

HORSES ARE HIS PASSION

Equine artist Sam Savitt brings his love of horses to art enjoyed by generations of horse lovers

by Marianna Haun

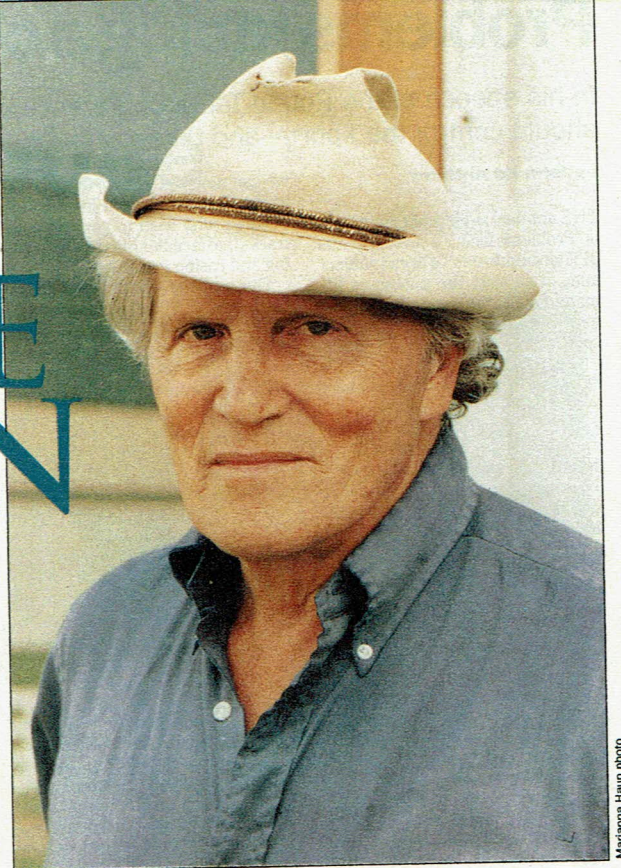
GROWING up in the Pennsylvania coal-mining town of Wilkes-Barre before World War II, a young Sam Savitt had little exposure to the animal that would end up defining his life's work. His love of horses seems to have been born in him. No one else in his family shared his passion. As a child he would follow after the milk cart

just to be near the horse drawing the wagon. As he grew older, he found he could do work at a local riding academy in exchange for time with the horses. He would spend hours trying to capture their movements on paper.

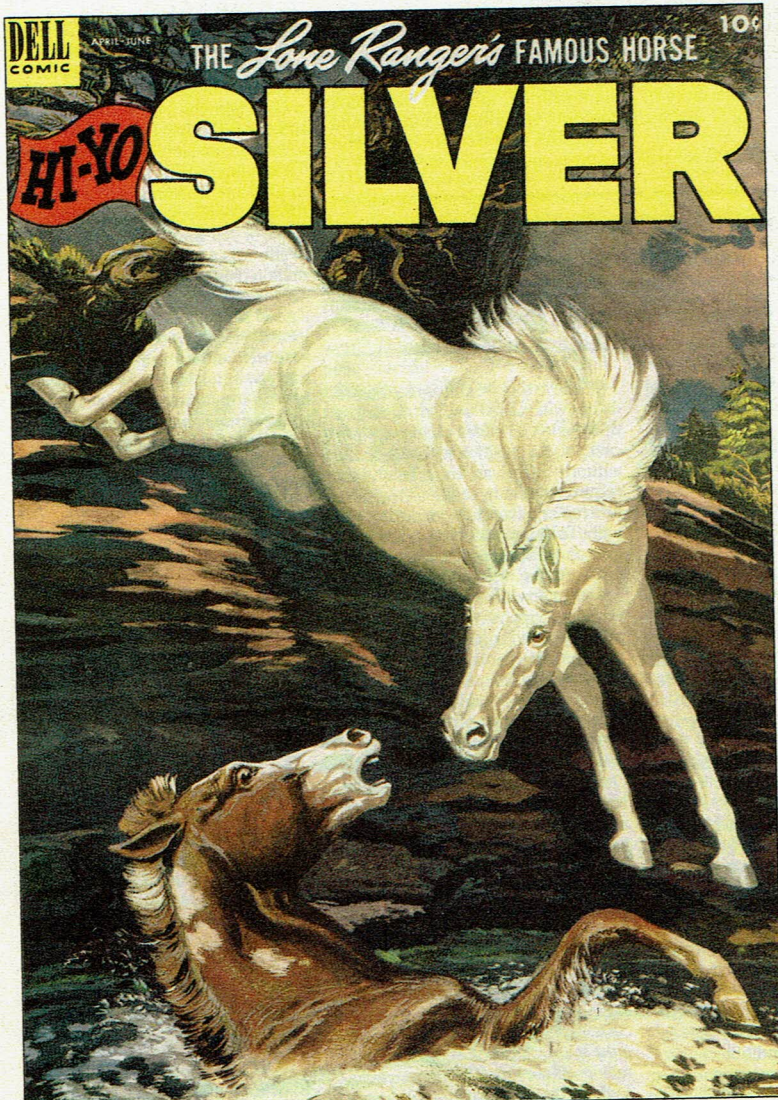
After high school, following the advice of his art teacher, he enrolled in Pratt Art Institute in Brooklyn, New York. "I didn't think I was good

enough," Savitt said. "It was intimidating that first day. All the other kids had had formal art training and had been going to art school and special classes. We didn't have anything like that in Wilkes-Barre."

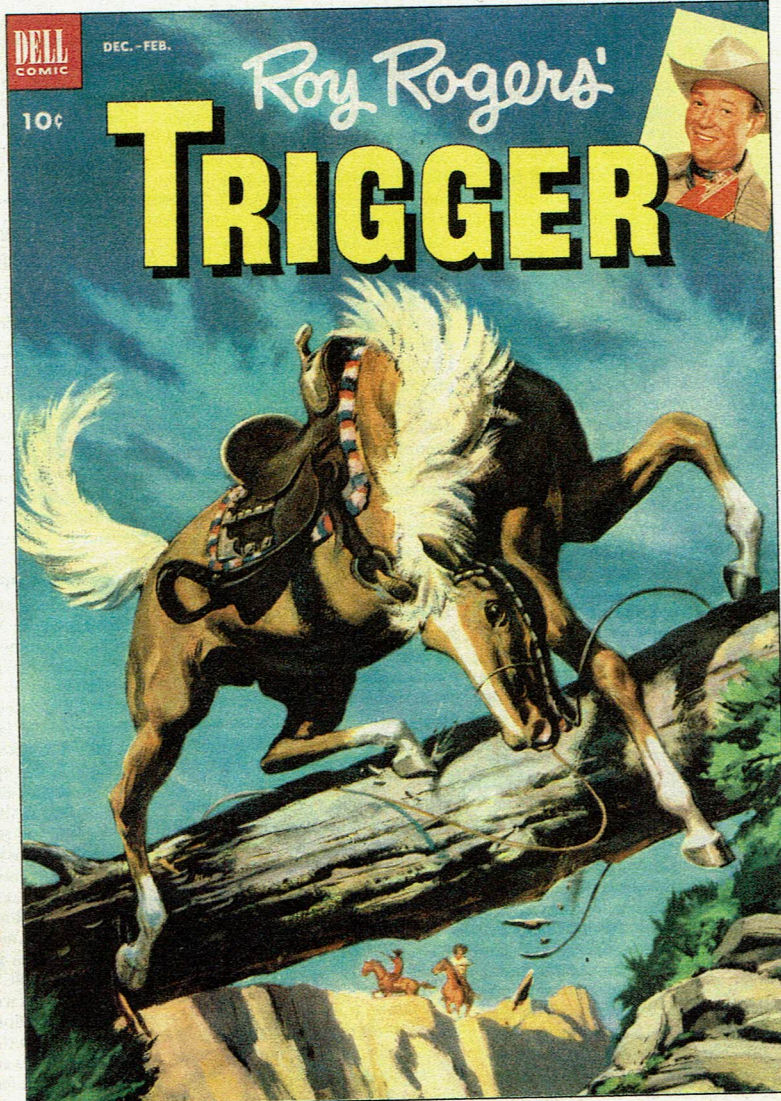
But Savitt found at Pratt that he had a skill that exceeded his more sophisticated classmates'—he could draw horses. "That was my one claim to success there," Savitt said. "So I



Marianna Haun photo



SILVER
The Lone Ranger's trusty steed dives in to rescue another horse in this comic book cover from the early 1950s. The vibrant colors and pulsating action of these dramatic covers have made them collector's items today



TRIGGER
The challenge each issue for artist Sam Savitt when he was illustrating horse comic book covers was to come up with a dramatic situation for the equine hero which would have plenty of action

decided that if this was where my talent lay, then I would work to do this one thing really well."

By the time he graduated from Pratt, he was already earning a living illustrating western stories in "pulp" magazines with lots of shoot-outs and plenty of equestrian action. "Doing that kind of work gave me a darned good foundation in drawing," Savitt said. A sound drawing is the fundamental base of every Savitt piece. "To me," Savitt said, "drawing is very important. A lot of people just paint, but I find that with any good painting, the base of it is a good drawing. You see it with the old masters and some of those magnificent drawings."

Following graduation from Pratt, Savitt served as a First Lieutenant in the Army during World War II where he worked with Army engineers in Burma, building a road to allow American troops access to China.

After the war, Savitt attended the Art Students League in Manhattan, where he learned a great deal about the qualities of color from colorist Howard Trafton. The relaxed atmosphere at the school made Savitt glad that he had already learned a strong work ethic at Pratt. He studied there for one year while continuing his illustration work.

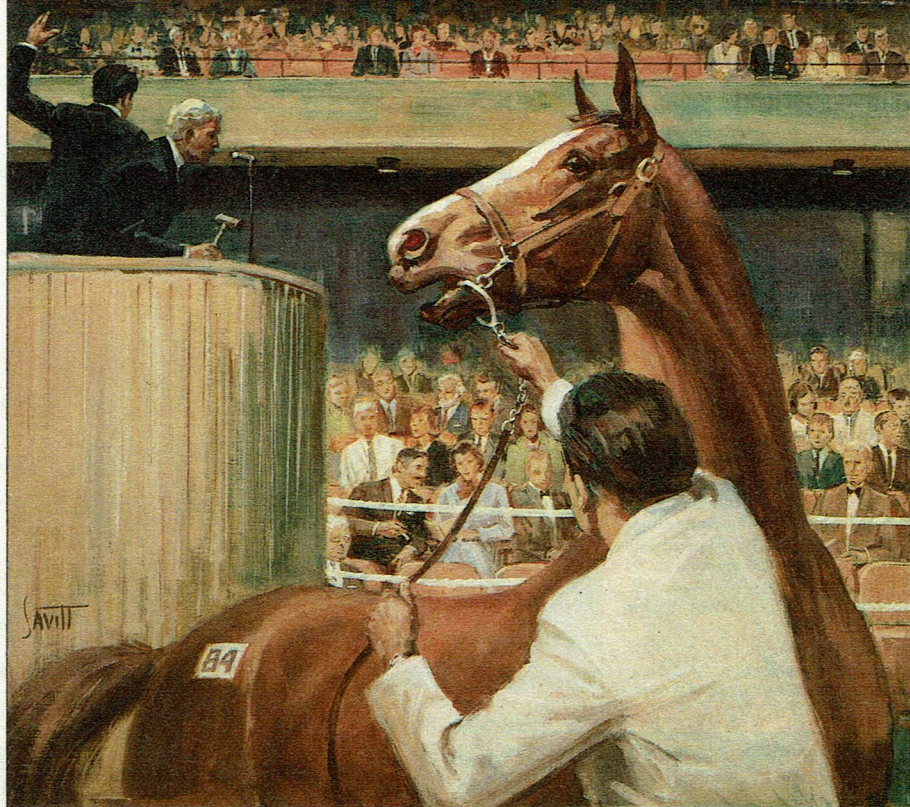
His work became familiar to many a young horse lover in the early 1950s when he started doing the color cover illustrations for such comic book horses as Trigger, Champion, and Silver, all of whom had their own comic books. The vibrant colors and

pulsating action of these dramatic covers make them collector's items today. "Every week I had to come up with some dramatic situation for the horses to be in for their covers," Savitt said. "Sometimes they got pretty far-fetched, but the challenge of showing the grace, fire, and spirit in each horse as he battled whatever problem each week was fun."

In the years that followed, Savitt became well known in the horse world for his equine art work. He has illustrated 135 books and written and illustrated 16 books of his own, two of which have won prestigious awards. His paintings are in galleries and private collections around the world. Among his equestrian portraits are paintings of such Americans as Raymond Firestone and William Randolph Hearst II aboard their favorite horses.

Savitt has served as the official artist for the United States Equestrian Team and as director of painting and one of the founding members of the American Academy of Equine Art. Every year, budding equine artists learn at art workshops he holds around the country, such as the annual workshop held at the Kentucky Horse Park near Lexington.

Savitt is also well known for his illustrated horse charts which are sold internationally and have been used by the Smithsonian Institute as well as a number of encyclopedias. The Sam Savitt Guide to Horses, his premiere chart, is still the top seller, 21 years after he painted it. In 1963,



HIP NO. 84

This painting of the yearling sale at Saratoga captures the feel of the sale and gives the viewer a sense of the young horse's point of view in what can be a frightening experience—going under the gavel for the first time

Savitt's wife, Bette, started Black Horse Press, a home-based business to publish, market, and distribute Savitt's horse charts, which include one of a foal's first day, a dressage chart, polo chart, and rodeo chart. The business is run from the studio that Bette and Sam share on the top floor of their home in North Salem, New York.

From that first horse pulling a milk wagon, Savitt has gone on to depict

the horse in many guises, from racing the last race of the day at Saratoga, to a tense moment during a hotly contested polo match, to the drama of the horse sales. Whatever he paints, there is always a sense of action, drama, and an endless fascination for the movements of the horse. "I always love to do the horse in action," Savitt said. "I enjoy rodeo and polo action the most because they both have such power and move-

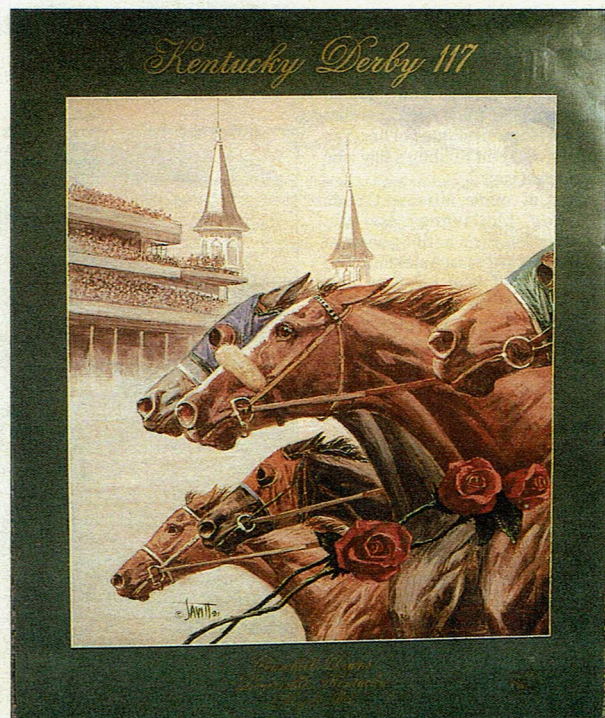
ment. Of course, I've done portraits and all that, but it is the horse in action that really fascinates me. I never tire of it. They'll have to pluck my brush from my cold dead fingers. Like they say, 'It's better to wear out than to rust out.' That to me applies to horses and to people." ⑤

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LAST RACE OF THE DAY

With the skies darkening from an approaching storm, the horses are running hard to reach home before the storm breaks. Savitt said the chestnut, which is moving up on the outside, will win the race



DERBY POSTER

Savitt's poster for the 1991 Kentucky Derby showed the horses' heads, with nostrils flaring, straining towards the finish line