

Louise Brooks To Shine In Orinda

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Louise Brooks

On Saturday, March 1st, author Robert Murillo will read from his new [Louise Brooks](#) inspired novel, *The Vanity*, at [Orinda Books](#) in Orinda, California.

[The Vanity](#) is a breezy, cleverly-written, Jack Finney-esque work of [fiction](#) involving time travel which centers on Brooks, the silent film star, and a set of compromising pictures taken when she was still an aspiring actress. Also figuring in the story are her former husband, the noted director Eddie Sutherland, as well as a contemporary admirer named Mike.

Based on many factual elements, the book is a what-if fantasy set in the years 1927 and 2011. Mike lives in what had been Sutherland's house, where an old piece of furniture still resides containing risqué images of Brooks.

The Vanity pivots on a vengeful Sutherland, who in 1927 has plans to turn the pictures over to the *Los Angeles Times*—unaware that an exposé will not only lead to his and Brooks' banishment from the movie industry, but to her suicide and his murder. Knowing their futures, Mike must decide if he should somehow try to stop Sutherland from publishing the photos in the past. If he does, he realizes he would be altering the past, and in doing so, changing history.

In a statement, Murillo explained his attraction to the story: "I fell in love with Louise Brooks the moment I spotted her in one of those clunky coffee table books. There was just one picture of her—taken in 1927—not much bigger than a postage stamp. We stared at each other for a few seconds before I realized she was seducing me and—like so many others—I fell. Hard."

Robert S. Murillo taught English for more than ten years before a career as a financial adviser. Today, he spends most of his time writing fiction; *The Vanity* is his first novel. He considers J.D. Salinger, Ray Bradbury, and Jack Finney to be the writers who have influenced him the most, though he also appreciates the likes of F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, and John Steinbeck. Murillo lives near Berkeley.

Orinda has an unusual connection with Brooks' career. The Bay Area community was the one-time home of Fay Lanphier, one of the stars of *The American Venus* (1926), Brooks' break-out film. (Lawrence Gray, who also starred in *The American Venus*, was raised in San Francisco.)

Lanphier was Miss America in 1925, the first Californian to win the honor. As a renowned beauty, she was offered a film contract, starring in a major Paramount release, *The American Venus*, the storyline of which centers on a beauty contest. Despite her charms, Lanphier's film career never really took off. She appeared in only one other film, a Laurel and Hardy short called *Flying Elephants* (1928). She died at the age of 53 in 1959 in Orinda.

Orinda Books is located at 276 Village Square in Orinda. Murillo's talk and book signing is set for 1 pm.