

SAM MAITIN

Prints and Places



Reflections on a Painting by a Little Girl, 1960
Etching, aquatint, engraving, 11 3/4 x 24 in.
Museum purchase, 1994

Published on the occasion of the exhibition

Sam Maitin: Prints & Places

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Philadelphia

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-Donald Meyer, Curator & Director of Exhibitions



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Table of Contents

Sam Maitin	3
By Donald Meyer, Director of Exhibitions and Curator	3
Prints & Places	3
American Master of his Own Making	4
The Prints: Beginning, middle and end: prints, collage, public projects	5
Color	5
Shapes of the puzzle	5
The writing on the wall	6
The Places: media as collage, collage as sculpture, architecture as collage	7
Sam Maitin	9
By Dr. Luther Brady	9
The Artist and the Physician	9
Friends and Collaborators	9
Precious Conversation	10



We are the curators of Life on earth

while there is Life There is hope



*The 1981
Sane Peace
Award
to Dr. Helen
Caldicott*

Sam Maitin

By Donald Meyer, Director of Exhibitions and Curator

Sam Maitin's work is in the National Gallery of Art, the Tate Museum, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Klingspor-Museum Offenbach, Germany, the Delaware Art Museum, the Reading Museum, the Ackland Museum of the University of North Carolina, and the Berman Museum at Ursinus College.

Sam's education began and was pursued exclusively in Philadelphia, studying at the Philadelphia Museum School of Art while concurrently studying part-time at the University of Pennsylvania, graduating with a Bachelor's Degree in 1951.

Maitin exhibited nationally and internationally in England, Germany, France, Israel, China and Japan.

Here in Philadelphia, the quality of his work--prints, collage, paint, murals -- made it a perennial favorite with public institutions and the public in general; so much so that Maitin was called the "quintessential artist-citizen."¹ His enthusiasm and energy went to a large number of good causes. Among the many crucial projects to which he dedicated his time was rescuing the Louis Kahn archives, now at the University of Pennsylvania.

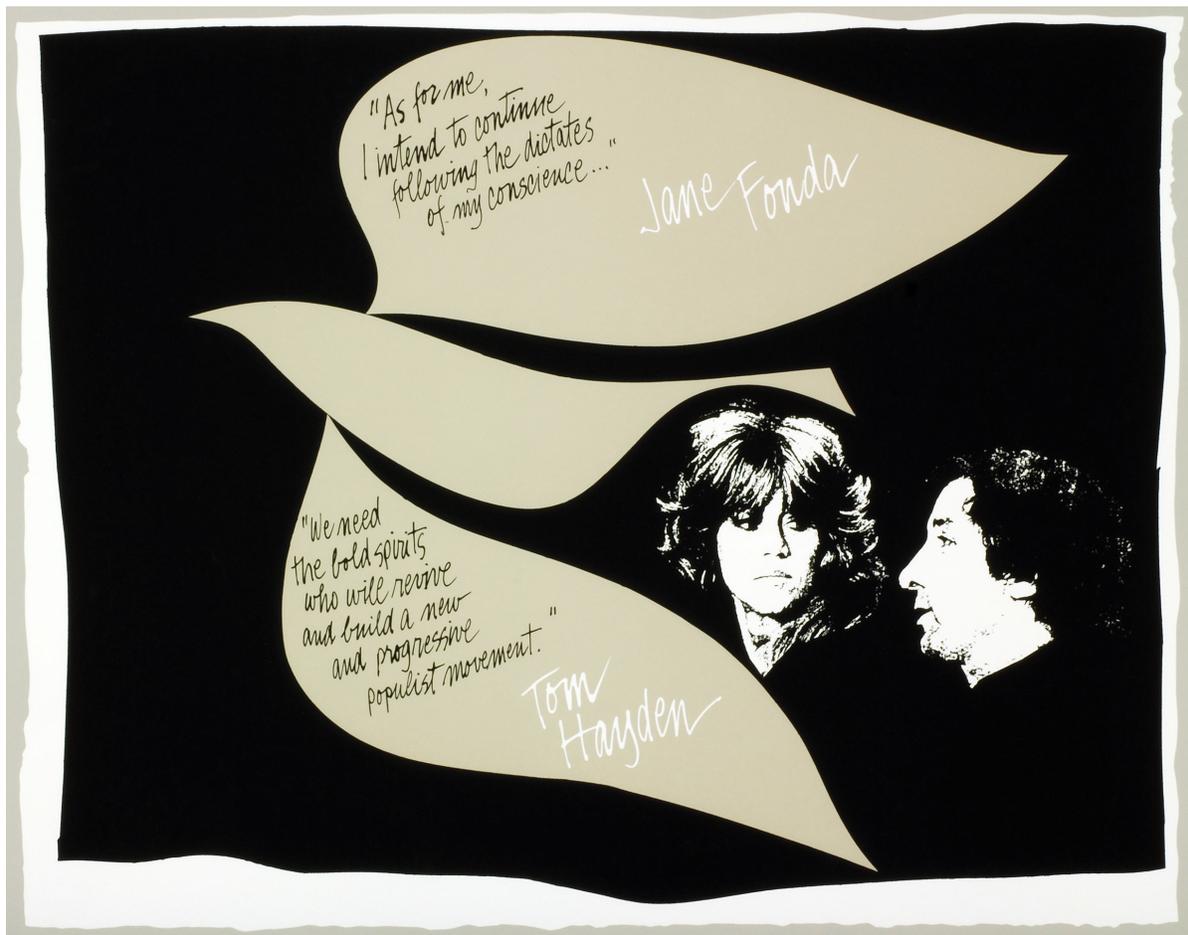
Prints & Places

Our exhibition focuses on the first public showing of thirty newly acquired prints from our permanent collection, presented as a gift by Lilyan Maitin and the Maitin Family in honor of Michael W. Schantz in 2009. Also on display are a selection of studies created by Maitin for "public" places, either mural or sculptural projects, both institutional and private, completed or contemplated. Presented at the courtesy of Lilyan Maitin and the Maitin family, the selection reveals at once the prolific and playful nature of Maitin's practice, as well as, even as studies, his continually evolving and expansive virtuosity in media.

American Master of his Own Making

It is always the distinct colors and signature forms of Maitin that stop the viewer at his work, but it is the energy that takes the viewer in: a powerfully kind and intelligent energy. This separates the work in itself, but in a strictly formal way this energy is clearly his distinction as a late 20th century American artist. Absorbing not just early 20th century Modernism but adding to it the distinctly American mid-century/post war tradition in the arts of global activism arising from the new threat of nuclear holocaust, Maitin made these part of the energy that survives him; but a growing number of discriminating viewers feel that these aspects should not be allowed to define the art he made. When looking through even this limited set of prints and studies in our exhibit the viewer sees these two aspects, an American formalism in reaction to European modernism, and globally realized activism. However, while the time and its events are too embarrassingly near to be historical and too far past to be contemporary, it is time to notice the importance of Maitin's work as a reflection of something more fundamental to both his and our time.

Artists like Sam Maitin are such masters of their own making that anywhere you start is his beginning, his middle and his end. It is there the timeless aspect of his work must be recognized. This is less immediately noticeable as he dedicated his life and art to many current and parochial events or causes in which he passionately attempted to have



others engage on a purely social level. Although most casually compare Maitin to Matisse, Miro and Dubuffet, likely associations since the artist, in his own words, "grew up"² in the Albert Gallatin bequest and Walter and Louise Ar-ensberg collection at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, it is necessary to remind ourselves that he admired those art-

ists as contemporaries and peers. Maitin actually collaborated with Miro and Dubuffet³. Aside the work of his friends and peers, the art Maitin made was distinctly of his own kind. Maitin, though respectful of the visual ingenuity of children and brute charm of primitivism like Dubuffet, was not essentially child-like or primitive in the work. Though whimsical and metaphorical in images he chose he was not ever surreal or simply psychologically ambiguous as was Miro. Most clearly, as relates color and form: though Maitin, collage technique and Matisse are joined in class-room discussions on media, Sam Maitin's use of collage was hugely distant in context, intent and the resulting clarity of their own making from the work of Matisse. His work seems more nearly akin to Stuart Davis and Ellsworth Kelly, sharing taschistic elements with his friend Franz Kline⁴, certainly turns an eye toward the same technological muses informing "Pop," and lives in a world decades beyond Modernism of his elder peers, in a world clearly of his own making.

The Prints: Beginning, middle and end: prints, collage, public projects

Here, on the occasion of Lilyan Maitin's generous gift, we are able to begin the work of seeing the whole of Maitin clearly by presenting his print works, stretching a lifetime, dated 1958 through the 1980's, as well as a few later pieces dating into the late 90's. Reflective of Maitin's continuing evolution from earlier prints through the development of collage and public sculpture, we are able to see in cameo the distinctions of his life work as if in episode. The additional "public" project studies selected for our exhibition continue, parallel and complement that survey. His color, the shapes he used and text elements aside from the context of a theme, cause, event or purpose of a project should be the focus of our survey as they were always there as the true expression of the art. Looking at a print about Jane Fonda, forgetting her celebrity and its context, and seeing the print as a work of art, is not as simple as viewing an 1890s poster of period celebrity Jane Avril by Toulouse-Lautrec and seeing it as the work of art it is. It is for our purposes, in this exhibition of Maitin's work, necessary to make the effort .

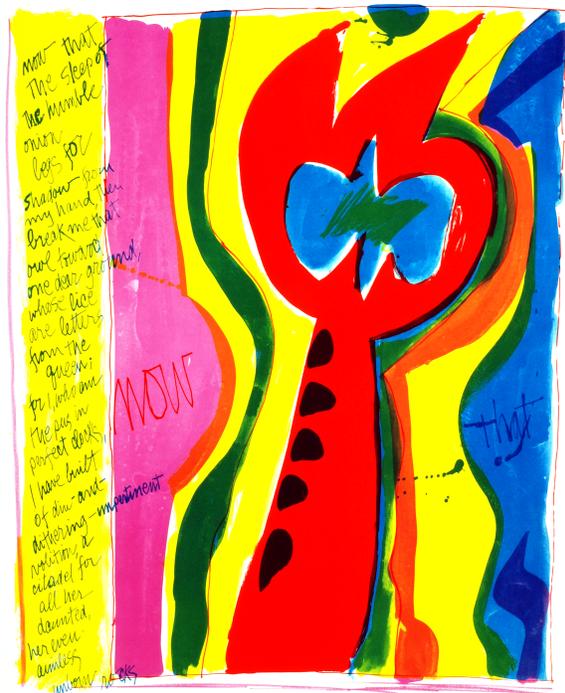
Color

He was a proud, serious artist slathering brightness on the face of his world. " 'Cones!' ", he would say his friend Dick Goldberg, fellow artist and ophthalmologist, had told him, referring to the cone-shaped color receptor-cells of the retina as opposed to the rod-shaped cells sensing light and dark, "I have more 'cones than rods.' My eyes see intense color, it's all I see."⁵

Or the viewer sees, given Maitin. "Matisse drew with colour; he composed with colour; he used colour the way someone else would use a line. He thought in colour," Maitin told Duncan Scott during the March 1994 Maitin Retrospective here at Woodmere⁶. Yet the viewer sees how his colors meant and extended clear certainties, more aggressively daring the eye in combinations than Matisse; how these colors, puzzled with his unique shapes, reached from each dimension to the next, in his sculpture or whatever the medium he worked, to surprise himself and the viewer. With Matisse color was a contemplation; with Maitin it was an ejaculation. "So impressed am I with this new world," Matisse wrote his wife as he passed through the United States enroute to Tahiti, "There's a grandeur of space and order here.... American light is bright, intensely bright."⁷ Maitin's light, Maitin's color, was new to Matisse.

Shapes of the puzzle

In a more profound way than we can effectively describe here, Maitin's life work flowed from prints during the mid '40's until the early '70's; to collage/mural/sculpture through the mid '90's; to an intimate search in the use of materials and techniques that promised much before he was so suddenly struck down in 2004. It is a puzzle so integrated with the complexity of concerns with which we know Maitin involved his art, all within the extreme and simple clarity of his expression, that his work seems at first easy to view. The intellectual complexity so well compressed within the clarity



of final visual choices Maitin made most easily become evident, even insistently interrupting the visual pleasure of the prints, by the intrusion of calligraphic text. The inclusion of his work in the collection of the Klingspor-Museum Offenbach, Germany, is not surprising as it is an institution dedicated to enriching its collection of literature on the art of book production, history of letterpress printing, typography and calligraphy, and graphic techniques.

A natural part of the acceding of his art to various “causes” was the use of text, language as letters, shapes as language. The viewer becomes reader of the “writing” on the pieces, carefully chosen shapes written in intimately selected colors, rather than the seer of those puzzling and unique Maitin shapes behind the words, supporting the impact of the text.

The writing on the wall

His friend and patron, Dr. Luther Brady, misses the conversations shared with Maitin at the artist’s kitchen table in his home and studio in Philadelphia, and recalls the ease with which Maitin pulled quotations from philosophy, the sacred religious books, literature high and low, all out of a morning’s sunlight. Dr. Brady startles the complacency of views of Maitin’s work by explaining his friend’s affinity to text as art, sharing the path of Western, Near and Far Eastern monastic traditions and the ancient insistent incipience and layering of common graffiti. Graffiti may be the low-art visual equivalent of shouting, or speaking out of turn, but the lovingly and fervent hand-copied scriptures and attendant illustrations spoke to Maitin as if his muse studied library science in the monasteries of Aquinas and mosques of Avicennes. Maitin was, so-to-speak, shouting and speaking out of turn, involving himself so deeply and fervently in his civic and humanitarian causes, but also all the while delighting his friend Dr. Brady and the viewer to our exhibition as well by listening to his very refined medieval muse in order to make our set of prints speak a visual form of wisdom as well as slogan. Jane Fonda, Desmond Tutu, Dr. Spock and Dr. Helen Caldecott are footnotes to the context of political protest movements of the 1970s, and must be left behind to join those quaint, safe and historic art-related personalities we enjoy in our “mind’s eye” in the graphic art of Lautrec, such as Jane Avril, Aristide Bruant and Yvette Guilbert in the scandalous glamor of Paris of the 1890s.⁸



The Places: media as collage, collage as sculpture, architecture as collage

In 1968 Maitin spent time in England on a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship. At that time, while working in London at the Curwen Art Studio, and as an instructor at Kent art College in Canterbury and at Camberwell Art College in London, Maitin was brought to the attention of the Tate Britain at Millbank. Dr Luther Brady presented one of Maitin's prints to their collection making it the first acquisition for the Tate, initiating their major collection of prints. Prior to that time, the Tate did not collect prints or lithographs, and the gift of the Maitin print by Dr. Brady led to a major restatement of the collecting goals of the Tate Britain at Millbank. Now that collection is a major and significant resource in London for prints from around the world.

This exhibition would be a failure unless it could describe the exact nature and meaning of the energy felt by anyone who knew Sam Maitin.

Obviously, beyond the relationship an artist has with the making of work, the most important relationship an artist can have is one that is witness to it. I mean by this a relationship with one who

encourages, suggests, requests or even demands solutions from the work, or simply is there to converse with the artist about the possibilities to which it can rise. To Sam Maitin, such a one could be Dr. Luther Brady.

So, when I approached Dr. Brady seeking a way to express the nature and meaning of the energy Sam shared with those with whom he associated, I soon realized the mirror Brady was able to hold before us to show his side of a fifty year friendship with the artist, and enable us to have that view as a witness. What follows are the memories of a relationship so crucial in the making of fine art, the relationship of a close friend.

Sam Maitin

By Dr. Luther Brady

The Artist and the Physician

When I first met Sam Maitin in 1960, I had no idea that he would become one of my very best and closest friends. The occasion was a commission to do paintings that would hang in the waiting room in the Department of Radiation Oncology at Hahnemann University Hospital. Out of our discussions in the Department, over the kitchen table, at dinner, came the twelve Hahnemann drawings which today reside in the collections of the Picker Gallery at Colgate University. Subsequent commissions for the Medical School at Hahnemann University - *Hope is the Art of Caring*, as well as, *Hope is the Search for Cure* - reside in major collections in the Philadelphia region.

With the expansion of the program in Radiation Oncology, Sam did commissions for all the outreach departments with the crowning accomplishment being the ceiling in the radiation therapy treatment room at the West Jersey Cancer Center in Voorhees. When patients lie on the table for treatment, they look in general at the ceiling and it's often seems nothing more than a blank wall. The ceiling tiles for that room were scattered across the ceiling, 3-dimensional in character, multi-colored, happy, exciting, and charged with the cross room lighting that has been designed by Sam.

In my collection are a number of wonderful pieces by Sam including the super posters, sculptures made with acrylics soaked in handi-wipes, and sculptures made in a 3-dimensional technology that was developed at the time of his major retrospective at the Fleisher Art Memorial in 1971.

Friends and Collaborators

So, I've known Sam for fifty years and we became very good friends at that Fleisher retrospective where he used sculptures to demonstrate how he was able to put together collages. It was as a consequence of that exhibition that I commissioned him to do a major sculpture for the garden on Delancey Street. It meant that he had to go back and learn how to cut metal and how to prepare the surface in such a way so that polyurethane paints would adhere to it. It took him over two years to complete the sculpture but when it was completed, it was magnificent and was a major important focal point in the garden.



Dui bla faccumsan ve



Quis. Dui bla faccumsan ve



Quis nulluptat. Dui bla

Precious Conversation

How does one describe Sam Maitin? He was loved by all who knew him. He had an incredible ability to interact with almost everyone he ever met in a clear, warm, heartfelt and precious manner.

When Sir Howard Hodgkin was visiting in Philadelphia for the occasion of the 125th anniversary of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, he was my guest and I asked that Sam show him the Italian Market, a place in which Howard expressed an interest. However, whatever time they spent in the Italian Market must have been very short because they ended up talking for hours at the kitchen table at Sam's home drinking coffee. Sir Howard speaks very warmly of his friendship with Sam and how much they had in common in their understanding of how to use color forms and emotional impression in their work.

We spent long hours talking about various projects in Philadelphia and he was a key, seminal individual in establishing the art motif for the galas of the Brady Cancer Research Institute. That meant designing not only the invitation but the dinner menu and program book. He was also critically involved in the design and execution of the retrospectives that were carried out by the Friends of the Philadelphia Museum of Art for Jasper Johns and Dubuffet as a part of the prints collections for the museum and the prints done for the Friends of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The major piece for the Friends was an edition of a lithograph and a piece of wood that was cut into small pieces. With each lithograph of the edition went part of that wood piece indicating that when all the pieces were brought together they made the whole, symbolizing the unity of spirit of the Friends.

His art forms from paintings to print making to posters to banners to three dimensional murals, to metal sculptures for the outdoors and wood sculptures for indoors were incredible. The extent of his public works include a 70 foot collage mural commission for the lobby of the Annenberg School of Communications, a 35 foot dimensional mural in the lobby of the Wood Building at Childrens' Hospital of Philadelphia, as well as murals for the Christian Association at the University of Pennsylvania and banners created for the Wharton School. His work resides in the Temple University Dental School, the Abington Hospital Memorial Chapel, the Adath Jeshuran Synagogue in Jenkintown. His last major work was a large interactive dimensional mural in the new Please Touch Museum in Philadelphia. His other major work before he died was for the club house and recreational facility for the Enclaves in South Philadelphia.

Of course, in relation to my involvement with his work, Sam created the sculpture done for the campus at the George Washington University entitled "Joyce", standing eight feet high and constructed of polyurethane paint on a metal

base in a three dimensional manner. It stands at the corner of 21st and G Street NW in Washington, D.C., near the Woodhull House on the campus, representing one of the major collections of campus sculpture.

Sam was a major enthusiastic supporter of the discussions that led up to the development of the Brady Cancer Research Institute at Hahnemann University, now the College of Medicine at Drexel University. He brought to that organization leadership, wise counsel, deep and heartfelt wisdom, and was one of the critically important individuals for its success.

His love of the city of Philadelphia and his absolute commitment to its reputation and its development are well known in almost every corner of government and every corner of the community from Philadelphia to Harrisburg. His input into all aspects of our region are hallmarks of a dedicated, highly committed, wonderful man. In Hebrew, he would be called a Neshama - just a wonderful soul, and certainly would be well described as an absolute Mensch.

Memories are the greatest things about friendships. From the multiple associations in his work to the incredible discussions far-ranging in character over the kitchen table stand out as wonderful points of life in my memory. He was one of the most widely read individuals I've ever met and could carry forth discussions in-depth on almost any subject that one might broach.

His illness which began in November of 2004 was shocking to everyone from his closest family, to his closest friends, to the community at large in Philadelphia. To see the rapidity with which his disease progressed was shocking and made all of us feel helpless to change. His death on the 23rd of December 2004 was a blow to the sensibility of all of us.

One of the greatest and most pleasant experiences in my life was meeting Sam Maitin, working with him, and helping to have some minor influence on his wonderfully widespread interests. His memory will always be a landmark in my life.

1 Bach, Penny Balkin. Public Art in Philadelphia. Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1992. p. 239

2 Scott, Duncan. Sam Maitin: Four Decades of His Art - A Retrospective Exhibition. Exhibition catalog, The Woodmere Art Museum, Philadelphia, 1994. "Of parallel inspiration to the young Maitin was the Philadelphia Museum of Art. He recalls: 'I grew up in this place....'"

3 Ibid. pg 5

4 Ibid. pg. 5

5 Conversation with the author.

6 Ibid. , pg 5.

7 Girard, Xavier. (trans. I. Mark.) Matisse-The Wonder of Color. Harry N. Abrams, Inc. New York, 1994. p.107.

8 Huisman, Ph., Dortu, M. G. (trans. Corinne Bellow) Lautrec by Lautrec. Viking Press, New York, 1968.