
The Illustrated Press publishes lavish volumes celebrating the lives and works of pulp artists who lack formal recognition within the discipline of art history, due to the content and venue of their work. This latest volume explores the oeuvre of pulp artist Hugh Joseph Ward and his visual legacy to American popular culture during his brief career. This study is a biographical narrative, rich with memorabilia from the artist’s life and education, such as class photographs, high school yearbook illustrations, and family photos as well as his drawings and paintings of family members, some of whom served as models for his book covers and characters.

Ward’s art work produced during the 1930s and 1940s consisted of idealized and sexualized semi-nude females on the brink of sexual exploitation and torture by semi-human villainous brutes represented by an ethnic ‘other’. Saunders’ analysis of the art works provide context for the escapist nature and cheap thrills of male entertainment art and literature. The scenario of distressed damsel and villain is incomplete without the idealized male hero, and it is for these characters that Ward should be best remembered. The artist was commissioned to visually represent radio characters of the 1930s and 1940s, and the author spares no detail in displaying the preparatory drawings and completed paintings of radio heroes The Lone Ranger, Tonto and Silver; The Green Hornet and Kato, and most importantly Superman for whom Ward’s brother-in-law was the model.

The author, David Saunders, is a pulp art historian, son and biographer of artist Norman Saunders, whose works included pulp novels and magazine covers, men’s adventure magazines, and comics. The author, an artist in his own right, is represented in museums including the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The quality of the illustrations is outstanding in all of their lurid color and chiaroscuro. The prose is blunt and unpolished but conveys the sincere respect and empathy of the author for his subject.

This monograph does not replicate other published volumes because its focus is one particular artist. However there are recent publications that address specific collections of pulp genre such as Men’s Adventure Magazines in Post War America: The Richard Oberg Collection (Taschen, 2004) which covers the decades of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s after Ward’s death. A survey such as Danger Is My Business: An Illustrated History of the Fabulous Pulp Magazines: 1896 – 1953 by Lee Server, (Chronicle Books, 1993) provides greater historical context. Saunders’ volume includes a unique list of Ward’s illustrations.

The audience for this title is pulp art enthusiasts, comic lovers and illustrators; it is recommended for art school collections.

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