

# The Arts

## The Miracle Man

Joseph Bau's art represents a lifetime of dealing with the horrors he experienced during the Holocaust.

MELINDA GREENBERG LIFESTYLES EDITOR

Joseph Bau believes in miracles. And the fact that the 78-year-old artist and Holocaust survivor is alive to bear witness to the horrors that he and his family endured is all the proof he needs.

But somehow throughout his life, Mr. Bau seems to have lived a protected existence. His life story, translated from Hebrew by his daughters Hadassah Bau Rosenblatt and Tzilia Bau Cohen, is filled with a series of near-misses and odd coincidences. His daughters frequently punctuate the tale with the phrase, "It was a miracle."

Mr. Bau has told his story in a memoir titled "Dear God Have You Ever Gone Hungry?" — which will be translated into English in June. But his artwork also speaks volumes about his life.

The Norman and Sarah Brown Gallery at the Park Heights Jewish Community Center is the first American venue to present an exhibition of Mr. Bau's work. "When Joseph Bau Bites" opened last Sunday, March 1, and will be on display until May 10. Following his current appearance in Baltimore, Mr. Bau and his daughters plan to travel to New York to arrange for a possible exhibit there.

The exhibit is filled with paintings and drawings that represent the wide spectrum of Mr. Bau's talent. Trained as a graphic artist, he paints whimsical satirical paintings, realistic portraits and witty depictions of the origin of Hebrew words.

Included in the exhibit is a striking portrait of Oskar Schindler, the protagonist of Steven Spielberg's Academy Award-winning film, "Schindler's List." Mr. Bau, who worked for Mr. Schindler while imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp, was one of 1,200 *Schindlerjuden*, or Schindler Jews, whose lives were saved by the German Catholic industrialist.

In many of the paintings, Mr. Bau demonstrates a sense of humor that his daughters say he is famous for. As a young man, he wrote comical plays in school,

and penned a weekly newspaper and even inspired a song about his comic talents.

"You read his memoirs, and it is so tragic, but it makes you laugh, too," Ms. Cohen said during a recent interview at the Pikesville hotel where she, her sister and father stayed while in Baltimore.

Claudine Davison, art coordinator for the JCC, said she sees his sense of humor in all his work.

"It hits you every time," she said. "His style is very personal, and he definitely leaves his mark. He has a real taste for life that comes through in the way he promotes life."

Mr. Bau, his daughters said, has a great appreciation for life. He does not even kill bugs, Ms. Rosenblatt said.

"He catches them in a glass and sets them free," she said. "He believes everything has a right to live."

A slender man with a luxurious mane of white hair, Mr. Bau bears a striking resemblance to Albert Einstein. His trip to Baltimore marked his first journey to the United States from Israel, where he has lived since 1950. In Israel, he is considered the father of animation.

In the 1960s and '70s, Mr. Bau was responsible for producing all

of the titles of Israeli films. When he turned 75, Israel's film industry honored him with a huge birthday celebration.

A small segment of Mr. Bau's life was depicted in "Schindler's List," and he and his wife, Rebecca, stayed in contact with Schindler after the war. The righteous gentile frequently was a guest at openings for Mr. Bau's exhibits.

Mr. Bau met and married his wife while they were both interred at the Plaszow work camp in Poland. Disguised as a woman, he sneaked into the women's barracks where he and Rebecca were married by his mother, Cyla.

Their wedding rings were fashioned from two silver teaspoons that Mr. Bau traded for a crust of bread. Their wedding night was spent on the top tier of the wooden bunk that she usually shared with two other women.

At Plaszow, Mr. Bau worked as a draftsman. Because he had studied Gothic printing at the University of Krakow, he was called upon to print documents for the Nazis. He still has some of the original maps that he drew for the camp's commandant. And he managed to smuggle a book of poems and drawings out of the camp with him. "This print saved me," he said. "I don't know why, but when I started to study it, I liked it. I was the only one in the ghetto and the camp who knew how to do this. I didn't speak German, but yet I knew every letter."

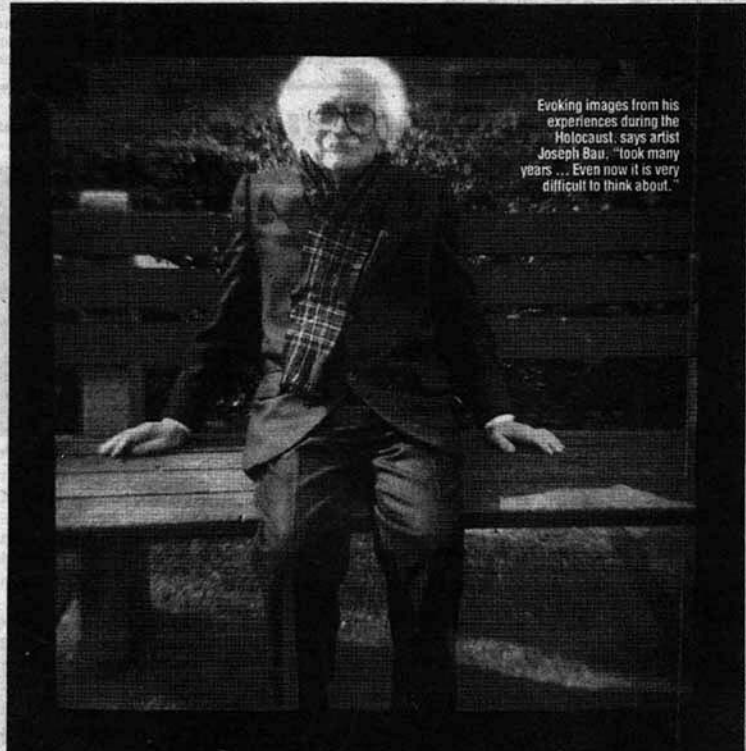
Mrs. Bau, who passed away last April, arranged for her husband to be transferred to Schindler's camp. She was sent to Auschwitz. He wrote a love poem titled "Love Lines" to her when they were separated, which speaks of his fear that they would never see each other again.

*When time erodes my footprints, don't think of me with sorrow. Because I am leaving behind so very little of myself; the heart of a poet, a few letters, a few odes dedicated to you, a withered flower and the dreams we dreamt of our future together. And plans which alas! Would not or could not come true.*

In 1977, Mr. Bau began producing works based on his Holocaust experiences. At Plaszow, other prisoners encouraged him to draw and write about the experience so the world would believe their stories. He made nearly 50 paintings.

"It took many years for me to make art on this subject," he said. "Even now it is very difficult to think about. But I lived through it and I had to tell people what I saw. This is my duty." □

"When Joseph Bau Bites" will be at the Norman and Sarah Brown Art Gallery at the Park Heights Jewish Community Center through May 10. For information, call 410-542-4900, ext. 239.



Evoking images from his experiences during the Holocaust, says artist Joseph Bau, "took many years... Even now it is very difficult to think about."

PHOTO BY DAVID DEAL

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