

Femme Fatale *The female criminal*

Woman is rarely wicked, but when she is, she is worse than a man. Italian proverb



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Nerida Campbell is available for interview.

The book is published in conjunction with the *Femme Fatale* exhibition, 7 March 2009 – 18 April 2010 at Sydney's Justice & Police Museum. www.hht.net.au

Cover image: *The postman always rings twice*, lobby card (detail), 1946. Courtesy National Film and Sound Archive.

With pulsating red lips and a curvaceous figure, the femme fatale is coolly criminal and dangerous to know. Sexy and seductive, she manipulates and murders on the pages of pulp fiction and on film noir screens. Meanwhile, the real female criminal, serves hard time.

Photographs of some of Australia's most notorious female criminals provide a stark contrast to the glamorised femmes fatales of popular culture presented in a new pictorial book published by the Historic Houses Trust.

With rare photographs taken at Long Bay Gaol between 1914 and 1930 from the vast forensic photography archive at Sydney's Justice & Police Museum, author Nerida Campbell introduces the brutal reality of notorious female criminals such as Eugenia Falleni known as 'the man woman murderer', Muriel Goldsmith the prolific thief with a string of aliases and the women who ruled Sydney's underworld in the 1920s like Matilda 'Tilly' Devine, a successful brothel keeper with a penchant for violence.

These women stand in stark contrast to the glamour of the film noir seductress and pulp novel siren, such as the unforgettable Hedy Lamarr as Delilah in the 1950 classic *Samson and Delilah* and Leslie Brooks as Claire Cummings in the B-grade film *Blonde Ice*.

Mae West said "When women go wrong men go right after them", perhaps reflecting the strange attraction bad girls exercise over the movie-going public. Pulp fiction artists helped define the femme fatale look of luscious lips, big eyes, revealing dresses and bold expressions.

Campbell's captions accompany the fictional and real-life femmes depicted in the book giving us insight into the crimes they committed.

This stunning hard cover photography book, featuring over 60 full colour and black and white images, illustrates how dangerous women both entice and appal us.