



Norway, Maine Summer Festival, July 6-9, 2006

Lajos Matolcsy, 1905 - 1982 A Brief Biography



“Above all, an artist is a teacher and a missionary whose prime duty should be to stimulate the mind and the emotions, to work to make life a little nicer for everyone.”

Lajos Matolcsy, June 17, 1905 - November 2, 1982. An artist dedicated to sharing his art with the world, first and foremost through teaching. His influence on the visual arts and artists in the Oxford Hills, especially through the Western Maine Art Group, established an environment friendly to the arts and supportive of arts and culture, which endures today more than two decades after his death.

Here is a block printed Christmas card. A man and a woman, hand in hand, walk a snowy path towards a small house in the distance. The woman’s head is wrapped in a scarf; she carries a bundle, and the man carries a suitcase.

Lajos Matolcsy created the card some time around 1958; the image is of Lajos and Claire Matolcsy, and their move from New York City to Paris, Maine.

But there is more here than a simple Christmas greeting. The house is a long walk through the snow. And the two figures carry their possessions, not gifts; the seemingly celebratory image is shadowed with the experiences of Lajos Matolcsy’s life.

We look at a later painting, an image of a scene from Matolcsy’s World War II experiences. Here are Hungarian refugees, urgently bent forward, struggling towards a goal that recedes indistinctly into the distance. They also walk through a snowy landscape, carrying shapeless bundles and bags, the women’s heads swathed in scarves. A



child pulls a wagon with a toy horse tied atop his bundle.

This figure is echoed by a boy standing with his father in front of a cottage, watching the stream of people, and holding in his left hand a stuffed toy of his own. The boy is painted almost cartoonishly - and his eyes are rough black holes in his face.

Look at the joy on the face at the top



of the page, then at these somber reminders of the memories Matolcsy brought with him to Maine. One may feel that he can begin to understand what coming finally to the Oxford Hills meant to Lajos Matolcsy.

Lajos was born in Szerencs, Hungary, about 200 miles northeast of Budapest, and grew up in the Balaton Lake district, about 50 miles southeast of Budapest. Balaton is central Europe’s largest lake, with rolling hills and farmland around it.

Lajos’s family was prosperous; he described it to one interviewer as of “baronial stock.” The family crest is on the Hungarian Parliament building, and it is possible that the family had a patent of nobility going back at least to the mid-nineteenth century.

Lajos's father was the supervisor of bookkeeping in a bank and an officer in the Austro-Hungarian Army; his mother was a teacher. The senior Matolcsy fought in World War I and spent time in a prison camp, foreshadowing the brutal effects of war on Lajos's own life.

The young Lajos showed his passion for art as a child. The earliest work the family has is a portrait of Lajos's sis-



Matolcsy family, early, Lajos 2nd from right.

ter Ilona, completed when he was 18, which shows that he was already a competent artist. But an art career was not an easy option - his father was adamant that he study law. After the War, in the mid-1920's, Lajos joined the army himself, to finance his secondary education, a practice common in eastern Europe at that time. Then, bowing to his father's demands, he attended law school at Pecs, Hungary.

Having satisfied his father's wishes Lajos almost immediately entered the Royal Academy in Budapest, a place where traditional methods of training still dominated and formed Lajos's formal art training.

It is interesting to look at some near-contemporaries: Picasso and Braque were some 25 years older; Henry Moore and Magritte were born in 1898, Dali in 1904. Much later Matolcsy told an interviewer that he had experimented with impressionism and cubism, but always returned to realistic art. This is not surprising if we look at his extensive academic career in the fine arts, which went from the Royal Academy to scholarship study at the Collegium Hungaricum in Rome and the Julian Academy in Paris.

Matolcsy's first marriage was in 1931, to Ilona Kasz6. In April 1938 their daughter Ildiko was born.

In 1933 Lajos settled down to teaching, as a Professor of Fine Arts at Gy6nk Gymnasium (equivalent to a junior college), then Nagykata High School, then Siofok Gymnasium, an experimental school emphasizing personal attention to the students. In 1940 he became the Director at Siofok, a position he held until 1944. At the same time he worked as Director for the Ministry of Education, supervising fine arts programs for about 80 schools, one of the youngest directors ever appointed. Inevitably, he was also a member of the Hungarian Army, first as a reservist and then on active duty as World War II overwhelmed Europe.

He was elected to the Hungarian Art Society (Magyar Kepzomuveszek Egyesultete). He exhibited regularly, in-

cluding six international shows, winning first prizes for poster art at exhibitions in Switzerland and Belgium. In Hungary he exhibited at the National Art Gallery from 1938 to 1945, and won first prizes for watercolors in the Hungarian National Exhibition. He also held one-man shows.

While his preferred artistic mode was realism, Lajos was an experimenter in any medium that came to hand. He painted murals for Hungarian churches (mostly destroyed during World War II); he loved figure painting, especially nudes; and created landscapes and portraits in oils, watercolor, pen-and-ink and pencil.

We come now to World War II. If Hungary was in a difficult position during and after World War I, it was doubly so after 1938. The terms of the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, which settled World War I, left Hungary in nearly as bad a state as Germany. The country lost two-thirds of its territory, the size of the army was limited, and armor and an air force were banned.

A 1927 treaty with Italy, intended to create an alliance that would help regain lost territory, set the stage for connections with the developing Axis. Between 1938 and 1941 the country was able to regain some territory by diplomatic and military means, and rebuilt its army. Then in 1941 Hitler took advantage of Hungary's desires by offering back the territory taken in World War I. In return, the German Army was allowed to enter Hungary to pre-



Early self-portrait, 1930's, in a room of his home.

pare for the invasion of Yugoslavia, and the Hungarians mobilized the Hungarian Third Army to assist. When Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, Hungary joined the Axis by declaring war against Russia.

We give these political details in order to help us understand Lajos's situation during this period. He was a successful artist and teacher, with a notable career, in a country that had seemed to be doing well politically and economically. He must have felt that times were good. Then, between 1938 and 1941, it all changed. We know that Lajos was an officer in the reserve, and later served on active duty. We do not know many details of this period, but there is a wood block self-portrait that Lajos made about 1940, and a family story that tells of him being lined up for inspection, with his horse - a tragicomic picture when compared with the massively mechanized German forces. The horse stepped on his foot, and Lajos screamed. The inspecting officer lost his temper

at this insubordination, and ripped Lajos's insignia of rank from his uniform then and there. Significantly, Lajos, the artist, responded to this incident with the woodblock image, the instinctively aesthetic reaction of a man for whom visual art was the fundamental medium of expression.

In 1944 Hungary's situation grew disastrously worse. Sensing the imminent Axis defeat, the government of Hungary sought a peace treaty with the Allies. The Germans immediately ousted the government and replaced them with their own Fascist "Arrow Cross" party. The Holocaust came with the Germans, who transported hundreds of thousands of Jews to Auschwitz and elsewhere, along with Roma (Gypsies) and other victims. The Hungarian Army was effectively destroyed, and Lajos joined the Resistance, fighting now



Oil of a Hungarian town on the Danube, probably late 30's. Lajos carved the frame, using traditional Hungarian designs, and highlighted it with gold leaf.

against the occupying forces of his country's former ally.

As the Germans withdrew during 1944 and 1945, the Russian army invaded Hungary in pursuit, and the Resistance shifted its target to the new occupier. By the spring of 1945 the Russians were firmly in control, in spite of the efforts of the dwindling Resistance. The country was devastated, a million Hungarians dead: soldiers on the front, Hungarian Jews in concentration camps and civilians during the Red Army campaign against the Wehrmacht.

The family preserves Lajos's brief accounts of this period, which are harrowing. A group was bulldozing a bombed-out building; Lajos got separated from the rest, and was buried in the rubble. He lay there for three days, until his searching comrades heard his calls. In battle, he was pinned against a tree by a large truck, which crushed his rib cage. At the same moment, a shell burst nearby, giving him a head wound that left a scar he carried the rest of his life. He was taken to the hospital, where he was put in a body cast. The hospital was bombed. The patients were carried out and laid on the street, Lajos in his cast, now infested with lice.

At some time before the Russian invasion, Lajos spent time in a German prison camp; he emerged starved to 90 pounds or so, gums diseased from malnutrition, his teeth removed one by one with a nail or other handy piece of sharp metal. That the artist in him survived this descent into the brutal chaos of guerrilla war, and even thrived afterward, seems nearly miraculous.

Lajos had seen two powerful enemies overwhelm his country, and was now a marked man under the Communist regime, as the secret police began hunting down and killing members of the Resistance and anyone else who might offer opposition. In a bit of grim irony, the secret police set up its headquarters in the very same Budapest building used by the Germans for that purpose. After the fall of the Communists, the building became a museum honoring the Resistance fighters - it is called The House of Terror, and the torture chamber is preserved intact.

So Lajos left, with what possessions he could carry in one trunk, traveling west through Austria into Germany. He had visited Germany before the War, spoke the language, and was familiar with the country. We do not know where he settled, though surviving paintings suggest that it may have been in the southeastern part of the country. Whatever temporary employment may have been necessary for him to get established in Germany, he quickly turned once again to art as his primary source of income. We have evidence of two primary areas of activity during this period. The first is his participation in exhibitions - remember, he had exhibited outside Hungary before the War, and must still have had some reputation. The second part of his work took advantage of his wide-ranging artistic abilities: he began doing commercial graphic work, mostly for a German tourist company. After he came to the United States, we find him doing considerable antique restoration, a set of skills that he may well have begun to develop during his time in Germany.

This part of Lajos's life lasted half a dozen years, until 1951. His time in Germany notwithstanding, he was still an immigrant, a Hungarian, not of German stock like other immigrant groups from Eastern Europe. We do not know why he was expelled, but they must have been related to German policy changes towards these war refugees, who had come from the East in waves after World War II. The family preserves Lajos's account of the event, when he was awakened at dawn by the German police with no advance warning, and told to pack what he could and leave immediately.

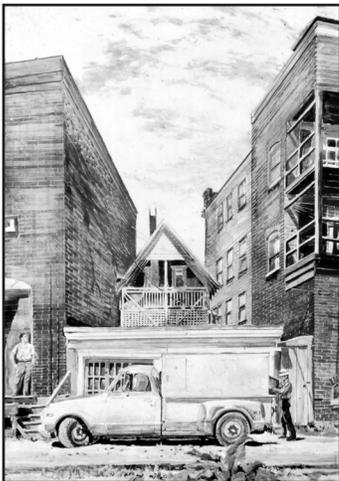
It seems clear that Lajos had a career in Germany, and must have felt that he had reached at least some sort of refuge after the horrors he had seen in Hungary. To be driven once again from his home and possessions must surely have been a deep wound, even to a man toughed by war.

But Lajos had been toughened, and by now knew survival as well as he knew art. He packed a single trunk - the family still has it - and must have traveled north, to Hamburg or another port, where he was able to use the last of the money he carried with him to buy passage to New York.

He arrived in the United States, having watched appalled as the ship jettisoned unused leftover food at sea before they docked, unimaginable to a man who had faced starvation. Lajos was delivered to Ellis Island, where he fought indifferent clerks to get his name recorded correctly, a man who might have lost much, but never his pride. He was still, as the Hungarians say, *Magyar*, proud and independent in his national identity.

Emerging into New York, Lajos was again a refugee, with no money and no contacts. So he became once again, for a while, a guerilla fighter, who knew how to be invisible and how to survive. He settled in Central Park, scavenged food from garbage cans, and watched for an opportunity. It came when he found a Hungarian newspaper in a garbage can. This led him to the Hungarian community in Manhattan, a busy ethnic enclave such as New York has always supported. They greeted him with traditional hospitality, and, one may suggest, with some respect for his role in the War.

We do not know exactly what happened next, but we know that Lajos found work quickly and turned the situation to his advantage. We know that he started an antique restoration business in New York, successful by the time he met



The Squeeze, a Lewiston, Maine scene, where the artist's eye for an odd scene is made a bit Escher-like in the way he manipulates point of view and perspective.

his second wife Claire. The family has seen photographs of him on ladders, as though working on large buildings, where his artistic skills were valuable for restoration work. He eventually found a job as a draftsman - again, a position where art skills count - and the family has saved one of his blueprints.

There is a story from this period that sounds typical of Lajos: his artist's mind could not content itself with simple drafting, and he developed a concept for a somewhat innovative building. This he presented to his employers,

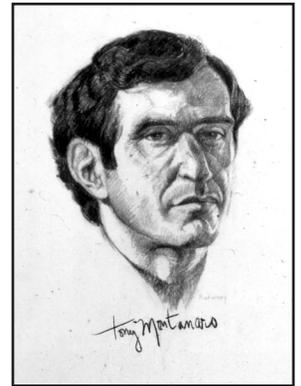
who rejected it out of hand as being impractical. This ended the matter, until Lajos passed a building some years later, and realized that it was the one he designed, now finished and operating, built by the people who had so soundly rejected the idea. He seems to have been more pleased and amused than resentful; later, as he renovated and added to the Ryerson Hill farm, he was immensely proud of his design and construction work.

This period carries us another half dozen years, to the late 1950's. Lajos seems to have had an art studio and restoration business operating successfully by this time, perhaps with a growing reputation. A young woman from Portland, Maine, Claire Couri, had moved to New York after graduat-

ing from Cornell, received a master's degree in international relations from NYU, and was working at the United Nations as Secretary to the Chairman of the Council on Foreign Relations. She was like Lajos in that she had subsumed her real love, dance, to more conventional vocations. But both her talent and her commitment were genuine, and she had been able to make her quotidian life support study with no less than Martha Graham, and then Jose Limon.

Claire had a friend in Limon's dance class named Tony Montanaro, like Lajos a man who was following his artistic impulses. Tony had studied mime in Paris with Marcel Marceau and others, and was studying dance to hone his physical skills as a performer.

Tony also was friendly with Lajos; how and why we do not know. He encouraged Claire to meet the Hungarian, who was 21 years her senior. As a teenager, Claire and Lajos's daughter Aranka once asked her mother if there really was such a thing as love at first sight. She had never believed in it, said Claire - until she first met Lajos. Lajos was perhaps not so susceptible, not surprising considering his history; but the two quickly fell deeply in love and began a devoted relationship that lasted the rest of their lives.



Pen and ink sketch of Tony Montanaro, probably 1970's.

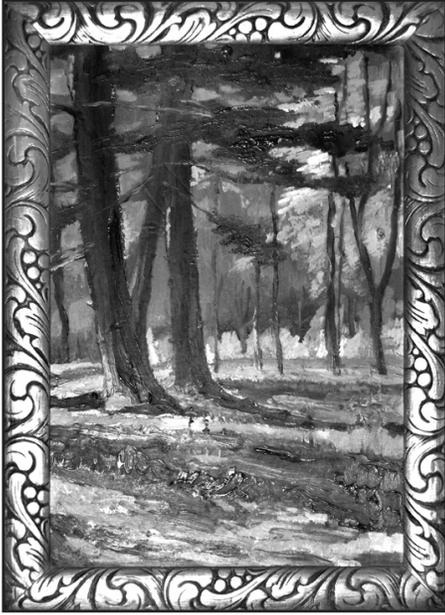
They were, eventually, living together, a practice much less accepted in the 1950's than today. Claire's family lived in Cape Elizabeth and was well-to-do, her father Dewey Couri a successful car dealer around Portland. Mr. Couri deeply disapproved of all of it, the dance, the Hungarian artist, the cohabitation, and the possibility of marriage.

Claire's mother's family had been from Buckfield, in Oxford County, and Claire fairly soon brought Lajos to Maine to show him the country she loved in the Oxford Hills. Traveling on old Route 26, the couple retraced Claire's route with her mother, through Paris Hill, over Ryerson Hill towards the cemetery in Buckfield where Claire's Thayer ancestors were buried. On Ryerson Hill Road there was an old farm, a long-abandoned place that Claire knew well.

On August 4, 1958 Lajos and Claire were married, a simple ceremony in New York City. This was the final straw for Claire's father, who disowned and disinherited his daughter, and later tried to block her contact with her mother. In April of 1959 their first son, Sandor, was born.

The prospects of marriage and a family suggested that it was time to think about moving from the city. The Montanaros were by that time living in Woodstock, New York, an attractive and congenial place when the Matolcsys visited. But in the end it was that old farm in Maine that pulled most strongly, not least because it was abandoned, nearly falling down and could be had for very little.

Claire and Lajos visited the place. Lajos set out to explore the house, over Claire's objections that the place was dangerously unsafe; she chose to be cautious, and stay in the car. Lajos disappeared inside. A few minutes later Claire heard an eerie sound.



Oil, Hungary, with carved frame by Lajos; a scene reminiscent of Maine, an early example of Lajos's lifelong fascination with trees, a continuing theme in his art.

It was an organ, being played enthusiastically. Claire was struck dumb, convinced now that Lajos had indeed fallen prey to the place, and his ascent to Heaven was being accompanied by music. She ran inside - carefully - and was astonished yet again, to find Lajos in the ancient living room, playing away on an old pump organ that

had been built into the wall. It was one of those remarkable incidents that argues that your proposed course of action is the right one.

The Matolcsys submitted an offer for the place, \$777.77, surely a lucky bid. It was accepted, and the family got a quitclaim deed for the place and a \$700 mortgage from the bank. Lajos was 54 years old, penniless again, now in debt, and starting again in a new place, with a house that was barely habitable.

This time, however, he had Claire, and the Oxford Hills, which evoked memories of his childhood home in Hungary. That he was barred absolutely from Hungary and his family was a continual pain for Lajos; he would not live to see the end of Communism and free elections in Hungary in 1990.

At this point we may return to Lajos's Christmas card. It was made before the family moved, in anticipation of the



Oil, apple tree, Woodstock, New York.

event. And if we look at it again, in the light of the Matolcsys' hopes, we may see it not only as a shadow of Lajos's past, but as a symbol of his future. In Christmas iconography we know that house is home, and that Lajos and Claire are walking towards a place that will help join the pieces of their lives with a place that will give them the things that home represents.

The move was made in several trips, with a tent for shelter until it was possible live in the house. Lajos and Claire unleashed a whirlwind of activity renovating the old place, Claire working beside her husband to transform their derelict shell into a home.

For a woman who had grown up affluent and often unhappy this energetic engagement with the real world may have been a kind of liberating relief.



Pencil sketch, old farm buildings. Maine farm scenes were a favorite subject for Lajos's fine pencil drawings.

For Lajos the liberation was profound. After twenty years of a life lived in stages, each ended by tragedy, he was now in a place that was his own, one that felt comfortably like Hungary, passionately in love, with an infant son. A second son, Zoltan, was born in May 1961. In the years that followed Lajos displayed an immense energy for art, for teaching, and for his life on Ryerson Hill.

Once the house was livable, Lajos built a garage, a barn, an el that connected the garage and house together, a sun porch and a studio. Almost all of it was built with materials from abandoned barns and other buildings in the area - Lajos never lost the habits learned from the chaos of World War II. Even nails were straightened and reused. Lajos enjoyed carpentry and building as much as he did his art. He proudly laid up fieldstone for parts of the barn wall, and pointed out clever bits of design and carpentry to visitors.

The final arrangement was very much like the traditional connected farm that Lajos saw in the neighborhood, an arrangement strange to a European, but one whose utility he must quickly have seen. The studio building benefited from another New England tradition, moving buildings intact. A hunting camp across the road was transported to the Matolcsy property; then a building on the Cooper farm, down the road, was moved intact, hauled by a tractor as helpers, mostly local boys, inserted and replaced round logs to keep the structure moving continuously on rollers.

Eventually the barn was filled with animals and the yard with fruit trees. Lajos knew the Hungarian ways of making fruit wine and hard cider, and produced some potent beverages. His talent with plants was as great as his skill with the inanimate world, so that the sun porch was filled with plants, as was the greenhouse he built from salvaged windows.

In his 50's now, Lajos was not tall, but was solidly built and very strong. His friend Charles Berg told about Lajos carrying large rocks for the stone walls of the barn, too heavy for any of the other workers. And one might expect that an artist's hands would naturally show the delicacy needed for painting; but Lajos's were the calloused hands of a worker. His daughter Aranka remembers walking with him as a small child, holding just his pinky finger, feeling as though it were



Lajos in front of house, looking west, house repaired, garage built.

as large as a whole hand.

Behind the joy of settling in Maine, however, there remained the sadness of what he had left behind in Hungary. Within the limits of the Communist government's control there was regular family correspondence. The letters from Hungary almost always brought waves of despair to Lajos, who could fold up into himself and retreat to his studio for a day or more. As Lajos looked around at his new family he could not escape feelings of guilt as he read the letters, especially from his daughter Ildiko, now married and living in Tarcál with her husband Sándor Tóth.

There was no solution in sight. The 1956 Revolution in Hungary had been put down viciously, and a letter from the family in Hungary warned him bluntly about his fate if he dared to go home: "They'll take you into the hospital and you'll never come out." A consolation was Leonie Cooper, a neighbor up the road who had escaped from Germany during the War with her two sisters and her brother. She and Lajos shared experiences, and Lajos, not yet fluent in English, appreciated the chance to speak German with Leonie.

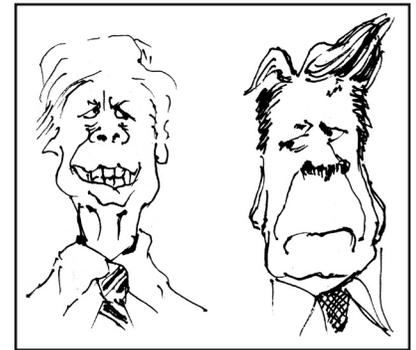
As soon as possible, Lajos and Claire set about creating an income. The upstairs became the dance studio and the art studio alternately, both eventually to be transferred to the schoolhouse on Main Street in Norway that became the Lajos Matolcsy Art Center.

Lajos was as energetic in his art. With the elements of a good life in place, his creativity was released, and spread in all directions. His children remember it as what one called "an unbounded desire to get his hands on everything." He had always worked in whatever medium attracted him at the time, and now he produced oil paintings, watercolors, pen and ink drawings and pencil and charcoal sketches; wood block prints and silk screens; ceramics and sculptures; wood carvings; and even some weaving.

He exhibited constantly, at galleries, schools and else-

where, around Maine and in Boston. Claire was an important part of this active exhibition and sales effort. Perhaps as a bit of heritage from her automobile dealer father, she worked tirelessly to promote Lajos's work and sell his art. There were sales constantly, but Lajos never saw sale prices comparable with those of more eminent and popular artists. We may speculate that this is in part because Lajos never specialized in the way that most well-known artists do, so as to make one or two readily identifiable products that could be sold easily.

What grew most explosively was his teaching, which outgrew the Ryerson Hill house and eventually expanded to studios in Lewiston, Portland and Casco as well as Norway. He spent roughly a day a week at each location. By 1962 he was staging exhibitions of his students' work. In December of that year the *Lewiston Evening Journal* reported on an exhibit of 200 paintings by 36 students, scheduled to be shown in Lewiston, then Portland and South Paris. "In age they range from 14 years to 85," reports the paper. "They are housewives, business and professional men, a doctor or two, bank employees, and even a warehouse worker."

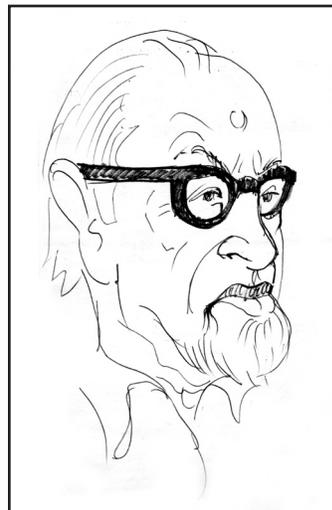


Lajos shows his humorous side, with caricatures of Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan.

In 1962 Lajos formed an arts organization. The Western Maine Art Group was established, with Lajos as President. The founders included Lajos's students Lee Bean, Anne Beyer, Ellie Viles, and Marion Stewart. As the organization grew to approximately 100 members from the area, Matolcsy created an ambitious teaching schedule and guided the art group in holding exhibits and other events. They exchanged

exhibits with the Nashua, New Hampshire Artists Association. And they mounted an exhibit loaned by the Farnsworth Museum in Rockland, Maine.

By 1966 the Art Group had grown to the point that it began to think of establishing a permanent home, a facility where its varied activities could take place year round. Contacts with the Maine Humanities Council produced encouragement but no funds. Then the Town of Norway reached the point in its consolidation of



Lajos's own caricature of himself, perhaps as the wise Professor.



Looking west from the Ryerson Hill house. From a pair of brochures promoting the Oxford Hills, written by Claire and illustrated by Lajos in pen and ink, done for the local Chamber of Commerce. Claire was the Executive Secretary of the Chamber for a while in the 1970's.

schools where the old one-room schoolhouses were vacant,



The Lewiston studio

and could be disposed of. The Art Group came forward, and after some negotiation, and with the help of the Town, was able to purchase the school on upper Main Street, which they renovated into the gallery still owned by the Western Maine Art Group. Lajos began teaching art classes upstairs, and Claire established her modern dance studio downstairs in the space that was also used for exhibits. The building was named the Arts Center.

In 1967 the Art Group created the Sidewalk Art Festival, an outdoor public exhibit and sale that became an annual event which has endured for 40 years. Under Lajos's leadership the event became one of the most prestigious art shows in the region.

For their work these were good times for the Matolcsys; but for the family it was the worst of times. At the end of January 1967 the Matolcsy sons Sandor and Zoltan were visiting the children of Lee Bean, sledding in the snow with the Bean children, when Sandor slipped into a cesspool hidden under the snow, and drowned. He was 7 years old. The loss devastated the family. The child was surely a symbol of the passion of Lajos and Claire for each other, and of the new life that Lajos had found in his marriage and his home in Maine.

The couple survived, and Lajos called once again on his determination to persevere. In July 1968 the birth of a daughter, Aranka, gave new life to the family. Lajos was now 63 years old and Claire was 42. By the standards of the time they were quite old to have a child; but the couple was determined to ensure that Zoltan would have a sibling.

His concentration on his art seems to have continued

and increased. The children remember him as constantly drawing or painting, using anything that came to hand, as though his hands had a will of their own to make art. He might sketch on the back of an envelope when that was what was handy and something interested him. He might take the children fishing; but he would be sketching them and the scene while they fished. At home, the children found him concentrated on his art, playful and loving, but always returning to his studio.

He worked constantly. We may suspect that while loving what he did and feeling no need for respite, he also worked obsessively to escape from some of his lingering unhappinesses, including the death of Sandor. By this time many of his art students had been with him for years, and had great respect and affection for him - he was always "the Professor" to them.



1978 - Lajos, Ellie Viles, Lee Bean

The local classes tended to be dominated by women, who had time for the lessons and time to pursue the hobby. Lajos, always charming and engaging, appreciated women and enjoyed his students. His annual trips to Swan's Island, on the Coast above Portland, to paint with students, were the closest he came to a vacation.

In 1972 that the Matolcsy's old friend Tony Montanaro decided to look for a place where he could raise his growing family and experiment with new directions in his performances. The Matolcsys found a house and barn in South Paris, a place nearly as decrepit as their own had been. The Montanaros bought the house and moved to Maine, where Tony founded the Celebration Barn Theater, now an important setting for learning and practicing performance arts of all kinds. The move would also lead to collaboration between the mime and the fine artist.

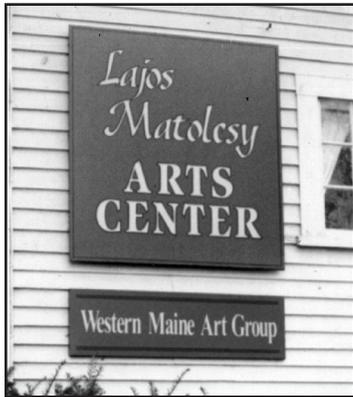
While the 1970's were a period of extraordinary produc-

tivity for Lajos, he faced a series of life-threatening health crises, the effects of his difficult life. But his artistic vitality and passion for his work could not be suppressed. He was commissioned regularly to create portraits and other pieces of art, taught constantly at multiple locations, participated in one-man and group art shows, and was continually winning art competitions throughout the region.

He carried shrapnel in his body from World War II, which shifted and caused discomfort and medical complications. He developed diabetes shortly after Sandor's death. In the mid-1970's he suffered several heart attacks and strokes. One stroke paralyzed his right side, and it took months of rehabilitation before he could draw and paint again. The most significant blow to his health came in the spring of 1980, when his left leg was amputated above the knee, a result of diabetes.

In June of that year the Art Group honored Lajos by renaming its gallery the Lajos Matolcsy Arts Center. Lajos arrived at the Arts Center unaware of the dedication ceremony planned in his honor wearing his new artificial leg. He pulled himself erect onto his crutches, and Claire guided his attention to the new sign displaying his name in gold leaf.

It was a dramatic - and deeply emotional - moment for a man whose life had been marked by so much destruction, and who had been an anonymous victim of uncontrollable historical forces for so much of his life.



In spite of his declining health he continued to smoke heavily, which aggravated cardiac problems. Lajos died peacefully at his home, of a heart attack, on November 2, 1982. Claire survived her husband, but died too young in 1989. The couple are buried in Mount Auburn Cemetery, Auburn, Maine, with their son Sandor.

Lajos worked at his art until shortly before his death. But at the end he seems to have known that it was time, that he needed to do what could be done to order his life for his family. Working from his wheelchair, he spent hours in his studio, organizing papers, drawings and memorabilia.

His old habits never changed - he never threw anything away if he could help it, and he used what was at hand to do the job. He assembled dozens of portfolios, fastened together with large rubber bands cut from bicycle tubes. He made file folders from scrap paper and cardboard.

It is all there, documents and bits of art from Hungary, the travel passes from the German police that allowed him to go to exhibits, posters for a German tourist company, blueprints from work as a draftsman in New York, and hundreds of sketches and studies, newspaper clippings, photographic negatives and the letters from his family in Hungary.

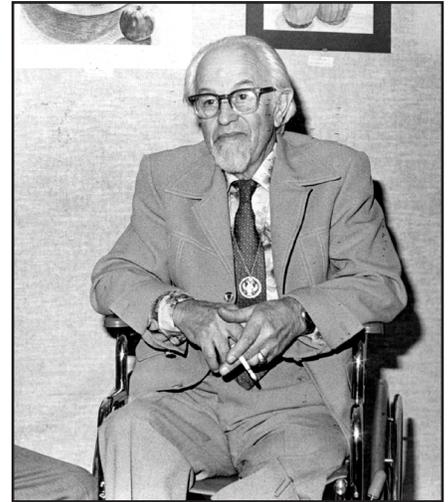
There are more than 100 paintings in the collections of

the Matolcsy children, and his work is in private collections in the United States, Europe and elsewhere.

The most significant symbol of his contribution to the world of the arts is the Lajos Matolcsy Arts Center, at 480 Main Street, Norway Maine USA, still thriving as the home of the Western Maine Art Group. His daughter Aranka now serves as President.

In 1983 Lajos's was recognized by the Oxford Hills Chamber of Commerce when his family was presented with the Annual Community Service Award.

Lajos's life and work continue to be recognized and honored. In 2006, 25 years after his death, Lajos



was selected as the featured cultural figure of the Norway Maine Summer Festival, recognizing his place in Norway's history. The initial publication of this biography was a result of that event.

His legacy continues in the lives of the countless people he touched, and through his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren in the United States and Hungary.

We end with two quotes from Lajos's children, for whom the memory of their father is alive and vivid, that perhaps illuminate Lajos's character a little:

Aranka Matolcsy: "His death - it was as though he had paid his dues - that he was able to die in peace, in his own home, on his terms."

Zoltan Matolcsy: "When we pass on the only thing you will miss is our being. Our spirits will still be here. His spirit is still here, very much, in the paintings, and in the books I read and in the mountains I look at, and it's definitely in my son's face. It is still here."

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