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## From Shadow to Light: The Life Art of Mort Meskin

*Steven Brower*

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#2400965 in Books 2010-10-04 Original language: English PDF # 1 12.40 x 1.00 x 9.501, 2.88 #File Name: 1606993585224 pages | File size: 48.Mb

**Steven Brower : From Shadow to Light: The Life Art of Mort Meskin** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised From Shadow to Light: The Life Art of Mort Meskin:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Forgotten Comic Book Master By Harry Mendryk Mort Meskin is a forgotten comic book artist. So forgotten that a few years back he failed to be voted into the Eisner Hall of Fame. However his career spans over the formative years of comic books, from 1938 to 1965. There is nothing deserving about this neglect as in his day Meskin was a favorite of many readers and fellow artists. What has been needed to correct this was a book that would outline his career. A formidable task for such a prolific artist. Fortunately Steven Brower has successfully authored just such a book. "From Shadow to Light" is just filled with examples of Meskin's artistry. The book's large dimensions allows comic book pages to be viewed at a size greater than their actual printing. The book size also is perfect for the many examples of original art that are provided. This volume is filled with art from Meskin's early superhero features, his mid career work for genre comics, his late horror work and finally his post-comic book career and personal art. Mort was a master of graphic story telling and here the reader will find two

complete and previously unpublished stories (one superhero and one crime) to show why that is. With such a large quantity of beautifully reproduced art the reader might find it hard to tear themselves away from just viewing Meskin's art. Take all the time you need on this visual feast, but do not neglect to read the biography that Brower provides. I have described Meskin as a forgotten comic book artist but he was not forgotten by his fellow artists. Here masters like Steve Ditko, Joe Kubert, Alex Toth, Jerry Robinson and more explain why Mort Meskin was so important to them. Meskin was a shy and reclusive person but through many interviews and research Brower has put together a great portrait. While a masterful artist, Meskin was also a troubled individual. Meskin's personal problems will bring to mind other troubled artists like Van Gogh and Rothko but unlike the tragic end of those artists, Meskin's story is inspirational. While as a fanboy I would have loved to have talked to Mort about his art, after reading "From Shadow to Light" I suspect that had I would probably have spent most of my time talking to him about his philosophy of life. There are a lot of books about comics being published. This is a certain sign that comic books are finally getting the recognition that they deserve as a true American art form. It can, however, be financially overwhelming. All I can say is that "From Shadow to Light" is one book you do not want to miss. You will not miss this book if you are already a Meskin fan but if you are not it will make you one.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. About TimeBy CustomerMort meskin seems to have been neglected by comic fans over the years. I hope this book will remind fans just how good Mort Meskin was and perhaps introduce his work to those who do not know his art. When I was a eight or nine year old reader of comics in the late forties I would jump over the lead stories of Superman and Batman to get to the Vigilante and Johnny Quick stories. The stories were always good but it was the artwork that made them stand out. Rather than showing the speed lines as the Flash, Johnny Quick was shown in multiple poses to depict quick movement. Mort Meskin's artwork is equal to the best of Simon and Kirby, even the large detailed splash pages. This book covers the thirty year career of Mort meskin with over 200 pages to work with. Steven Brower has done a nice job. Very nice intro by Jerry Robinson, also. Great book, don't miss it.

6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. The Best Designed Monograph of a Comic Artist I've SeenBy AndromedaFrom "Shadow to Light" by Steven Brower is gorgeous. The scans of Mort Meskin's art came out beautifully. There is a good balance of pen and inks, pencils, sketches, splash pages, covers and interior work. There are scans of the original artwork as the artwork - with white out and all; there are unfinished pencils, pulp short story illustrations; there is a full, unpublished story shot from the original art work. There are examples of Meskin's ad work and private fine arts work, which ranged from pen and ink illustrations, water colors, sketches, to abstract expressionistic paintings. Meskin's art is shown at it's best, each cover and splash gets a full page, rarely are pages cropped. The focus of the book is on the work of the artist, not the designer (also Steven Brower), and is designed to show Meskin's art at it's best. In my opinion this is the way comic artist monographs should look. Fantagraphics published Blake Bell's *Fire and Water: Bill Everett, The Sub-Mariner, and the Birth of Marvel Comics* at about the same time, and tho there is a similar variety of Bill Everett's artwork, and some of it looks very fine, in my opinion it has some real design flaws. Quite often there are four covers/splashes to a leaf - sometimes even 4 interior pages, which I find ineffective - covers are meant to grab and hold your eye, so four to a page is distracting. Many of the covers are printed at quarter size and included on text pages as well, and at that size it is impossible to appreciate the detail of the line work. There is a premium on quantity rather than quality, to no purpose really. The designer (not sure if it's Bell) often used Everett's art as collage material, creating melanges of pages and panels, that don't show off Everett's work at it's best. Much of the artwork is cropped, to fit more panels on a page, or to focus on a certain image, or due to ill chosen caption placement - there are pages where the captions are pushing the artwork either off the page, or into the crease. By contrast, Brower carefully arranged text and art pages so that captions are placed on pages with text if need be. Brower's design is used to frame Meskin's work, and to display it to best effect, it is clear Steven has a deep and abiding respect for Meskin's art - as art, rather than pop culture kitsch. Brower is more effective in using the examples of Meskin's artwork with his text, he doesn't just follow the timeline of Meskin's life. For instance, he shows us Mort's mastery of facial expressions, his use of film techniques, juxtaposing scenes from "Citizen Kane" with Meskin's work and an interview with Robinson wherein he talks about the influence Orson Wells had on his and Meskin. The text is well written and informative, without going into pointless detail. I know there are readers who want to know everything about an artist, but personally, I don't find any use in knowing the names of grade schools, the color of houses, the brand of detergent used. There is an emphasis on Meskin the artist, with a good balance between the personal and professional, with much of the text devoted to teaching us about Mort's style and technique. Steven credits Mort's sons as co-writers because he interviewed them extensively, and they help us understand both the man and the artist. They tell charming stories about how Meskin made them rocket ships out of cardboard and tape, and how Meskin would even draw on paper towels when he was bored at work. Brower starts with a quick history of American comic books, which was both informative for those who don't know it, but concise for those of us who do. He got great interviews from Jerry Robinson and quotes many workmates of Meskin's. I am not a visual artist, tho I studied art in college, my natural abilities lay elsewhere, so breaking down specifics about art is not natural to me. Brower's text helped me analyze Meskin's abilities in using shape and negative space. For instance, I was able to see how he used negative space to make folds in clothing, rather than drawing the folds. When I first read that Meskin covered his art board with a thin sheen of pencil, and then used an eraser to mark out shapes, I could not

grasp how that affected his art. Brower used quotes from Robinson and Toth to help me see it clearly, so by the time I got to the unpublished Golden Boy story I truly understood how Meskin's technique worked. For instance a character's mustache was created with negative space, and had a fullness and weight to it that was a direct result of Meskin's erasing technique. I could see how characters were formed out of the spotted blacks. I know others disagree, but I personally think comic art is shown to its best effect in black and white, so the use of the Golden Boy full story, at that point in the text, was a brilliant stroke, because it illustrated and supported everything that had been written about Meskin's technique, and much more effectively than a 4 color story would have, or another group of covers. The only criticism I have is that I was unclear how Meskin's technique changed after he got out of the hospital and started working for Simon and Kirby. His work obviously had to match up with the house style, so I would have liked to hear more art analysis of that time period. Other than that I was right with Mr Brower. I hadn't seen much of Meskin's work before reading "From Shadow to Light," so I had trouble with it, now I know what to look for, and have a far greater appreciation for his illustration style. The text of the Golden Boy story was somewhat poorly written, and usually that drives me crazy, but I hardly noticed it because I was marveling at Meskin's use of body language and facial expressions to tell the story. By contrast, "Fire and Light" gives us a lot of detail about Everett's personal life, and mostly tells us about his professional life in terms of statistics: when he worked for whom, what characters he worked on, what was going on in the publishing world at the time - but Bell tells us nothing about Everett's process as an artist. There is almost no analysis of Everett's artwork and writing, and I have no better understanding of Everett as an artist than I did before I read the book. I learned a great deal, about Meskin reading "From Shadow to Light," what a fine human being he was, but also, what a talented artist he was, how he achieved his unique style, why other comic artists admired him so much, why Jack Kirby himself said Mort was a better artist than him, and I learned a lot more about comic art in general. I can give no higher praise. I can't recommend this beautiful book enough. One last thing - I fervently hope Fantagraphics gets Brower to edit a collection of Meskin's work, I'll be one of the first to pre-order it, because now I'm hungry to read more Meskin.

Career-spanning biography-cum-artbook on near-forgotten golden age comics master. Mort Meskin was a consummate professional, dedicated to his work. A great talent. Jack Kirby. *From Shadow to Light: The Life and Art of Mort Meskin* is a coffee table art book and critical biography of one of the twentieth century's most influential comic book artists. Meskin's career spanned both the Golden and Silver ages of comics, from the 1940s to the 1960s. His drawing, chiaroscuro technique, and storytelling are considered by connoisseurs of the form to be among the most sophisticated of his time. His passion for his artwork was equaled by his skill, and the quality of his overall oeuvre blurs the artificial distinction between high and low art. Yet he is known mostly among hard-core aficionados today, eclipsed by many of his peers, some of whom he profoundly influenced. Among Meskin's fans and admirers are Jim Steranko, Joe Kubert, Alex Toth, Carmine Infantino, Steve Ditko, Jerry Robinson, and Jack Kirby. *From Shadow to Light: The Life and Art of Mort Meskin* will finally give this neglected artist the recognition he's due. The first artist to draw Sheena of the Jungle, Meskin's work appeared in such diverse genres as romance, true crime and western comics. Following World War II he formed a studio with the legendary Jerry Robinson, co-creator of *The Joker* and *Robin*. He later worked for Joe Simon and Jack Kirby's company SK Studio and with Stan Lee at Atlas (Marvel). During the 1950s and 60s he helped DC Comics define their mystery and science fiction lines. And there is one aspect of Meskin's voluminous creative output that has yet to be examined: his personal art. *From Shadow to Light* compiles for the first time the best of Meskin's art from his comic book career, his post-comics career in advertising, and his fine art. Many of the comics pages are scanned from the original art, thanks to the cooperation of the Meskin estate. Mort Meskin's story is one of perseverance and overcoming personal demons. It is the tale of the indomitable spirit of a true artist and innovator. *From Shadow to Light: The Life and Art of Mort Meskin* will finally set the record straight and add his name to the pantheon of comic book artists who helped create this distinctly American art form. 220 pages of color comics

From Booklist Recent years have seen a growing interest in the early years of the comic-book industry, shining a light on the pioneers of the art form. Few individuals are more deserving of this attention than Meskin, whose abilities surpassed nearly all of his contemporaries. One of the few comics artists of the era who had formal training (at the Pratt Institute), Meskin's illustration skills, panel compositions, page designs, and dramatic lighting displayed a sophistication that was largely wasted on the mundane superhero and genre stories of the 1940s and 50s. Although Meskin's work is today known only to hard-core comics aficionados, he was a major influence on artists who went on to far greater renown, including Joe Kubert, who learned from inking Meskin's pencil drawings as a teenager, and Steve Ditko. Brower, a former art director at the New York Times, supplies revealing biographical information, insightful critical assessments, and, most of all, page after page of Meskin's brilliant work, much of it reproduced from the rare original drawings. --Gordon Flagg  
About the Author Steven Brower is an award-winning former Creative Director for Print, a former art director at the New York Times and The Nation, co-author and designer of *Woody Guthrie Artworks* (Rizzoli, 2005), and author of *Satchmo: The Wonderful Art and World of Louis Armstrong*

(Abrams, 2009). He is on the faculty of Kean University in Union, NJ, Marywood University in Scranton, PA, and The School of Visual Arts in New York City.