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Dennis Stock

- James Dean -

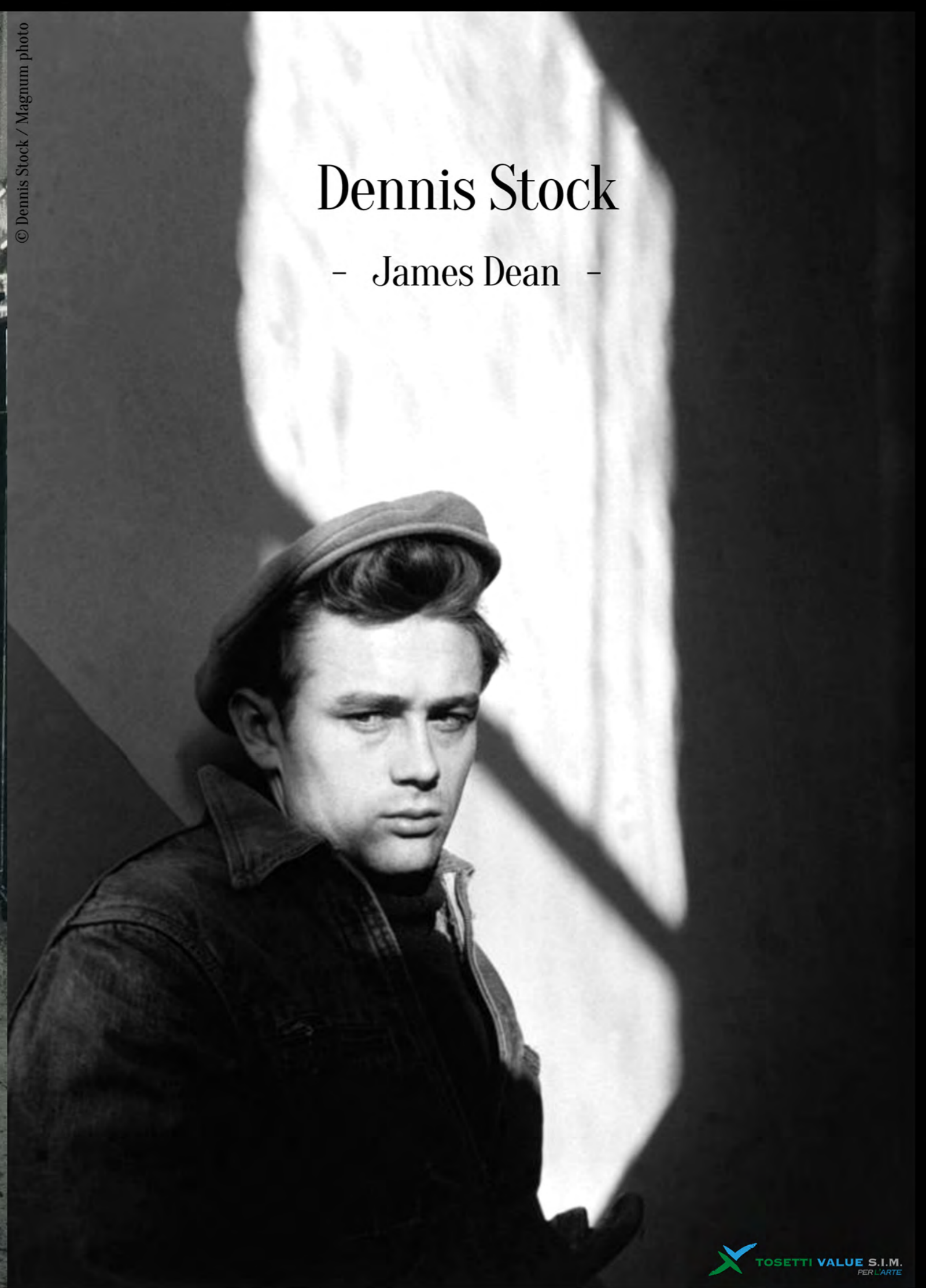
BIOGRAPHY

Dennis Stock

Born in 1928. American.

Lives in Woodstock, New York and Provence. Joined Magnum in 1951.

After working as an apprentice to the photographer Gjon Mili from 1947 to 1951, Dennis Stock won first prize in Life magazine's Young Photographers contest in 1951. He met James Dean in Hollywood in 1955 and photographed the star there and in his native Indiana. From 1957 to 1960 he photographed jazz musicians. Taking a leave of absence from Magnum in 1968, he set up a film production company, Visual Objective Inc., and produced several documentary films. He has shot many colour stories on nature and landscape, living and working in Provence since 1979 and also Woodstock, New York.



As an already established photojournalist in Hollywood, I had access to stars and movie events. On Sundays it was customary for Nicholas Ray, the movie director, to hold soirées at his bungalow on the grounds of the Château Marmont. Nick, an East Coast maverick, did not host singularly social affairs but rather offered the opportunity for talented people to meet weekly, exchange ideas, and form new ties. People from every part of the film industry converged on his little white bungalow on Sunday afternoons in the winter of '54-'55. The jugs of wine and the heated discussions somewhat reduced the superficiality that we experienced the rest of the week on the sound stages and in the offices in Hollywood. Amid the animation of gesturing hands and passionate discussions, I stood somewhat removed and shy; like most photographers, one foot in and one foot out.

Nick noticed my reserved appearance and led me up the small flight of stairs to a corner where a young man reclined, in a mood that seemed similar to mine.



We both awoke to the moment of our host's gracious introductions. I, the photographer, was presented to James Dean, the actor, and with that, Nick departed. There was nothing terribly imposing about this bespectacled young man. At first, his responses to my brief inquiries and observations were monosyllabic. But as the wine flowed more abundantly, so did our conversation. Relaxed, Jimmy asked about different aspects of photographic techniques, and I happily obliged as best I could. Inevitably the conversation touched on his work, and on his most recent job. In a casual way he mentioned having completed a film with Eli Kazan called *East of Eden*; I drew a blank, for I had neither read the book nor heard trade rumors about the production. We didn't pursue the film any further, but shortly before our conversation ended Jimmy invited me to attend a sneak preview of *East of Eden* the following Wednesday at a Santa Monica theater. With a nod and an "I'll see you there," we parted.

Midweek, I went to the shabby neighborhood movie house, totally unprepared for an experience that initiated a major chapter in my life. Jimmy's unassuming manner at Nick's had ill prepared me for the brilliant performance I experienced that night in *East of Eden*. [...]

There was no question that a star was born with the first public screening of *East of Eden*, for the entire audience applauded loudly as the house lights signaled the end. It took a few moments for me to reconcile the image of Cal with that of the unimposing, reserved young man of the previous Sunday night. What I knew was that I had to do a story on James Dean.

FAIRMOUNT, INDIANA

By the time we arrived at Fairmont, Indiana, shooting on *East of Eden* had been completed but the film had not yet been released. Still, the townspeople sensed that James Dean was somebody special. The local papers had followed his blooming career; he had already appeared on television. But as yet no one suspected the full proportions his frame would assume. Jimmy's parents moved to California when he was six. Three years later, on July 14, 1940, his mother, Mildred Dean, died of cancer. His father, a dental technician, stayed on in California, but Jimmy was sent back to Indiana to be brought up by his aunt and uncle, Ortense and Marcus Winslow, in Fairmont, where Jimmy's grandparents also lived. It is probable that Jimmy never got over his mother's death, but it is nonetheless hard to imagine a better home, for a boy in such a situation, than the Winslows'. They were Quakers, and as Jimmy's grandmother Emma once said of them, "Both are wise and gentle. Theirs is like a Quaker home should be. You never hear a harsh word there."

NEW YORK

Times Square. Jimmy haunted it. For a novice actor, in the fifties, New York was the place to go. Theater was thriving, and television was alive and well. The Actors Studio, directed by Lee Strasberg, was in its heyday. So when James Whitmore, Jimmy's first drama coach in Los Angeles, said to him, "Go East, young man," he went. And in many ways, Jimmy felt more at home in New York than in L.A. It seems that Jimmy's life in New York revolved around a very narrow area of blocks, the center of which was Times Square. I've often speculated that Jimmy's preoccupation with the drums was more an interest in sound than in the instrument itself: drums, motorcycles, sports cars all vibrated with a powerful sound to which he responded.

HOLLYWOOD

Back in Hollywood, Jimmy tried to resume old routines, but a combination of his instantaneous fame and his own quirky, complicated personality made that difficult. He still hung out at Googie's, but anonymity, even there, was a thing of the past. Meanwhile he was preparing to film *Rebel Without a Cause*, which Nicholas Ray had persuaded Warner Brothers to make after the property had languished on their shelves for seven years. It was the first movie of the new nine-film contract. Now poverty was a thing of the past, and with ready cash available, and credit no problem, Jimmy began buying bigger and faster racing cars. He made no bones about it with the studio executives that racing interested him far more than acting, a statement that obviously failed to endear him to them, for two reasons: it was an affront to their corporate and creative dignity; and they felt that damn kid would end up getting hurt, thus endangering their investment on any film in progress. Jimmy's latest acquisition was a four-thousand-dollar Porsche Speedster, which in the spring of 1955 he entered in a race at Palm Springs. He not only won in the amateur class but came in third among the professional divers, and this only whetted his appetite for more and better races.

