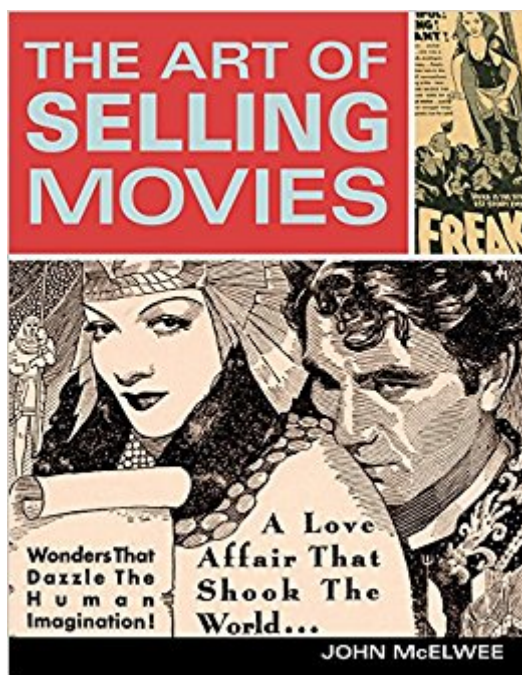


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# The Art Of Selling Movies



## Synopsis

The Art of Selling Movies presents the first-ever look at 60 years of newspaper advertising for motion pictures great and small. These ads created by Hollywood and adapted by local and regional exhibitors motivated patrons to leave their homes, part with precious income, and spend time in the dark. Because of the high stakes involved, theater operators used wildly creative means to make that happen. They made movie advertising equal parts art and psychology, appealing to every human instinct (especially sex) in an effort to push product and keep their theatres in business. From the pen-and-ink masterpieces of the 1920s and 30s to location-specific folk art to ad space jam-packed with enticements for every member of the family, The Art of Selling Movies dissects the psyche of the American movie-going public ... and the advertisers seeking to push just the right buttons.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"The Art of Selling Movies" represents the King-Kong-sized collection of hundreds of images and clippings gathered by John McElwee and reproduced through the use of innovative restoration technology. The three-hundred-plus pages of old newspaper ads, along with witty captions, effectively opens a velvety curtain into movie Americana." — "Foreword Reviews" Decades™ worth of yellowing movie ads pack historian John McElwee's new volume with lurid, eye-seizing drawings and feverish copy. Such is the legacy of the many theater owners who in years past commissioned ads made solely to push product, whether through sex, star power, FOMO bullying,

technological gimmickry, live (yes, live) pony giveaways, appearances by quintuplets, and all-around hysteria. McElwee celebrates the work of the "folk artists" tasked with creating something grabbing (and sometimes beautiful) in a small box. Fatty Arbuckle is trumpeted as "the best known fat man on earth." A Cabinet of Dr. Caligari plug covers all the bases: "Great! Rotten! Fine! I Don't Get It! What's It All About?" Ad copywriters further tweaked their tone to match national or local tenor. Of course, the illustrations are the draw here, with sensational copy (1917's Cleopatra promises exactly "1,000 Marvelous Scenes") sharing space with massive faces like a cut-out Norma Shearer shouting, "I Can Take Care of Myself In Your Man's World!" in the liberated A Free Soul (1931), or the painstakingly rendered visages of Gable, Lugosi, and Kong. McElwee runs the lovable blog Greenbriar Picture Shows, likewise devoted to what he calls cinema's Classic Era (generously stretching from the earliest silents to the mid-'60s), and his brisk commentary here has the same folksy wry color. The rich survey is often funny, never dull, delivering "Sights and Thrills You May Never Behold Again!" "Film Comment" Lovers of old Hollywood and cinema history will be spellbound by The Art of Selling Movies, a 300-page treat packed with photos and vintage advertisements. (My favorites date from the fifties, specifically ads run by small-town newspapers to promote genre fare. One, a spider with a skull's head, is particularly memorable) Featuring everyone from Valentino and Pickford to Bardot and Hitchcock, this is a wonderfully entertaining and insightful coffee table tome. "The Film Stage" would like everyone reading this book to come away proclaiming movie ads a great lost art," declares John McElwee. It's unlikely his wish will come true, but that's no detriment to The Art of Selling Movies, a panorama of newspaper advertising from the early teens to the end of the 1960s. McElwee's lively and informed commentary runs through more than 400 examples of the strident black-and-white collages that have crammed the entertainment pages of America's far-flung press. McElwee has a consuming fascination with the process that brings Hollywood's astronomically costly products to hometown audiences. The importance of his broad collection is that these ads came not just from the great urban centers, but also spoke for neighborhood cinemas in obscure townships across the States. These neighborhoods were often far away, in every respect, from the studios and executive offices of classic-era Hollywood. "Washington Post

John McElwee is a lifelong film enthusiast who is a blogger on the Greenbriar Picture Show website, has taught and lectured on film, and has programmed extensively for colleges and universities. He has consulted on various documentaries about Hollywood history and contributed to DVD release of

classic films. His feature articles have appeared in *Film in Reviews*, *Monsters from the Vault*, and *Noir City Annual*. He is the author of *Showmen: Sell it Hot*. He lives in Wilkesboro, North Carolina.

The lost art of selling movies is on display here in all of its glory. Everybody in the motion picture business should order a copy for everyone in their employ.

Great newspaper ads for a vast variety of films.

There was a time when there weren't 500 channels of TV, no Netflix, no seeing first run movies in your home shortly after they were released. A time before cell phones, before the internet, before cable television, before television itself, before even radio became widely available. There was a time when people had to go out for entertainment. They went to the movies. The places people went to ranged from small theaters with hard wooden seats, the movies sometimes sharing a stage with live vaudeville acts, to palatial buildings with giant screens: Movie Palaces, with plush seats, velvet curtains, balcony seats, tiny stars twinkling in a false sky overhead. To go to one was special, an event. This book, *The Art of Selling Movies*, covers what the author calls the classic era of movies, from their first showings in the late 1800s (!) as a novelty addition to the live stage shows of vaudeville, into the early years of the 1900s silent movies (Charlie Chaplin, Theda Bara, John Barrymore, Rudolph Valentino), the advent of sound, the 1930s, 40s, 50s, into the mid 1960s (Elizabeth Taylor, Steve McQueen, Paul Newman, the Beatles). Its focus is the print advertising for those films. Movie theaters had to get the word out to people, draw them in, get them to buy a ticket, come take a seat. They did this in several ways: first through the architecture of the movie houses (which could be grand and exotic), then with marquees and posters, but most importantly, with newspaper ads. Today if you pick up a newspaper, you might only see the name of a multiplex, a list of movies and showtimes. But the ads of theaters from the past, those ads tried to capture you. They were the enticements, the promises, the art, the stars, that tempted and attempted to draw an audience, paying customers. They might be well done, polished, perhaps by the movie studios. Or they might be a local job by a small cinema, trying to get by. They might be a few inches on the page or they could take up a quarter, a half, sometimes a whole page of the newspaper for a single movie theater's shows. This is one of the best types of books of its sort, a little information and lots of very good photographs and reproductions of the ads. After the introduction, words become sparing, the movies take over. You lose yourself in page after large page of movie ads, broken into chapters arranged somewhat by years, somewhat by topic. *The Art of Selling Movies* is full of

expansive pages of pictures of the ads, and some of the theaters, with captions giving just enough info that you know what's going on. The movie art is front and center, the star. The reproduction of the ads is clear, done well, and you can lose yourself in reading the movie advertising, the stars, the art, the double features with newsreels and cartoons, maybe even live entertainment. The variety of a single screen theater might offer hours of varied shows, and they wanted you to know it. If the first half century plus of movies interests you, if you enjoy the nostalgia of earlier times, if you remember some of those ads from when you were a kid, this is likely a book for you. It is well done and with genuine love of the subject. This review is based on an Advance Reader's Copy I was provided through Netgalley.

The Art of Selling Movies by John McElwee is a free NetGalley ebook that I read in early November. Far more than the book I wanted this to be - where I thought McElwee would simply gather up lobby cards and posters, then 'paste' them like a scrapbook, he takes the time to not only post newspaper clippings chronologically, but also according to philosophical theme (i.e. movies that promote products, portraying pre-show acts or theater theme nights, a movie that's garnering a lot of bad press and gossip, movies that shouldn't be seen by the weak-hearted or the morally innocent, promotions that use recent slang or puns, intricate ink & paint sketches, positively critiqued movies and ones that stay in a theater for multiple runs, new film technologies and sound options, and appealing to different audiences).

It sounds almost a little dramatic for me to say that Mr. McElwee's latest book THE ART OF SELLING MOVIES is a work of art in itself, but I have no other words that can adequately convey my first impressions of this obvious labor of love, which was gleaned from his lifetime interest in motion pictures. Beautifully illustrated with hundreds of digitally "restored" newspaper clippings of theater ads from the silent era to the late '60s, the author has produced yet another classic piece of film literature to match its predecessor SHOWMEN, SELL IT HOT, with entertaining prose and lavish graphics celebrating Hollywood's long gone days of glory. Sweeping in its breadth, "THE ART" is too much to digest in one sitting, much less in ten: It's the kind of book that one "lives with" for years to come, which is the best kind.

Movie lovers, rejoice! Hollywood history buffs, rejoice! This is, perhaps, the ultimate coffee table book for you. In this generously illustrated volume, film firms John McElwee not only takes readers on an historical trek through the movies and their cultural significance in America from their origin

through the 1950s, but he also provides a lesson on the various ways poster art was used to commercial advantage. In the book's gorgeous illustrations, we see the evolution of movie advertising--as McElwee guides is through the historical and cultural climate of the times. A lovely book.

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