

**News Release**  
**Public Information**  
**Department**

April 2003

**Exhibition of Paintings for Pulp Magazine Covers of the Mid-20th Century on View at Brooklyn Museum of Art, May 16–August 31, 2003**

**PLEASE NOTE CHANGE IN EXHIBITION CLOSING DATE**  
**Press Preview Thursday, May 15, 10 a.m. to noon**

*Pulp Art: Vamps, Villains, and Victors from the Robert Lesser Collection*, an exhibition of more than 100 now rare paintings created for the front covers of popular fiction magazines in the first half of the twentieth century, will be on view at the Brooklyn Museum of Art from May 16 through August 31, 2003.

*Pulp Art*, which will tour to venues to be announced, has been organized for the Brooklyn Museum of Art by guest curator Anne Pasternak, Executive Director of Creative Time, Inc.

Many of the paintings in *Pulp Art*, most of them from the 1930s and 1940s, will be presented alongside the printed magazine covers for which they were created. Often melodramatic, even lurid, these images were intended to catch the eye as dozens of magazines competed for attention on crowded newsstands.

Among them were titles like *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, *The Shadow*, *Doc Savage*, *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, *Terror Tales*, and *Spicy Mystery*. Their covers illustrated potboilers sometimes written by such noted American authors as Ray Bradbury, Zane Grey, and Louis L'Amour, who often published under assumed names. Called "pulp" fiction because of the cheap paper on which they were printed, the magazines were produced by companies such as Street & Smith and Popular Publications. Usually, the publishers purchased the images outright for their magazines, churning out copies by the thousands for audiences hungry for the inexpensive entertainment they provided before the advent of television.

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The paintings were created in accordance with the publishers' needs. Most measured approximately 30 by 21 inches, with room left at the top for the title, author, price, and a story blurb to be stripped in. Once photographed, the paintings were often discarded or destroyed. Or, they would be covered over by another painting, because the canvas and its stretcher were considered more valuable than the painted image. Now, only a few hundred, out of an estimated fifty to sixty thousand of these paintings, are known to have survived.

To be arranged thematically, the exhibition will examine how these works illuminate the popular culture of the inter-war years and reveal the racial and gender stereotypes of the time. By today's standards, many of the images—which often focused on scantily clad women in jeopardy and manly acts of derring-do in exotic locales—betray sexist or racist attitudes. Examined more critically, however, they also tell of the deep-seated fears and concerns of different segments of society during an era of sweeping change.

*Pulp Art* will include some of most important cover artists of the day, whose work was so much in demand that they were often booked a year in advance. Among them are J. Allen St. John, Rafael de Soto, Virgil Finlay, H.L. Parkhurst, Frank R. Paul, and George Rozen. The exhibition will explore how these artists drew upon art historical prototypes to create dramatic impact. Another section of the exhibition, containing works by present-day artists, will suggest the enduring influence of this art, which continues to both fascinate and repel.

The exhibition is made possible, in part, by the Third Millennium Foundation and by AOL Time Warner Book Group. Additional support is provided by Steve Kennedy and Mr. and Mrs. Andrew J. Sordoni III.

For 30 years, Creative Time, currently headed by guest curator Anne Pasternak, has presented public art in some of the most compelling public spaces—from bridges and parks to billboards and skywriting--but the organization is perhaps best known for its leadership role in presenting the two towers of light commemorating those lost at the World Trade Center.

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Robert Lesser is a New York–based playwright and longtime collector of a wide variety of items of popular culture. In addition to his extensive holdings of pulp art, from which the works in the exhibition have been selected, he also has a remarkable collection of toy robots, seen at the BMA in the exhibition *Robots and Space Toys: The Robert Lesser Collection* (November 10, 2000–February 1, 2001).  
End

Contact information for press only:

Sally Williams (718) 501-6330

James Gordon (718) 501-6334

Adam Husted (718) 501-6331

### **GENERAL INFORMATION**

#### **Admission:**

Contribution \$6; students with valid I.D. and older adults \$3. Free to Members and children under 12 accompanied by an adult. Group tours or visits must be arranged in advance by calling extension 234.

#### **Directions:**

**Subway:** Seventh Avenue express (2 or 3) to Eastern Parkway/Brooklyn Museum stop; Lexington Avenue express (4 or 5) to Nevins Street, cross platform and transfer to the 2 or 3. **Bus:** B71, B41, B69, B48. On-site parking available.

#### **Museum Hours:**

Wednesday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; First Saturday of each month, 11 a.m. to 11 p.m.; all other Saturdays, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day.