

# Crazy About Horses

by FOXY GWYNNE

Sam Savitt is to horse painting what Babe Ruth is to baseball.

What horse enamored kid hasn't read a Savitt book — Midnight the Bucking Horse, is still the all-time favorite — or owned a Savitt wall chart?

What parent hasn't sent or received a Savitt horse greeting card, owned or wished to own a painting?

## Crazy for Horses

Mr. Savitt's work, which will include major oils as well as many pencil and watercolor studies, will be exhibited at Beth Welch and Ron Klute's Northridge Gallery in Ridgefield, Conn., beginning Sept. 15 for three weeks.

Strange that a man who grew up in a small town in the coal mining area of Wilkes-Barre, Pa., where only two horses existed — the horse of a mounted policeman and the cart horse of a fruit and vegetable man — should be so crazy for horses.

"I've never pinned down my interest," said Mr. Savitt. "My interest is in the horse wherever he is."

The living room of Sam and Betty Savitt's 160-year-old farmhouse in North Salem was filled with paintings and drawings all framed and resting against the sides and backs of furniture awaiting transport to the show.

Sam Savitt, boyish at any age and tidy as a model from an L.L. Bean catalog, pointed to one of his favorite oils — Forever Wild — a flame-maned mustang framed by trees,

which will appear in the show.

"I actually saw this scene out west. The horse appeared from nowhere when I was walking along, looked and was gone before I could blink. The look haunted me so much I had to get it on canvas," he said.

Mr. Savitt was drawn to wild horses after reading Hope Rydin's book *America's Last Wild Horse*, and it was partially due to her that he came to paint Mustangs and present it to the Wild Horse Protection Society. Part of the proceeds from the Northridge show will also benefit the society.

## Mustangs

He spoke feelingly of the mustang's plight, hounded to death by ranchers who have no use for them.

"There is a small horse sanctuary in northern California, but as part of our heritage they should be allowed on federal land and protected. But the land management program run by ranchers is the enemy. During the wild horse adoption program, it was found that ranchers would adopt 40-50 at a time and slaughter them.

"Will James in one of his books published in the '30s wrote of mustangs so thick it looked like the hills were in motion."

Mr. Savitt's article on a mustang massacre in Idaho will appear in a forthcoming issue of *Equus Magazine*. He has also been published in *Western Horseman*.

Another of Mr. Savitt's strong opinions lies in the severity of certain jumps in competitive jump-

ing — such as Beecher's Brook in the English Grand National and the water jump at the Kentucky Horse Park during the '78 World Championship Three Day Event where 10 horses turned over and fell into the water.

"I told the facts in *Classic Magazine*. Jumps shouldn't be made so you kill a horse on them."

As official artist for the U.S. Equestrian team, his paintings depict hair-raising jumps, looming disasters — as in an oil called *Trouble Ahead*.

## Mother Love

In a more sentimental vein, Mill Pond Press has commissioned limited edition prints of a mare and foal entitled *Mother Love*, which can also be seen at the Northridge Gallery.

*Hip #84* is the title for the study of a horse coming to auction at the Saratoga sales. "I called it that," he said, "because the numbers are on their hips and that's how the auctioneers call them."

There is also a portrait of Secretariat, the triple crown winner who once won a race by 30 lengths. "I was judging an art show in Lexington, Ky.," Mr. Savitt recalled, "and stopped in at Clairborne Farm to see Secretariat I sketched him in profile for this painting that I would finish in a wintry setting in a three-quarter position with his head looking over his shoulder.

"That horse stood stock still for 15 minutes until his groom said: 'When he finds out you don't have a camera he's going to get impatient.' He was a real ham for the

camera."

It's been awhile since Mr. Savitt, attending his first life class at Pratt, was too embarrassed to look at the nude model so just drew horses over his paper.

But he's been drawing horses ever since and has risen to the top in a field loaded with horse painters, like thoroughbred portraitist Richard Stone Reeve, who pays more attention to the bulge of a specific muscle than Mr. Savitt cares to detail.

Mr. Savitt draws inspiration from the uniqueness of Will James and the forceful moods of a Munnings.

## Chalk Talks

Artist Paul Brown was a personal friend who gave horse talks with a pencil, which may have been a motivation for Sam Savitt's well-known chalk talks. An upcoming one will be the Troy Gallery in Scottsdale, Ariz., on Oct. 3.

A book, *Draw Horses with Sam Savitt*, which takes the view that "sight is a faculty: seeing is an art," has been extremely popular.

Mr. Savitt has probably exceeded his late friend Paul Brown because he rode, something Brown never learned, and was instructed by the master horseman Gordon Wright.

He has viewed first-hand scenes in the hunt field from hunting with the Golden Bridge Hounds on his horse McClory who lives in the Savitt barn.

Betty Savitt — if she isn't traveling with Sam to Ireland, England, or the like on business — can be found in the cellar, her office and mail order plant for Sam's many books and illustrated horse charts of western horses, draft horses, polo horses and the history of the horse. She says the demand is constantly increasing.

Observing the caring equine scenes on every wall of Mr. Savitt's home, you can tell his heart and head is always with the horse, and his eyes are never far away from one



ARTIST Sam Savitt is surrounded by works depicting his favorite subject — horses. A show of Mr. Savitt's

works opens at the Northridge Gallery in Ridgefield on Friday, Sept. 15. — Geoff Kerrigan photo.

# Sam Savitt