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Taking Stock: documentary of Magnum co-founder this Sunday

Posted by Rich Corozine on March 1, 2013 in Art, Events, Screen · 0 Comments



James Dean, used with permission from James Dean, Inc. www.jamesdean.com Dennis Stock/Magnum Photos

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When dealing with the "iconic" photographs of Magnum's Dennis Stock, it is best to remember – quoting Stock from Hanna Sawka's no-nonsense, straight-ahead film portrait of the artist – that "Every picture should be a masterpiece." You hear that kind of talk a lot lately, but you get the impression, looking at the indelible images that saturate Sawka's 75-minute documentary and listening to the Magnum co-founder discuss the making of his artwork, that the late Woodstock photographer really meant it.

Filming in his "Articulate Image" class at the Omega Institute, Sawka lets the camera roll and lets Stock discuss what he does best: making art – and what an experience that has been, creating some of the most famous images in the world. Stock's photo of the not-yet-famous James Dean walking in the rain in Times Square is listed by the BBC as one of the most famous photographs of all time. "He was just this little guy on Broadway trying to make it," says Stock. And it was followed by perhaps Stock's most famous series – "I call them little movies" – of Dean back home in Indiana, just before he broke through to stardom with his first film, John Steinbeck's East of Eden. "It was a kind-of 'you can't go home again' look at Jimmy," says Stock, "because he couldn't. He had gone beyond that little town in Indiana."

Besides his fame through the Dean photos, Stock is responsible for so many other of the images that have become "iconic": photographs of the Golden Era of Hollywood, jazz greats, the hippie generation on the communes, landscapes from the Old West to Provence in southern France and many more images recognizable to mainstream magazine readers and artists alike. But this look at Stock's work is much more than just a bio in photographs, as Sawka, who grew

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up in High Falls and has four award-winning short films to her credit, gets inside the artist, goes beyond the "iconic" and finds the man behind the beautiful and evocative pictures.

Stock provokes and cajoles his class at Omega, telling them that "You must be glorious in your own imagery and how you share it with others," that "A bit of aggression is fundamental" in the taking of pictures and that "The image must become indelible." He is a self-described curmudgeon, telling his class that he "hates affectation in photography" and that he feels that the Photoshopping of pictures "changes the intuition into something that is disruptive, false. It could start a war...We have to be careful about Photoshop."

In describing his approach to his own photographs, Stock tells us that he is more than just a photographer, a taker of pretty pictures: "I'm a photo-essayist – a storyteller, after all." That he is, indeed. And with that insight, Sawka has done us a favor. She has told us a story about this seminal American artist just before his passing (Stock died in Woodstock in 2010) and given us not only the brilliant and iconic images, but also the thoughts and feelings behind them.

Hanna Sawka's *Beyond Iconic: Photographer Dennis Stock* will be presented in a special screening at Upstate Films in Woodstock this Sunday, March 3 at 1:30 p.m. The screening will be followed by a reception at the Center for Photography at Woodstock, with live music from the composers of the moody film soundtrack, John Menegon and Teri Roiger.

Sawka's plans for her next film is a feature-length romantic comedy that explores the weekender versus local population dynamic through a reverse Pygmalion love story, shot entirely in the Rosendale/High Falls area. "It's a humorous look at the community around me," says Sawka.

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