Walsh Library Gallery presents

Jack Savitsky
A Retrospective of a 20th Century Folk Artist

September 5 - October 25, 2002

Reception Thursday, September 19th 5-8 p.m.
Gallery talk at 6:30 p.m.
"Jack Savitsky: an American Folk Artist"
by the artist's son, Jack P. Savitt

Curated by James C. Lansing

Sponsored by
the Graduate Program in Museum Professions,
Department of Art and Music, in association with
the American Folk Art Museum, New York City

Walsh Library Gallery
400 South Orange Ave.
South Orange, NJ 07079

Mon. - Fri. 10:30 am-4:30 pm
(973) 275-2033
http://library.shu.edu/gallery
Jack Savitsky (1910-1991)

Jack Savitsky’s paintings and drawings document the life of the working man in America. Through the prism of his close to forty year personal experience as a Pennsylvania coal miner, he focused on these unheralded heroes who performed backbreaking, often dangerous daily chores that helped build our country’s strong industrial force. Savitsky painted the surrounding landscape and mining towns, its churches, schools, and identical rows of houses in which the miners lived, and the miners themselves, sometimes adding their wives, children and pets. He painted miners at work—the coal trains, mine shafts, breaking coal, drilling the coal, and he also depicted miners at leisure celebrating a July Fourth parade. Patriotism and religion, strong impulses in American folk art inspired many Savitsky subjects. Along with patriotic themes, biblical subjects included, The Crucifixion, Adam and Eve, The Peaceable Kingdom, Noah’s Ark, and The Last Supper. Historical events and personages as well as mythology also interested the artist.

Sterling Strauser, an important figure in artist and collector circles, and friend, patron and advocate thought of Savitsky as an authentic folk painter. He perceived that Savitsky worked within a folk tradition similar to that of Yugoslavian, Russian and Czechoslovakian folk artists in that he used the “same treatment of line and the same repetition.” Working in a variety of media, including pen and ink, charcoal, colored pencil, crayon, pastel, watercolor and oil on many different surfaces, paper, cardboard, Masonite, wood and canvas, Savitsky created sensitive renderings free of superficiality. These deceptively simple artworks were skillfully and confidently executed with an economy of line and narrow range of pure unmixed colors.

Unlike many self taught artists who were frozen in one expressive style, Savitsky’s cartoon-like pictures consciously evolved from earlier more naturalistic expression. Hunting the Wood Duck (1925) and The Hunter (1925) exemplify efforts to use light, shadow, and perspective to create the illusion of three dimensional forms and space. The artist abandoned attempts at realism in favor of flattened perspective, a shallow picture plane, and generalized lighting to highlight every detail equally. Savitsky’s art looks fresh in our postmodern era and resonates with the graphic language several academically trained artists have adopted to express their views of contemporary American society and culture. How ironic it is that Savitsky’s use of the cartoon device depicted an era that was rapidly ending.

Lee Kogan
Director Folk Art Institute
Curator of Special Projects for the Contemporary Center
American Folk Art Museum
September 2002
Works on Exhibit

WATERFRONT FARM HOUSE
1965, Oil on masonite, 42.5" x 30"
Collection of John Doyle

DELAWARE WATER GAP WITH CANOE
Undated, Oil on masonite, 15" x 21"
Collection of John Doyle

HOME ON COUNTRY ROAD
Undated, Oil on board, 7.5" x 15"
Collection of John Doyle

VIEW OF JIM THORPE
Undated, Oil on board, 21.5" x 18"
Collection of John Doyle

WINTER IN NEW ENGLAND
1965, Oil on masonite, 33" x 28"
Collection of John Doyle

LADY GODIVA
1964, Oil on masonite, 21.5" x 35.25"
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

VILLAGE OF ECKLEY,
Pennsylvania
1970, Oil on masonite, 18" x 24"
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

MINERS TRAIN
1973, Oil on masonite, 29" x 43"
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

THE READING COAL MINER'S TRAIN
1982, Oil on masonite, 24" x 48"
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

WASHINGTON CROSSING THE DELAWARE
1976, Oil on masonite, 24" x 48"
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

THE PARADE
1976, Oil on masonite, 24" x 36",
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt
MUSTANGS  
1975, Oil on masonite, 18” x 24”  
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

COAL MINER CRUCIFIED  
1978, Oil on canvas board, 24” x 18”  
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

BREAKER BOYS  
1981, Oil on masonite, 24” x 36”  
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

A DAY IN THE COAL MINES  
1977, Oil on masonite, 16” x 20”  
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

COAL MINER TESTING AT 2000 FEET BELOW  
1958, Oil on cloth, 20.5” x 31”  
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

OLD COMPANY LEHIGH  
1958, Oil on masonite, 20.5” x 31”  
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

PEACE  
1981, Oil on wood panel, 20” x 24”  
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

SCHOOL DAYS, 1916  
1960, Oil on board, 22” x 18”  
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

THE COAL MINER JACK SAVITT-SKY-FROM THE COAL MINES TO NEW YORK CITY  
1977, Oil on masonite, 28” x 48”  
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

BLUE MOUNTAIN FARM, CARBON COUNTY  
1960, Oil on masonite, 22” x 21”  
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

THE MINERS TRAIN  
1970, Oil on masonite, 18” x 24”  
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

ADAM AND EVA (sic)  
1963, Oil on board, 20” x 20”  
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

THE STORM  
1965, Oil on drywall, 14” x 17”  
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

THE HUNTER  
1925, Oil on drywall, 35.75” x 51.5”  
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

BELTZVILLE, CARBON COUNTY  
1960, Oil on wallboard, 21” x 22”  
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

OLD STONE BRIDGE  
1960, Oil on wallboard, 20” x 24”  
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

HUNTING THE WOOD DUCK  
1925, Oil on wallboard, 39.5” X 29.75”  
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

DRILLING THE COAL  
1966, Oil on masonite, 24” x 48”  
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

THE STRIKE  
1965, Pen and pencil on paper, 25”x18.5”  
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

EAGLE  
1973, Oil on board, 24” x 28”  
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

THE LAST SUPPER  
1974, Oil on canvas, 20” x 24”  
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

THE ROARING TWENTIES  
1976, Oil on panel board, 33” x 22”  
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

PEACE...AND THE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM  
1975, Oil on board, 23” x 43”  
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

THE WEDDING  
1983, Oil on masonite, 24” x 48”  
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

A BAD DREAM  
1976, Oil on masonite, 20” x 24”  
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

THE COAL MINER’S SUPPER  
1975, Oil on board, 31” x 49”  
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

THE SUNKIST  
c.1960’s, Oil on plywood, 46.5” x 32.5”  
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

MEDUSA  
1963, Oil on masonite, 36” x 24”  
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

STARRY NIGHT  
1983, Oil on board, 48” x 24”  
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

MY LIFE  
1970, Oil on board, 22.5” x 18.5”  
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

COAL MINERS WAITING FOR A RIDE UP  
1979, Oil on board, 24” x 48”  
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

MOTHER AND CHILD  
1979, Oil on masonite, 37” x 25”  
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt
MY WORKING CLOTHES
1974, Pen and pencil on paper, 14"x11"
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

SILVER CREEK ROAD
1976, Oil on board, 32" x 32"
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

THE PIETA
1977, Oil on board, 22" x 27"
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

THE THREE MUSKATEERS
1977, Oil on board, 18" x 12"
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

THE CHAIN GANG
1983, Oil on masonite, 15.75" x 42.5"
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

THE SHEPHERD
1979, Oil on canvas, 12" x 16"
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

THE WAKE
1977, Oil on board, 18" x 12"
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH
1964, Watercolor on canvas, 18"x24"
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

BRINGING FATHER'S LUNCH
1980, Oil on masonite, 28" x 48"
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

COAL PICKERS
1962, Oil on board, 14" x 48"
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

A DAY IN THE COAL MINES
1962, Oil on masonite, 10" x 60"
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

SALEM HILL COAL COMPANY'S MINE SHAFT WITH COAL MINERS
1962, Oil on board, 14" x 48"
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Savitt

THE CRUCIFIXION
1974, Oil on board, 18" x 14"
Generously donated to the University by Jack and Mary Lou Savitt
Acknowledgements

Walsh Library Gallery is very proud to present this retrospective exhibition of work by Jack Savitsky (1925-1983). Many people helped to make this exhibit possible. Grateful thanks to Jack and Mary Lou Savitt and to John Doyle—the artist’s son and grandson—for generously loaning these works to Seton Hall University. Thank you to James Lansing, curator and student in the Graduate Program in Museum Professions at Seton Hall University, for sharing his passion for Savitsky’s work and organizing this exhibition.

The exhibit is sponsored by the Graduate Program in Museum Professions, Department of Art and Music, in association with the American Folk Art Museum in New York City. Special thanks to Gerard Wertkin and Lee Kogan of the American Folk Art Museum, and to Barbara Cate, Director of the Graduate Program in Museum Professions and Trustee of the American Folk Art Museum for their support and contributions.

Walsh Library Gallery is part of the University Library, Dr. Arthur Hafner, Dean and Professor. We thank him and the Library faculty for their continued support, especially Dr. Xueming Bao, University Library Webmaster and the staff of the Special Collections Center - Alan Delozier, Kathleen Dodds, and Justin Myzie. Special thanks to the many members of the University community who have contributed to the success of this exhibition: Frank Fleischman, Public Relations; Eva Gale, and the members of TLTC; and Barbara Dente, Gallery Assistant.

Savitsky’s images are a snapshot out of the album of America’s past. In his art the artist chronicles his lifelong career working in the coal mines of northeastern Pennsylvania and through it we get a personal glimpse of the people, experience the work and become part of the community. ‘Coal Miner Jack’ as he was known, captures that page in our history and celebrates it. The bulk of his paintings were done after the mine closed (1959-1981) and as he began to suffer from the work related illnesses of black lung and emphysema. Through these canvases we see what Savitsky saw from the inside as a participant. The bright colors that immediately draw and engage the viewer are in direct contrast to the black darkness of the mines that was his constant companion for so many years. Using canvas and masonite he broadly strokes the memories of his coal mining life in oils, acrylics, watercolor and pencil. Savitsky celebrates the dignity of work and working class people with masterful simplicity, honesty and a reverence for the community he was a part of. We thank him for sharing his vision with us.

Jo Ann Cotz, Gallery Director