

REFLECTIONS ON THE MAKING OF *The Enduring Legacy of Pulp Fiction Magazines*

Researching and writing *The Enduring Legacy of Pulp Fiction Magazines* brought discovery, and in that a broad range of conflicting reflections. As is the lurid and fantastical nature of the magazines, I was morbidly fascinated by the collection. They have been through an entire lifecycle, from cheap paper pulp to exquisitely vibrant and detailed prints, copies issued in their millions for 10¢ each. They mark and physically embody the rapid mechanization of print over the 20th century. Today, original copies are rare, and generate huge revenue between collectors (a first edition of *The Shadow*, 1931, was sold for \$156,000 in 2021). Despite their scarcity they have been resurrected online, with 30,000 different covers available to view in digital archives compiled by dedicated fans. When asked if I would ever want to own them myself however, I was certain in saying no.

My response to the magazine covers was immediately emotional. The once relatively low-key adventure stories evolved into garish and explicit men's magazines, their content deeply connected with the historical turbulence of the time. The shocking violence of the world wars became intertwined with the gender politics of the post war period. Sexual violence and misogyny were made not only titillating and normalised by the magazines, but subtly (and not so subtly in some editions; 'You Asked for It', 'Kill Now, Pay Later', 'She'll Get Her's) made a device to validate a threatened masculinity. It seems obvious that in a generation of traumatized soldiers coming to grips with their new social footing, still indoctrinated with the violence of war, that a backlash would follow. Thus the market was taken by the ravages of the capitalist boom and age of mass reproduction. I felt sympathy for this, especially when today I am constantly questioning the same issues of consumption and overwhelming content. Yet more strongly I felt sadness and anger. The legacy of the pulp fiction magazines and their content is, as I discovered through my research, truly enduring.

Possibly softened but never abandoned, the pulp aesthetics cite and continue much more shocking attitudes of the past. Sometimes they are even revived, glamorised and made cool, as in Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fictions* (1994). Unpacking the evolution of these images allows us to see that the apparently harmless aesthetics of today belong to a tradition which still carries overtones of violence and misogyny that have been legitimised as part of our media and world. My research has only made me more determined, therefore, to dissolve these legacies. It also offered me a new way into materiality and the lifecycle of materials. Making my own paper pulp has revived my love of physical process, and it feels like the start of something exciting. I have discovered just how large and prominent the pulp fiction impact has been in contemporary media, but have also felt personally impacted. My simultaneous admiration and disgust has sparked an exciting dynamic in me, and has inspired me to keep using my work to bring attention to the issues that matter, and hopefully, make change.