DOHANOS Steve

A Visit with Stevan Dohanos

To realist Stevan Dohanos, a telephone pole, a mailman, a fireplug are more than ordinary sights. When he paints them in his pictures he endows them with a startling, sensitive magic that makes them tell entire stories to the millions who see and admire his work. His paintings of the "commonplace" objects in our daily lives can be found in the permanent art collections of more than a dozen museums.

Colleagues and art editors regard Stevan Dohanos as one of the foremost interpreters of the American scene. He is a nationally known illustrator and magazine cover artist, perhaps best known for his more than 125 covers for the *Saturday Evening Post* interpreting contemporary American life. He pursues a combination career in the fine arts and the commercial arts field.

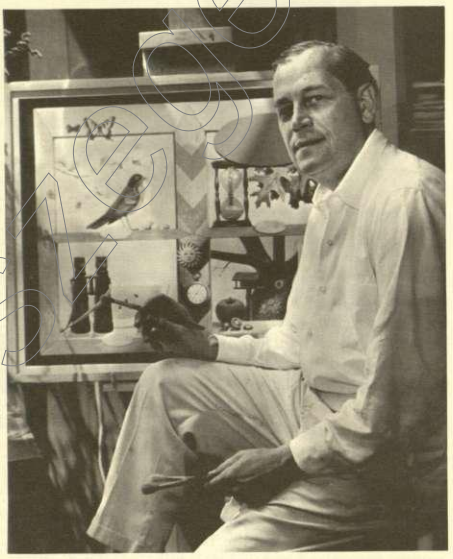
His many works show that, proud as he is of his Hungarian descent, he deeply appreciates America and is a man of genuine patriotism. The numerous postage stamps he has designed for the United States Post Office reflect that spirit in their beauty and color, in the waving pattern of the Stars and Stripes, and in the recent Kennedy stamp.

During a recent visit with Steve, I asked him to tell me something about his youth in Ohio, his family, his church and how he got started as an artist. He obliged me and I want to share his story with others.

"To begin my story," Steve said, "I am a first generation American. Both my parents were born in Hungary and married over here. I was the third of nine children, born in the steel mill town of Lorain, Ohio, in 1907. My father worked in the mills and we lived in one of the company houses, like all the rest of the immigrant laborers' families.

"It might make a more interesting story," Steve said, "if I could say that my childhood was unhappy; that I was oversensitive and suffered from my surroundings and that, as a result of my frustrations, I decided at a tender age, to become a great American artist, but it wouldn't be true. As a child, I was neither acutely happy nor acutely miserable; nor did I give evidence of any great precociousness or talent.

"Our family life was unspectacular. My mother was too busy bearing us, keeping us fed and clothed on the $28 a week my father earned, to have time for sentiment. We ate well enough; dinner was usually a rich stew, served on a checked cloth in the kitchen of our two story frame house. We were kept clean and warm and as soon as we were old enough—in my case, before



Artist and illustrator, Stevan Dohanos, in his studio.

I was 12—we were expected to work after school hours and contribute our earnings to the family budget. Like many other young Americans, I earned my first pennies selling papers. When I became twelve, I worked before and after school in a grocery store; summers I helped harvest crops on nearby farms. At fourteen, I thought I had had enough education and tried to quit school but the truant officers yanked me back and I stayed on till my sixteenth birthday. This happened to be in May and without waiting till the term ended, in June, I took my first full time job; as driver of a delivery truck for a flower shop," Stevan Dohanos recalled.

"What little social activity we enjoyed was centered around our local Hungarian Reformed Church groups. At about this time, a dramatic coach came to town to direct and produce folk plays for our church. It was my first taste of creative activity, making me aware that life might offer something more than the purely utilitarian. For the next few years," Steve explained, "I lived for these extra-curricular hours I spent with this discriminating Hungarian, who had not only singled me out to act, but had chosen me as a companion and friend to whom he talked not only of the theatre, but of art and music and literature. The bright world of the imagination in which he lived, opened its doors to me and from that day on, I knew I would never be content until it was my world, too."

His eyes looking into the distance, Steve said, "I

gave up truck driving to work as an office boy in the steel mill offices, a 'white collar' job that was supposed to lead to better things. The work was light; escorting visiting salesmen in to the boss; filling inkwells; filing; doing errands. I often found myself with time on my hands. To keep amused, I began doodling, copying the inevitable calendars that spot the walls of every office. To my own surprise, my copies resembled the originals sufficiently so that the stenographers, who were my fellow workers, offered to buy them for fifty cents and a dollar each. One girl even became interested enough to buy me art supplies out of her own none-too-fat pay envelope.

"I often think of these first patrons whose encouragement led me to begin seriously training for an art career—by enrolling at 18—in the International Correspondence School commercial art course!

"For two more years I continued in the mills, part of that time as an apprentice to a pattern maker in the woodworking shop and finally as a clerical worker in the railroad depot, earning $35 a week. After hours I still acted in our Hungarian theatre and now I was able to paint backdrops and design scenery."

Steve now spoke of the marked change of direction his life took. He related, "It was at this point that I heard of real live art classes at the Cleveland Art School and decided to attend one night a week. After my first term I was awarded a scholarship which allowed me to take second and third year courses. I also attended a class at the John Huntington Polytechnic School an additional night a week.

"It was at the Cleveland Art School that I met John Gee, my first instructor in commercial art; among the other teachers there, Gaertner, Young and Wilcox were all sufficiently helpful and encouraging so that when a job as an apprentice in a Cleveland Studio became available, I quit my mill job in Lorain. There was some opposition from my family; giving up a $35 job with security, to commute to Cleveland for a mere $22 a week, just didn't make sense!

"Though my work in the studio consisted of little more than lettering and layout," artist Dohanos explained, "I kept on painting, going on weekend sketching trips with other artist friends. Then, in 1928, soon after my twenty-first birthday, considering myself fairly launched in the art field, I took the summer off to go abroad on a pilgrimage to the art centers of Europe, in company with my instructor and friend, John Gee. We 'did' the museums, bicycled through the Alps, and then, on my own, I took a side trip into Hungary to visit my parents' birthplace."

Then Steve began to tell me about his first visit to Hungary. "The village of Bácska," he said, "lies forty miles west of Budapest and isn't even a whistle stop. I did the last few miles on foot, arriving on a Sunday afternoon, clad in plus fours and a beret, that artist's trademark of those days," he interjected, "and strolled down the one dirt road along which all the inhabitants live. A flock of geese escorted me to my great-uncle's door. The house, a long, masonry rectangle, with storks nesting in the thatched roof and well-sweep in the yard, was identical with all the others that lined the village street. Although I had arrived unannounced, I was warmly welcomed, as another nephew from America—most of the villagers had relatives in the new world—and that night I slept in the front room in a four poster bed reserved for guests, under a great feather tick.

"I remember," Steve said, "the sand floor and wondering how one managed not to get sand in the bed. I remember the good food, the wine, the rounds of calls to be made, for many of the villagers were related to me. I remember watching my Uncle bringing in the oxen at dusk and getting them into the barn, which was simply an extension of the house. Their horn spread must have been five or six feet and the barn door was narrow so that he had to turn their heads to get them through. I remember that when I left, I was given a boiled chicken, wrapped in newspaper, to eat on the train. But most of all, I remember waking up in that big bed and thinking that if my parents had not migrated to America, I would have been born here, *István Dohányos* of Bácska—and trying to identify myself with that imaginary character. All I could feel was an infinite gratitude for whatever star had guided my parents overseas so that, instead, I was Stevan Dohanos, artist and American."

His thoughts turned back to America and to how his career was launched. With a sigh he said to me, "All of us young artists lived for the day when we would be good enough to 'show' in the annual May exhibit of the Cleveland Museum. For me, that bright day finally arrived in 1930. I received an honorable mention for a black and white drawing and no prize I have received since, has meant more to me.

"By now," Steve continued, "nearly three years had gone by and my earnings had caught up and surpassed the $35 I had been earning in the mills and my family felt a little better about me. Then came the chance to go to New York City. As part of the process, I went to a doctor for a routine physical check-up and, instead of New York, I found myself hustled off to a sanitorium. A tubercular condition had been uncovered. Fortunately for me, it was in its early stage and I could be cured."

●

Listening to Steve relate the story of those early years up to 1932, I felt that I wanted to pick up the narrative and say that Steve's personal experience with tuberculosis was one that would have crushed lesser men. First stricken with the disease at the age of 25, he suffered a relapse ten years later in 1942. His brother, Bert, and a sister, Irene, both died of tuberculosis. His wife's brother, Valentine, was also a victim of TB.

1969

Another of his wife's brothers, Andrew, spent three years in a TB sanitorium, but recovered. Consequently, Steve has devoted more time to fight against TB throughout the years than any other figure in his field. In 1960 he was named Honorary Christmas Seal Chairman by the National Tuberculosis Association, an assignment that took him to almost every major city in the United States.

Steve is one of the greatest givers of time and talent to worthy causes. He has designed posters and stamps for the Red Cross, the Community Chest and United Fund, the National Cancer Association, Boys Town, American-Hungarian Relief, the United States Government and dozens of other national and civic organizations.

He has received the David Russell Lyman medal for outstanding service to the public welfare, and he has been honored with the George Washington Medal Award of the American Hungarian Studies Foundation.

Stevan Dohanos is a Founding Faculty member of the Famous Artists Schools of Westport, Connecticut. He is a member currently of the Postmaster General's Citizen Stamp Advisory Committee. He also serves as chairman of the board of the American Hungarian Studies Foundation. He is past president of the Society of Illustrators.

Steve's home and studio are in Westport, Connecticut, where he lives with his wife, Margit, and the youngest of his three sons, Anthony. Peter Dohanos is a TV and stage designer and Paul Dohanos is a painter and graphic designer.

A visit with Stevan Dohanos and his wife in their Westport home is a treat. The Hungarian and other dishes of the Dohanos' are a gourmet's delight. Mrs. Dohanos is also of Hungarian background. Her father, the Reverend Andor Kovacs, served as the first pastor of the Magyar Presbyterian Church in Leechburg, Pennsylvania, and later he ministered in a second congregation in Brownsville, Pennsylvania.

August J. Molnar

The Hungarian Bible

The beginnings of Hungarian Bible translations date back to the time of the pre-reformers, who emphasized national languages.

In Buda, Hungary, already in 1410, the principles of the Reformation were proclaimed. Among the students who studied abroad and returned were Simon Pécsi and Bálint Újlaki, who between 1416 and 1435 worked on translating the entire Bible into Hungarian. Through their work and principles, they came into disagreement with the church, and to evade persecution, they fled to Moldavia, where they were able to complete their translation. Parts of this translation are preserved in handwritten books called codices.

After the invention of printing, Benedek Komjáti translated Paul's epistles into Hungarian and published them in Krakow in 1533 with the financial assistance of Katalin Frangepán. Gábor Pesti Mizsér published the New Testament in Vienna in 1536. In Hungary, the New Testament was first published by János Erdősi Sylvester in Sárvár in 1541, on the estate of Count Tamás Nádasdy.

The complete Hungarian Bible was translated and published by Gáspár Károlyi, a minister at Gönc and dean of the Kassa Valley District, in Vizsoly in 1590 with the financial support of István Báthori, Zsigmond Rákóczi, István Drugeth, and Gáspár Magócsi.

The first complete Roman Catholic translation into Hungarian was published by György Káldy in Vienna in 1625.

The translation by György Komáromi Csipkés was published by the city of Debrecen in 1718 in Leyden,

Church at Vizsoly
Where the First Complete Hungarian Bible Was Printed

Holland, in four thousand copies, but almost three thousand copies were confiscated and burned on November 5, 1754 by Count Ferenc Barkóczi, a Roman Catholic Bishop in Eger, Hungary. This Hungarian translation had the best appearance.

Outside of the above mentioned translations, other attempts were also made. The most noted New Testament translations were made by István Kecskeméthy, Sándor Czeglédy, and Sándor Raffay. Among Hungarian Protestants, the Károlyi translation spread most and is still in use. Through 1940, this translation has been reprinted 268 times.

The Reformed Church in Hungary published the Károlyi New Testament into a modern revised edition and the publishing of the Old Testament is expected soon.

Francis Vitez