

Biography of Maria Bartha, Artist

*Researched and written by Heidi Johnson, M.L.I.S., M.A. Assistant Professor,
Librarian and Archivist at The College of St. Scholastica, Duluth, MN
Information from earlier in Europe and later from Texas researched by Alden Eckman, M.A.,
Archives Assistant at the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word Archives, San Antonio, TX
Updated Sept. 15, 2025*

Madame Maria Bartha was born on Jan. 12 or 13, 1885 in Nagykanizsa, Nagykanizsai, (Nagy-Knizsa) Zala County, Hungary to Lajos (Louis) Blau (1847-1926), Chamber of Commerce Councilor, banker, major industrialist, and landowner, and Frederike (Fritzi, Friederike, or Frederique) Glesinger (1860-1948). Her birth name was Alice Maria Blau, and she had a brother Arthur (1886-1914), who was killed during his voluntary military service at age 28. His last name was listed as Bartha in the Viennese newspaper's death notice although his parents are included on the notice with the last name as Blau. This brother is also given the prefix of Dr., the title of a lawyer in Budapest, and one condolence notice is from the company named Glesinger, which was his mother's maiden name. (1940 US Census; Austrian Jewish Record of Births, Marriages, and Deaths; Certificate of Death).

It is unknown when Bartha would have studied in Paris at the Academy of Julien and earned degrees from the Art Academy, the University of Paris, and The Sorbonne or when she studied with Professor Morino or Marino in Italy.

A list of people with whom she said she studied:

- "Philip Laszlo at the Vienna Academy and later in Paris" (*New York Times*, Feb. 16, 1941)
- "While in Europe the artist studied in Budapest, Hungary with the renowned portrait painter, Philipp Laszlo" (*Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, Jun. 30, 1950)
- "She has a degree from the Art Academy, Paris, and has studied in Vienna and at the Academy of Julien, Paris. She was a pupil of such noted artists as Professor Morino, Sir Philip de Laszlo, and Leopold Horowitz (Incarnate Word College *Logos*, Oct. 12, 1942)
- "Later she studied with Professor Marino in Italy and with several other famous artists in Vienna" (*The Daily Iberian*, Feb. 19, 1959).
- "...received degrees from University of Paris and The Sorbonne" (Obituary in the *Houston Chronicle*, Feb. 24, 1973)



Bartha reported to newspapers that she studied with Philip de László, who was born in Hungary in 1869, moved from Budapest to Vienna in 1903, and to England in 1907 where he died in 1937. For Bartha to have studied with him in Vienna as she first reported, it must have been from 1903-7 when she was 18 to 22 years old or if it was while he was in Budapest as she later said, it would have been even earlier. Either way, she would have studied with him before she was married.

On August 1, 1907, Bartha married Czech-born Maxmilian (Max) Mark Stein in Vienna, Austria in a Jewish ceremony (1907 Austrian Jewish Record of Births, Marriages, and Deaths). Max was born in 1875 and his father, Leopold Stein (1844-1917), was a “major industrialist, senior partner of the metal factory, and member of the board of directors of the Austrian Fez Factories Corporation (Leopold Stein newspaper death announcement, August 15, 1917).

They had two sons together including Herbert Hans Stein on May 24, 1908 (d. 1965) and Robert Josef Philipp Ernst Stein on October 8, 1910 (d. 2011) both born in Vienna and matriculated with the Israeli religious community (Austrian Jewish Record of Births, Marriages, and Deaths; birth certificates). On February 27, 1938, Bartha’s husband, Max, died in Vienna at age of 62 after a long and painful illness. His death notice listed both sons with the prefix Dr., Alice Stein as his wife, and Max as a co-founder and senior partner in the Kruger and Co. Cable and Wire Manufacturing company (*Neue Freie Presse*, Vienna, Mar. 1, 1938).

Alice Stein came to America on May 1, 1939 on the S.S. Normandie and was held for special inquiry due to her being from Hungary and Hebrew (Record of Aliens). Her U.S. Department of Justice Immigration and Naturalization form states she was intending to stay for six months. “Coming to this country before World War II broke out for a visit with friends, the artist was captivated with American and decided to remain here. ‘It would be too sad to return now,’ she said” (*Duluth News Tribune*, Sept. 29, 1946). Both her mother and her younger son, Robert, also moved to New York. He came a year later in May 1940 listing his marital status as single and his occupation as an electrical engineer on his petition for naturalization.

According to the 1940 United States Federal Census, Alice Stein was now Maria Bartha and had been living in Hungary in 1935. During the time of the census, she was 55 years old, widowed, her highest grade completed was College 4th year, and she was living in New York City.

Bartha quickly became a part of the art scene in New York. An article from the *New York Times* published on Jan. 14, 1940 wrote, “Portraits and still-lives by Maria Bartha, ingratiating and persuasive paintings if somewhat stiff and self-conscious at times, are on view at the Bonestell Gallery. The artist studied with Philip Laszlo at the Vienna Academy and later in Paris. This is her first New York exhibition.” A year later, there was news of another exhibition, “Maria Bartha, who studied with Laszlo, is exhibiting portraits and landscapes at Alma Reed’s Gallery (till Feb. 23). The portraits fall rather in the dashing society manner and seem for the most part conventional” (*New York Times*, Feb. 16, 1941).

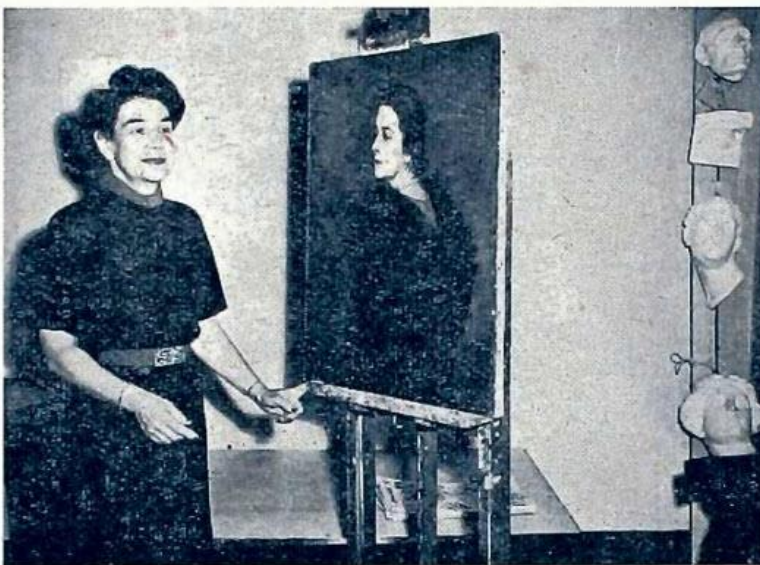
An article published in the Minnesota newspaper, *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, gives more of a biography, “A newcomer has joined the ranks of Minneapolis artists. She is Maria Bartha, a native of Paris, France. Miss Bartha came to



this country in May of 1939 planning to stay just a short time. Then war broke out in Europe. As a result she never has returned to her homeland. While in New York, N.Y., she completed a number of portraits...For a time she was in San Antonio, Texas, where she painted and taught at the Incarnate Word college....After returning to New York for a while, Miss Bartha accepted a commission to do some murals for the college of St. Scholastica, Duluth, Minn.....While in Europe the artist studied in Budapest, Hungary with the renowned portrait painter, Philipp Laszlo. Her paintings were exhibited at the Salon in Paris, the Kuenstlerhaus in Vienna, Austria, and in Nemzeti Salon in Budapest” (Jun. 30, 1950).

Bartha painted a series of portraits for the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio, Texas in 1943. These portraits were of the CCVI General Superiors (Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word Archives). She taught art at Incarnate Word College in San Antonio from 1942-1945 and went back to New York perhaps to visit her mother and son prior to coming to Minnesota (Incarnate Word College *Logos*, Oct. 12, 1942; *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, Jun. 30, 1950).

In the fall of 1946, Bartha joined the faculty to teach art at The College of St. Scholastica in Duluth, Minnesota. In this introduction it says, “Recently a resident of New York, she is a native of France.



Madame Bartha, internationally known portrait painter, who is now teaching art at the College, poses with the portrait of her friend Baroness Schwarzeran.

Having studied in Vienna and at the Academy of Julien in Paris, Madame Bartha is an accomplished artist in many fields. She is especially competent in landscape and portrait painting.” (*Scriptorium*, Oct. 9, 1946). This is accompanied a month later by a photograph of her with a portrait “...of her friend Baroness Schwarzeran” (*Scriptorium*, Nov. 27, 1946). This was the only painting she brought with her when she came to America, and she painted it of her friend in Paris before the war (*Duluth News Tribune*, Sept. 29, 1946).

Alice Maria Bartha Stein became a United States citizen on June 6, 1947 (Naturalization Certificate). Her mother, Frederique Gelsinger Blau, died on Oct. 2, 1948 in Manhattan at the age of 88 (<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/227443826/frederique-blau>). Starting in 1948, she began working on a panel for The College of St. Scholastica’s library that depicts Benedictine life (*Scriptorium*, Apr. 14, 1948). It took her 18 months until Christmastime 1949 to complete the 36 feet wide by 8 feet high five-panel mural, which includes 25 life-sized figures in “...the varied activities of the Benedictine sisters of Duluth: prayer, teaching, scientific research, literary production, nursing, Catholic action, and the fine arts” (*Scriptorium*, Dec. 10, 1958).



(*Scriptorium*, Apr. 27, 1949)

While she was in Duluth, she also traveled. In the winter of 1949, she traveled to Memphis, Tennessee to paint portraits (*Scriptorium*, Feb. 23, 1949). According to the *Memphis Press Scimitar*, this was her second trip there as “Earlier in the fall she came to paint the portraits of Mrs. Geoffrey Fortescue and Mary Alice Riggs. Now she is a guest at the Parkview and will remain here for several weeks until she travels to the Virgin Islands” (Jan. 25, 1949).

The mention of her traveling to the Virgin Islands is corroborated by an article in the *Scriptorium* in 1950 where it says that she had just come from visiting a friend for three weeks in the West Indies and St. Croix Island of the Virgin Island group. She also spent two days in Florida and one day in Puerto Rico enroute. “Madame Bartha’s eyes twinkled as she parted with the next information, ‘The vacation really cost me nothing,’ she whispered. ‘I painted a portrait of my friend and one of a doctor from Chicago, and received more than my expenses for doing them. So you see, I was very well fixed’” (Mar. 8, 1950). She left Duluth and The College of St. Scholastica at the end of the 1950-51 academic year for Texas.

Places she taught in her career include the following:

- Before 1939 in France at Mme. De Renassons’ Chateau de Grossley (*Duluth News Tribune*, Dec. 29, 1946)
- 1939-42? in New York City (Incarnate Word College *Logos*, Oct. 12, 1942)
- 1942-45 in San Antonio, TX at Incarnate Word College (Incarnate Word College *Logos*, Oct. 12, 1942)
- 1946-51 in Duluth, MN at The College of St. Scholastica and at the Duluth Art Institute school (*Duluth News Tribune*, Mar. 16 1947)
- 1959 February in New Iberia, LA for the L’Acadian Art Guild - a weeklong workshop at the National Guard Armory (*The Daily Iberian*, Feb. 19, 1959)

In 1951, Bartha moved to Houston, Texas where she resided at the Parker Edwards Apartments on 3424 Louisiana (*Houston Chronicle*, May 3, 1959; Jan 17, 1969). In an article from February 10, 1952, Bartha is described as a “newcomer to the local scene” who is “active in the art colony at 3424 Louisiana and making new contacts” alongside Countess Helena Sierakowska, daughter of portraitist Boleslaw Jan Czedekowski.

Bartha is listed as exhibiting two portraits including of a baroness and Mr. Clovett in Houston at the Fifth Annual Art Fair and Exhibit of the Art League of Houston in November 1952 (Art League of Houston Program, 1952). She also exhibited works three times for the Annual Exhibit of Works

by Houston Artists at the Museum of Fine Arts of Houston in 1954, 1955, and 1957 (Exhibit programs). She participated in the Art League of Houston's studio tour, and a photograph of her and her studio is included in the *Houston Chronicle's* article (Apr. 28, 1957).

In 1959, there was a newspaper article on Bartha from New Iberia, Louisiana where she was conducting a week-long workshop for the L'Acadian Art Guild. It contains a few more details of her life including her having, "...studied with Professor Marino in Italy and with several other famous artists in Vienna. She toured the most noted European art galleries to study the old masters. On her return to Paris she opened her studio and specialized in portraits. Madam Bartha became an American citizen in 1945 and is permanently located in Houston. Since coming to this country, she has painted in New York, Minneapolis and Houston. Her works have been exhibited in the Salon in Paris and in Vienna, New York and Minneapolis art galleries" (*The Daily Iberian*, Feb. 19, 1959).

Bartha continued to travel later in her life including spending three months in the summer of 1957 visiting the Salzburg festival in Austria, Switzerland, and Paris (*Houston Chronicle*, Oct. 2, 1957). In the summer of 1964, she spent the summer in Europe visiting her son Robert enroute in New York and the other son Herbert in Vienna. She also worked on her landscape paintings in France and attended a family reunion on the Italian Riviera (*Houston Chronicle*, Jul. 23, 1964).

Sadly her first-born son Herbert, died a year later on May 21, 1965 at the age of 56 in Vienna (Austrian Jewish Record of Births, Marriages, and Deaths). A year after that in 1966, she again spent the summer in Europe including Switzerland and Spain (*Houston Chronicle*, Aug. 26, 1966; Sept. 8, 1966). She traveled even farther in 1967 when she went to Honolulu, Bangkok, Tokyo, Kyoto, and Formosa with the educational group of Women in Radio and TV (*Houston Chronicle*, May 31, 1967; Jun. 20, 1967). She spent the summer in Europe and Delbert in 1970, and the summer in Mallorca in 1971 (*Houston Chronicle*, Jun. 26, 1970; Aug. 27, 1971).

Throughout this time, she also moved twice as her apartment "fell under the wheels of freeway progress" including in April 1965 to another place in the Parker Edwards complex and again in January 1969 to a new studio and home at 4801 Montrose (*Houston Chronicle*, Apr. 27, 1965; Jan. 17, 1969).



1964

Nine months before her death, Bartha suffered a debilitating stroke (Certificate of Death). On February 23, 1973, Madame Maria Bartha died of pneumonia at Rosewood General Hospital in Houston. She was cremated and services were held the following Sunday at Settegast-Kopf Co. (Certificate of Death; *Houston Chronicle*, Feb. 24, 1973; US Social Security Death Index). Fittingly, her death certificate states that her "Usual Occupation" is "Portrait Painter," and her "Kind of Business or Industry" is "Painting."

Madame Maria Bartha should not be confused with another Hungarian artist with a similar name and dates of life, Mária Barta (1897-1969). Barta also studied in Vienna and lived for a time in Paris, but she never immigrated to America, was a member of the avant garde, influenced by Henri Matisse, and did “drawing with scissors” collages similar to what Matisse did later in his career.

Bartha Maria

The only painting still at The College of St. Scholastica by Madame Maria Bartha includes a portrait of a former student, Priscilla Rogers (1911-1943), which was commissioned by her father in grief after she died young from a congenital heart defect.

This painting illustrates the special three-point perspective technique Bartha employed with great effect where the eyes of the portrait follow the viewer.



A list of people for whom Bartha painted portraits includes the following:

- Before 1939 in Paris - Baroness Schwarzeran (*Duluth News Tribune*, Sept. 29, 1950)
- 1939-42? in New York City - Her Imperial Highness, Archduchess Franz Josef of Austria; Russian Princess Orloff; and Murray Jacoby (*Duluth News Tribune*, Sept. 29, 1950; *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, Jun. 30, 1950)
- 1942 in San Antonio, TX - US Department of War commissioned a portrait of General Douglas MacArthur for his alma mater, Texas Military Academy (Incarnate Word College *Logos*, Oct. 12, 1942; *Duluth News Tribune*, Sept. 29, 1946)
- 1943 in San Antonio, TX - for the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word (CCVI) Mother Bonaventure Burns, Mother Ignatius Saar, Mother M. Alphonse Brollier, Mother Madeleine Chollet, Mother Mary John O'Shaughnessy, Mother Pierre Cinquin, and possibly Rt. Rev. Claude M. Dubuis, D.D. (Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word Archives)
- Before 1945 in San Antonio, TX - Edwin MacArthur, the conductor; Ambassador Murray; and a number of social leaders in San Antonio (*Duluth News Tribune*, Sept. 29, 1950)
- 1946-47 in Duluth, MN - Mayor George W. Johnson, retired district Judge Martin Hughes, the Duluth Symphony conductor Tauno Hannikainen, and his wife (*Duluth News Tribune*, Mar. 16, 1947)
- Fall 1948 in Memphis, TN - Mrs. Geoffrey Fortescue and Mary Alice Riggs (*Memphis Press Scimitar*, Jan. 25, 1949)

- Spring 1948 to December 1949 (18 months) in Duluth, MN - a mural with 25 portraits of students and Sisters from The College of St. Scholastica and St. Scholastica Monastery (*Scriptorium*, Jan. 26, 1949)
- Before 1950 - Karl von Zeska, European actor in his role of Fox in "Pitt and Fox" and hangs at the Burgtheatre's Gallery of Honor in Vienna (*Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, Jun. 30, 1950)
- 1950 - one of Bartha's friends and a doctor from Chicago (*Scriptorium*, Mar. 8, 1950)
- Before 1952 - a baroness (could be the same one from before 1939) and Mr. Clovett (Art League of Houston Program, 1952)
- December 1954 - Alley Theatre Director Nina Vance, which is hung in the theatre lobby (*Houston Chronicle*, Dec. 5, 1954)
- April 1955 - Conductor Sir John Barbirolli and Lady Barbirolli (Identified by her autograph on the painting discovered online; *Houston Chronicle*, Apr. 27, 1965)
- July 1955 in San Antonio, TX - Concert pianist Dorothy White and William Clegg, Jr. (*Houston Chronicle*, Jul. 28, 1955)
- April 1957 - Bishop Clinton S. Quin, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas (*Houston Chronicle*, Apr. 28, 1957)
- November 20 - December 11, 1957 - *Study of Hedy Lamarr as Joan of Arc*, exhibited in the 32nd Annual Houston Artists Exhibition at the Art League of Houston Building (MFAH Program)
- Before 1959 - Socialite Mrs. K. C. Owen (*The Daily Iberian*, Feb. 19, 1959)
- Before 1965 - Dr. Marc Moldawer and Lynne (Mrs. Oscar) Wyatt (*Houston Chronicle*, Apr. 27, 1965)

A list of exhibits and studios Bartha had include the following:

- Before 1939 - exhibits at the Salon in Paris, Kuenstlerhaus in Vienna, and Nemzeti Salon in Budapest (*Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, Jun. 30, 1950)
- "On her return to Paris she opened her studio and specialized in portraits" (*The Daily Iberian*, Feb. 19, 1959)
- January 1940 - exhibit at Bonestell Gallery in New York City (*New York Times*, Jan. 14, 1940)
- February 1941 - exhibit at Alma Reed's Gallery in New York City (*New York Times*, Feb. 16, 1941)
- 1946-52? - exhibited in Minneapolis, MN (*The Daily Iberian*, Feb. 19, 1959)
- November 1952 - exhibited two portraits of a baroness and Mr. Clovett at the Fifth Annual Art Fair and Exhibit of the Art League of Houston (Program)
- February 1953 - exhibited at the Junior League of Houston (*Houston Chronicle*, Mar. 1, 1953)
- February to March 1954 - exhibited "Head of a Woman" at the 29th Annual Exhibit of Works by Houston Artists and was for sale for \$150 (Program)
- March 1955 - exhibited "The Young Rider" at the 30th Annual Exhibit of Works by Houston Artists and was not for sale (Program)
- November to December 1957 - exhibited "Hedy Lamarr as Joan of Art" at the 32nd Annual Exhibit of Works by Houston Artists (Program)
- In 1959, "...currently maintains a studio at 3424 Louisiana Avenue, Houston, Texas" (*The Daily Iberian*, Feb. 19, 1959)

Other paintings discovered through online searching, which have not been conclusively identified as being by Bartha but have a very similar signature, include a landscape dated from 1940; a portrait of a boy holding newspapers with one titled “Herald”, which interestingly was the name of one of the newspapers in Duluth, MN when Bartha lived there; a still life, and a portrait of Sir John Barbirolli dated 1st April 1955.

M. Bartha.

