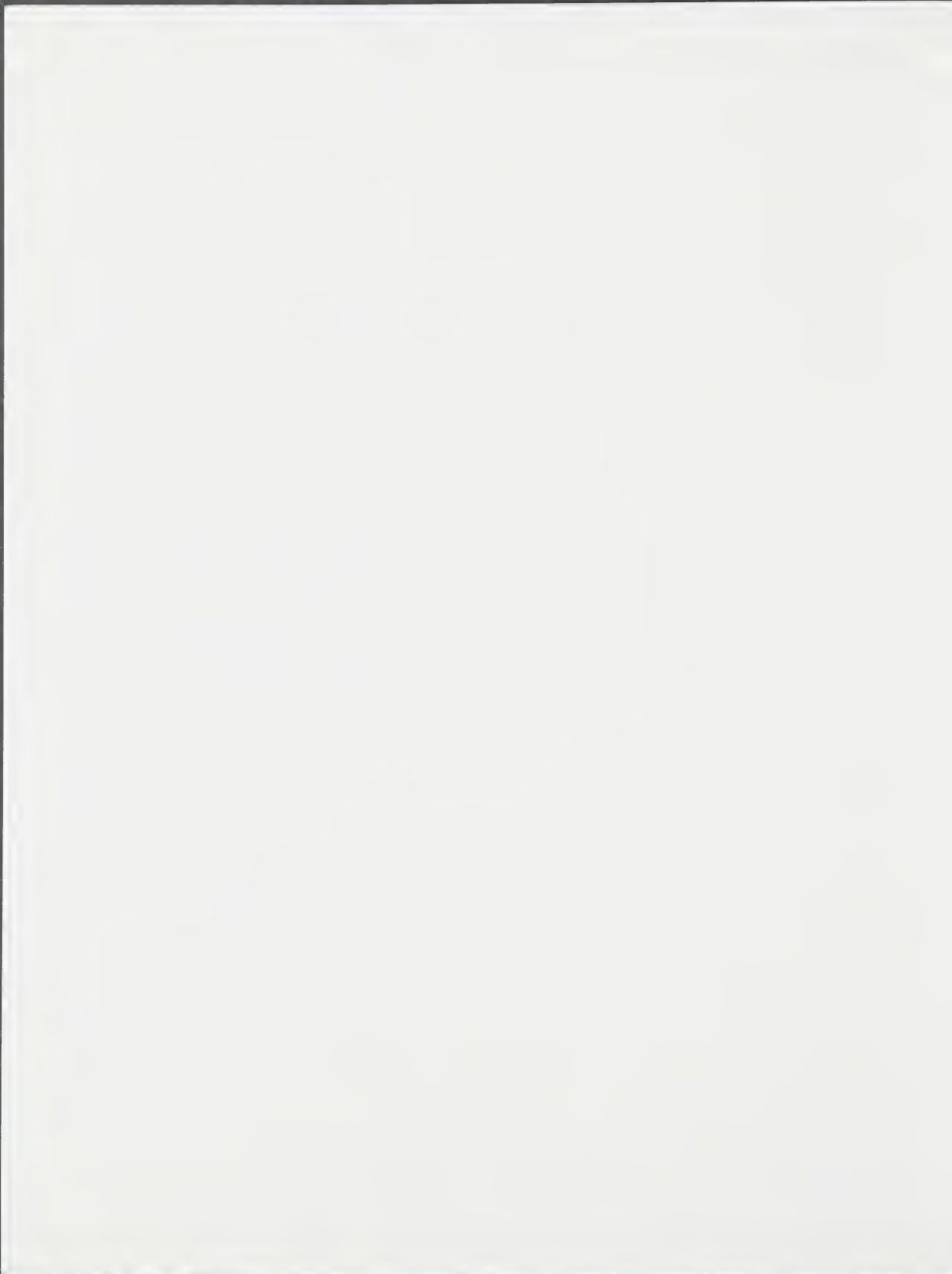
*Violin Solo with Dance Accompaniment II*, ink drawing, 1986, collection of Dr. Robert Steinman

### Checklist of the Exhibition

Unless otherwise indicated, all works are loaned from the collection of Dr. Alfred and Isabel Bader

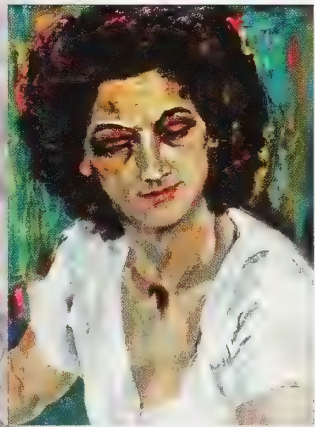
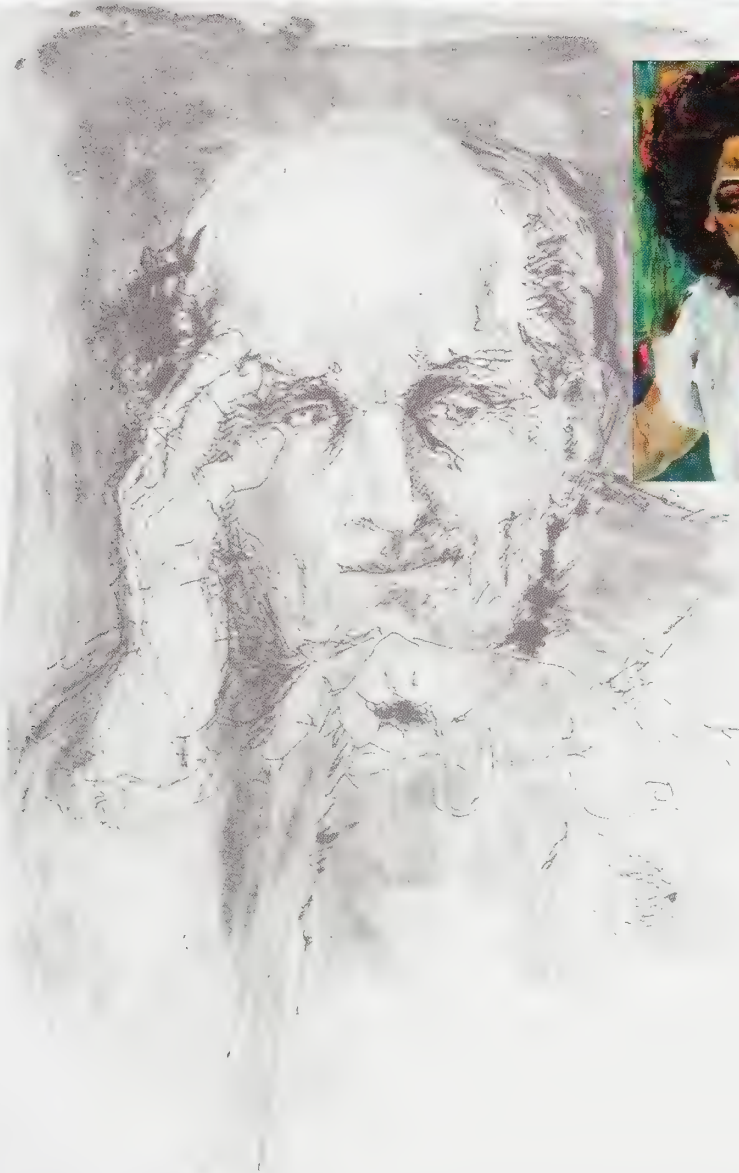
1. Sketches from Laszlo Matulay's wartime portfolio, watercolor and pencil
2. *Untitled*, pencil drawing, undated, collection of Carl and Irene Auvil
3. *Portrait (believed to be Hertha)*, oil on canvas, 1937
4. *Portrait (believed to be Hertha)*, oil on canvas, 1937
5. *Untitled (Woman)*, ink drawing, 1961
6. *Portrait of Harriette*, oil on canvas, 1950
7. *Woman with Cat*, pen and ink, undated
8. *Untitled Nude*, pen and ink, 1949
9. *Long-nosed clown*, ink and watercolor, undated
10. *Man and Woman*, relief print, 1984
11. *The Immigrants*, relief print, 1984
12. *The Scholar*, relief print, undated
13. *O. Karsch*, intaglio print, undated, collection of Carl and Irene Auvil
14. *Old Woman*, pen and ink, undated
15. *Woman with Pencil*, pen and ink, undated
16. *Prophet*, ink drawing, 1983
17. *Prophet*, ink drawing, 1957
18. *Three Figures (Family)*, mixed media drawing, 1970, collection of David and Michelle Bader
19. *Jester and Two Figures*, pen and ink, undated, collection of David and Michelle Bader
20. *Couple and child*, graphite, 1981
21. *The Carpenter*, ink drawing, undated

22. *Self Portrait*, ink drawing, undated
23. *Jester, Waiter and Nude*, pen and ink on mylar, undated
24. *Girl with 'Cap. Cardoni'*, mixed media drawing, undated, collection of David and Michelle Bader
25. *Nude*, pen and ink, undated
26. *... With arrogance and charity to none*, mixed media drawing, 1986, collection of Dr. Robert Steinman
27. *Violin Solo with Dance Accompaniment II*, ink drawing, 1986, collection of Dr. Robert Steinman
28. *Two Dancers*, ink drawing, 1985, collection of Dr. Robert Steinman
29. *Woman and Man*, mixed media drawing, 1990, collection of Dr. Robert Steinman
30. *Untitled (Trees)*, mixed media drawing, 1993, collection of Dr. Robert Steinman





Laszlo Matulay:  
*Images for Words*



on the cover:      *Portrait of Harriette*, oil on canvas, 1950  
                             *Self Portrait*, ink drawing, undated

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Laszlo Matulay:  
*Images for Words*

MARCH 25 THROUGH APRIL 28, 2002  
*Robert L. Ringel Gallery, Purdue Memorial Union*

Purdue University Galleries  
West Lafayette, Indiana 



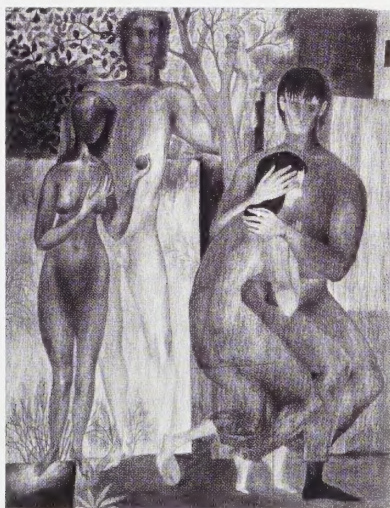
Watercolor sketch from Matulay's wartime portfolio

opposite: *Untitled*, pencil drawing, undated,  
collection of Carl and Irene Auvil

## *Foreword*

Every five years since the early 1980's, Dr. and Mrs. Alfred Bader have generously presented a portion of their extensive art collection in exhibitions at the Purdue Galleries. This exhibit of the works of Laszlo Matulay is sponsored by the Baders in celebration of the 90th birthday of Purdue Professor Emeritus and Nobel Prize laureate Dr. Herbert C. Brown.

Laszlo Matulay communicates to us a long and storied lifetime through the images collected for this exhibition. Each drawing or painting attempts to address us on a common level of visual understanding. We are presented with chivalrous cavalry officers, rumpled GI's, elegant maidens in flowing gowns, ragged prisoners, young thinkers, drunken revelers, immigrants, children, and lovers.



Throughout the parade of individuals that people Matulay's work, we are treated to simple but effective representations of the human condition. His work is illustrational in its need to communicate beyond the formal qualities of the image. But his drawings, in particular the later works, are developed through an expressive style of mark making and brushwork. In contrast to descriptive rendering, this gestural approach enlivens the works with implied activity and the impression of an image being conjured from a living memory.

In this energetic drawing style, Matulay shows his connection to the artistic heritage of early twentieth century Viennese artists and the work of compatriots such as Oscar Kokoschka and Egon Schiele. The Expressionists were no strangers to book and journal illustrations,

and Matulay's production of artwork, both in Europe and here in the United States, reflects this practice. In particular the production of his own book of illustrations *Then and Now*, comprised entirely of wordless imagery, cements his respect for serial artwork and stands as an evocative, enigmatic vision of the artist's life.

Perhaps no single unit or group of works better exemplifies Matulay's artistic personality than the private studies he produced during his time as a soldier in World War II. Bundled together in a small portfolio box and kept by his side during the war, these small gems show us both the wartime world of Europe and the daily experiences of soldiers – views from café-lined streets and civilian life, transport ships and barracks. Represented in each is Matulay's characteristic observation of common people, an essential humanism that runs through his entire body of work.

We are fortunate to be the beneficiaries, once again, of the Baders' commitment to fine art, and we are grateful to them for their generous support. They have supplied the majority of works in the exhibition. Our thanks go also to Dr. Robert Steinman, Irene and Carl Auvil, and David and Michelle Bader for lending works from their collections and to Matulay's daughter, Amrita, for her encouragement and support.

Craig Martin, Director  
Purdue University Galleries

opposite: *Self Portrait*, ink drawing, undated