

December 30, 2000

The New York Times
ON THE WEB

Sam Savitt, Artist and Author Who Specialized in Horses, Dies at 83

By ERIC PACE

Sam Savitt, a prolific freelance artist, author and illustrator who specialized in depicting horses, died on Monday at his home in North Salem, N.Y. He was 83.

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For more than a half-century, Mr. Savitt painted and drew horses in oil and with watercolors, charcoal, ink and other media. "I know horses, and I just sort of reconstruct them on canvas," he said in an interview.

He portrayed horses doing all sorts of things. The New York Times Book Review said of his 1956 children's book, "Step-a-Bit: The Story of a Foal," which he wrote and illustrated: "Done in soft pencil, the sketches of the foal from birth to weaning have great charm and spontaneity."

Mr. Savitt was also skilled at capturing likenesses of horses caught up in polo, racing, show jumping, rodeo and other sports. He was commissioned to execute posters for events like the Kentucky Derby. Drawings by him appeared in Sports Illustrated and other magazines.

He won a Boys' Club of America junior book award for his 1958 book, "Midnight, Champion Bucking Horse," which he also wrote and illustrated. And he painted numerous portraits of horses.

In 1956 he was named the official artist for the United States Equestrian Team, based in Gladstone, N.J., whose activities include training horses and riders to compete in the Olympics. He retained that title for many years.

In 1998 he received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the North American Horsemen's Association, which also honored him as an Equine Artist of Distinction.

In 1986 he said: "I am a creative person and I found that painting pictures did not completely satisfy this creative urge. I turned to writing as an extension of what I felt."

Among his writings are a total of 15 books, including children's and coffee-table books and ranging from "The Dingle Ridge Fox and Other Stories" (1978), which is fiction, to "Draw Horses with Sam Savitt" (1981, Half Halt), a popular how-to book. And he illustrated 150 books by other authors.

A salesman's son, he was born and brought up in Wilkes-Barre, Pa. He was fascinated by horses from boyhood and used to follow mounted policemen around.

He studied illustration at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, graduating in 1941. He served in the Army during World War II, rising to first lieutenant.

Mr. Savitt attended the Art Students League in Manhattan in 1950 and 1951 and later studied sculpturing at the New School. In later decades, he taught workshops around the country on drawing and painting horses.

He is survived by his wife, the former Bette Orkin; a daughter, Vicki Savitt of Berkeley, Calif.; a son, Roger, of Bedford, N.Y.; a brother, Alfred, of Manhattan; and a sister, Sally Ross of Tamarac, Fla.