

cowboy peers out from around the cover of the thin spine of a paperback, or *Slim* (2004), in which a cowboy strides purposefully across the blank pages of a book, casting a tall, thin shadow. "Untitled" has always frustrated me," says Allen. "But I don't like titles that have to explain what you're looking at, either."

Allen's work could be compared with that of David Levinthal, an artist he admires, or Abelardo Morell, whose "Alice in Wonderland" series from 1998 consisted of constructions made using cutouts of John Tenniel's original illustrations. Like these artists, Allen builds miniature constructions out of recognizable pop-culture artifacts or images. But where Levinthal

often begins with loaded symbols (soldiers, porcelain figures in blackface, or figures of Jesus, for example), Allen begins with symbols that most would consider kitsch (though it's hard not to appreciate the terrific illustrations on those paperback covers). And while Morell's black-and-white images deconstructed a work of classic children's literature, Allen's photographs celebrate the particular qualities of the pulp-fiction novel—it is cheap and disposable, a little tawdry, and unfailingly entertaining. But there is more to Allen's images than simple amusement. His photographs have to do with the way books come to life for their readers.

"I was an avid reader as a kid," says

Allen, who chose dog-eared, well-worn paperbacks to embody the way books, particularly paperback fiction books, are consumed. These are not precious objects, physically speaking, and they are not literary masterworks. They are cultural artifacts whose themes and morals are immediately familiar. By creating scenes in which the action is distilled to its essence—a seduction (in *Thirst*), a standoff (in *Bear or Upshot*), or a tense, suspenseful moment (*Cover or Teeter*)—Allen reminds viewers what is so compelling about a good story.

*Thomas Allen's work is on view at the Foley Gallery in New York, January 11, 2007 – March 3, 2007.*



*Pounce*, chromogenic print (20 x 24 in.), 2006