

A TREASURED RETROSPECTIVE

Michael Dolas @ Montecito Frame & Gallery

By ERIN J. SMITH / CASA

SANTA BARBARA'S OWN AMBASSADOR FROM THE GOLDEN ERA OF ILLUSTRATION, the famed American illustrator Michael Dolas, will share 58 pieces of his best work in *A Treasured Retrospective*, on view at Montecito Frame & Gallery through April 28th. An opening reception with the artist will be held Saturday, April 3rd from 3 to 5pm.

"My mother thought it a disgrace that I didn't stay a confectioner and make an honest living," said Dolas, whose father owned a candy shop. "I just had a pencil, and I worked. I've never known anything else, and I never thought of doing anything else."

Dolas, who was born in Waterloo, New York on December 12, 1912 into a family of seven, developed a knack and passion for drawing at an early age. "I can't remember not drawing," he said. "My mind turns things into pictures right away."

His family later relocated to Strasburg, Pennsylvania and Dolas skipped the sixth grade, much to the chagrin of his older sister.

As a teenager, Dolas also had the unique opportunity to spend a few years living with relatives in his parents' native Greece. "The thing about Greece is that it's really a small country – the size of a suburb in Los Angeles," said Dolas. "Yet I can remember walking through town and looking up at the Parthenon."

Dolas left Greece before joining other young men his age in military



Michael Dolas

service, but later enlisted in the US Army during the 1940s as a photographer. He moved up the ranks from Buck Private to Lieutenant, and he was assigned to the Signal Corps due to his ability to speak Greek. He has since obtained his photographs and negatives from the Associated Press and several will appear in the show along with his artwork.

After graduating high school, Dolas attended Syracuse University, but left three years later and headed for New York City. "I went to *The Saturday Evening Post* and interviewed them," he said. "I looked at the business in New York, made a list of the things I needed to know in order to make a living, and quit school. I studied everything I could on my own. When I hit New York, I was ready to take over."

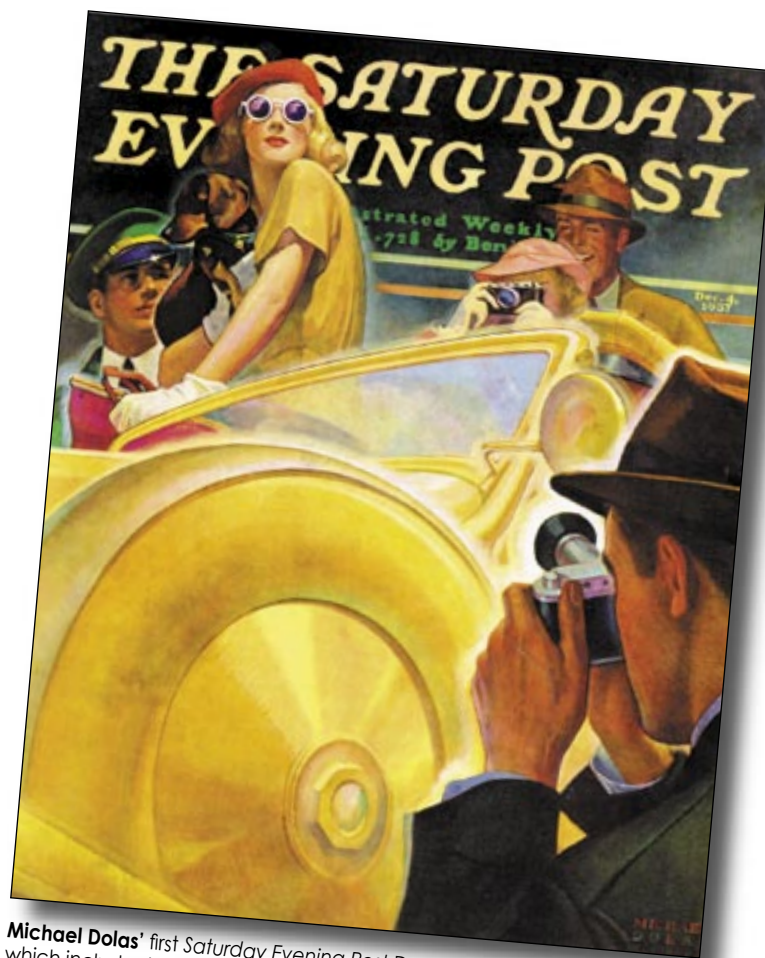
After getting his start by illustrating book jackets, Dolas landed his first *Saturday Evening Post* cover in 1937, but quickly learned that if he wanted to support a family, he'd have to turn to more lucrative work. His mentors J. C. Leyendecker and Norman Rockwell could command between \$2200 to \$2500 per cover illustration, but as a young, albeit promising, illustrator just starting out, Dolas earned only \$100.

"I wouldn't be anyone if I hadn't met Leyendecker," said Dolas, who studied Leyendecker's work closely before conquering the world of illustration. "And Rockwell was a wonderful, gentle soul. He taught me everything he could. Being number three in that trilogy is nothing that I earned."

Dolas found work as a commercial artist for Hearst publications, including *Cosmopolitan*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Redbook*, and *American*, and continued gaining a reputation. During his career he also illustrated advertisements for companies such as Crown Royal Gasoline, Barbosol, Pabst Blue Ribbon, Budweiser, and Wells Fargo.

In 1939, Dolas was honored with an Order of the Rake Award, an exclusive award presented to 13 remarkable young men under the age of 31. The only artist in the group, Dolas' fellow honorees included Joe "Flash" Gordon, Winthrop Rockefeller, Jimmy Roosevelt, and Orson Welles. When asked how he felt about the award, Dolas said frankly, "I think I got a good meal out of it. I was a commercial artist and that's what I did. It was nothing more than that," he said.

In keeping with that



Michael Dolas' first *Saturday Evening Post* December 4, 1937 cover, which includes his one and only signed illustration.

mind frame, Dolas only signed one of his major pieces – his artist signature can be seen in the bottom right hand corner of his first *Saturday Evening Post* cover. "Either you're a celebrity or you work. I didn't know what else to do," he said. "Even when I was young, I hated having my picture taken. The photographer had a bell and he would ring it. I grabbed the clapper and have had my hand on it ever since."

Dolas settled in Santa Barbara in the late 50s, having visited the area before. "I visited a friend out here who was in his 60s or 70s, and I was in my 20s. When he found out I was coming to California, he suggested Santa Barbara. He told me if the world ended, the people of Santa Barbara wouldn't learn about it for ten years," said Dolas. "There were four houses on the Mesa, and I bought the one that wasn't selling. I fixed it up and made a nice patio. From the second floor, you can see from Goleta to the Wrigley house. It's beautiful. I still own the house."

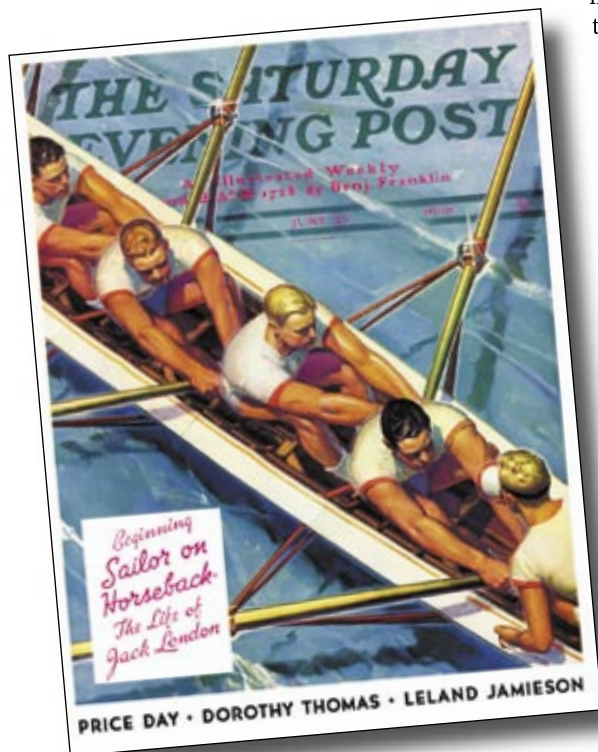
Dolas' two children were both raised in the area, and his daughter now heads the theatre department at UC Berkeley

while his son is a set designer based in Santa Barbara. Dolas contributes his longevity to "not dying" and surrounding himself with good people. In addition to his own work, Dolas boasts one of the largest and most complete collections of artwork from the Golden Era of Illustration, which he has proudly passed on to his children for safe keeping.

"I am bursting with joy at having this show in the gallery," said Michelle Thomas of Montecito Frame & Gallery. "Illustration doesn't always get the credit where it's due, but to look at the work that Mike has done, he's captured a unique time in our visual history exquisitely. This show is really to honor him and his extraordinary place in that history."

Dolas, still a little overwhelmed by all the attention, said, "I've only ever just been a spectator."

Montecito Frame & Gallery is located at 2173 Oretga Hill Rd. Hours are 9am to 5pm, Mon through Sat, and 10am to 4pm, Sun. For more information, call 969-1129 or visit www.montecitoframe.com.



The *Saturday Evening Post*, June 25, 1938, cover by Michael Dolas



The Three Swimmers by Michael Dolas