

Bandy Center Acquires *Les Fleurs du Mal* Illustrated by H. MATISSE

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Librarian, W.T. Bandy Center

In his biography of Charles Baudelaire, the late Claude Pichois, Vanderbilt Distinguished Professor of French Emeritus, mentioned two reactions to the French poet's most celebrated and infamous work, the collection of poems titled *Les Fleurs du Mal*. A government report called the book, first published in 1857, "an act of defiance in contempt of...religion and morality." Victor Hugo, on the other hand, wrote to praise Baudelaire by noting, "Your 'flowers of evil' are as radiant and as dazzling as stars."

Subsequent reactions have covered the full spectrum of those polarized opinions, including visual interpretations of the poems themselves.

Many of Baudelaire's poems were erotic, sensuous, and flouted conventional mores. In August 1857, he was prosecuted for "offending public and religious morality." Ultimately, the French court fined Baudelaire 300 francs and banned six of the most erotic and sexually explicit poems from the volume.

In the summer of 1944 French artist Henri Matisse began the project to illustrate *Les Fleurs du Mal*. The edition was completed in 1947 and published by La Bibliothèque Française. This rare first edition has just been acquired by the Jean and Alexander Heard Library and is one of only 300 copies signed by the artist (320 copies were printed). It is part of the Baudelaire Collection at the W.T. Bandy Center for Baudelaire and Modern French Studies.



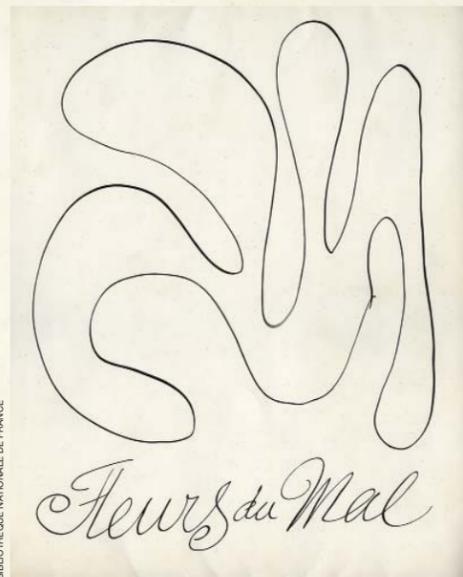
Henri Matisse at work, from Matisse et Baudelaire: [exposition] Musée Matisse, Le Cateau-Cambrésis. Le Cateau-Cambrésis: Musée Matisse, 1992.

In this book Matisse illustrated a selection of 33 poems from *Les Fleurs du Mal*. His images, mostly of women's faces, also include portraits of the poets Baudelaire and Guillaume Apollinaire, and a self-portrait. Delicate line lithographs face the first page of each poem. Matisse also illustrated the work of such other writers as James Joyce, Pierre Reverdy, Stéphane Mallarmé, and Tristan Tzara.

The illustrations of women's faces, drawn from models, evoke the spirit of each poem. Of particular interest is the poem, *L'invitation au voyage*, which contains the famous line "Luxe, calme et volupté (Luxury, peace, and pleasure)," the title of a 1904 painting by Matisse. The woman's face opposite this poem is traced in a few, spare and lyrical lines.



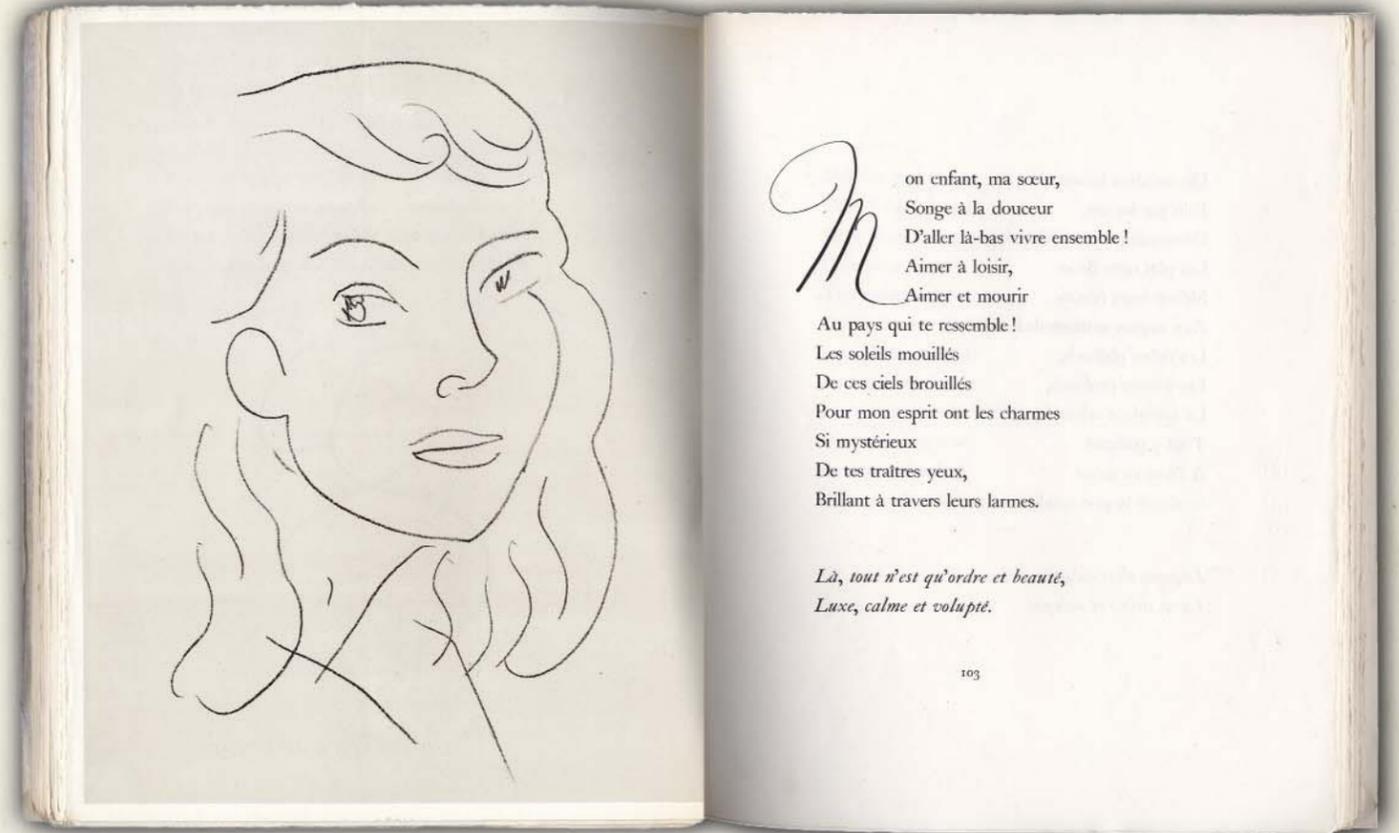
The artist's portrait of Baudelaire



Headline at top of page 5: Signature of Henri Matisse from one of his cover studies for *Les Fleurs du Mal*.

Left: The front cover of *Les Fleurs du Mal* as illustrated by Henri Matisse.

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The woman's face opposite the poem, *L'invitation au voyage*, is traced in a few, spare and lyrical lines. The poem contains the famous line "Luxe, calme et volupté (Luxury, peace, and pleasure)," the title of a 1904 painting by Matisse.

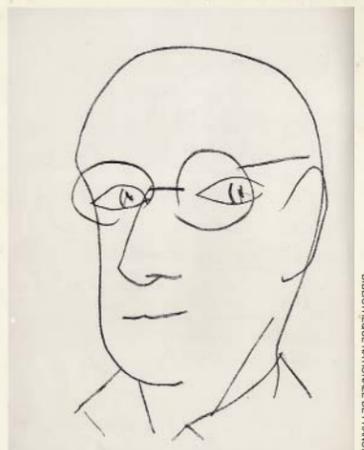
Matisse added designs at the end of each poem, which become abstract blossoms mirroring the florid quality of the verse. He also drew the capital letters that begin the first word of each poem, transforming image to letter. It is said that as Matisse pondered how to match the character of the poems, he declared that "the drawing should be the visual equivalent of the poem."

The recently acquired volume is a testament to the success of that ambition. It was acquired at the suggestion of University Librarian Paul Gherman and with generous funding provided by The Heard Society. The acquisition of this rare and valuable volume marks a very special addition to the Baudelaire Collection's comprehensive holdings of material by and about the poet. This illustrated edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal* is a tribute to the creativity of both poet

and artist, to the unique union of their visions, and to the genre of artists' books.

The newest addition to the Bandy Center collection joins more than 200 other editions of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, spanning more than 30 languages.

This is indeed a welcomed addition to the Baudelaire Collection because next year commemorates the 150th anniversary of the publication of *Les Fleurs du Mal*.



A self-portrait of Henri Matisse