

24th New York queer experimental film festival

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Friday, November 18, 2011 · 8:00pm

How The West Was Won: A Bob Mizer Film Sampler Part 1

\$12 ·



Total Running Time: 61 min.

Bob Mizer's earliest photographs appeared in 1942, in both color and black & white, but his career was catapulted into infamy in 1947 when he was convicted of the unlawful distribution of obscene material through the US mail. The material in question was a series of black and white photographs, taken by Mizer, of young bodybuilders wearing what were known as posing straps - a precursor to the G-string. He would serve a nine-month prison sentence at a work camp in

Saugus, California for what now seems tame. At the time, however, the mere suggestion of male nudity was not only frowned upon, but also illegal.

In spite of societal expectations and pressure from law enforcement, Mizer would go on to build a veritable empire on his beefcake photographs and films. He established the influential studio, the Athletic Model Guild (AMG) in 1945 with one or more heretofore- unidentified partners, but by the time he published the first issue of *Physique Pictorial* he was operating the studio on his own. With assistance from his mother, Delia, and his brother, Joe, he would go on to photograph thousands of men, building a collection that includes nearly one million different images and thousands of films and videotapes.

Robert Henry Mizer was born in Hailey, Idaho on March 27, 1922 to Delia Mizer, a recently widowed mother. Five years later she would move, along with her two youngest sons, to a home in Los Angeles, where she took in boarders to support her family. The home at 1834 West 11th St. would become the centerpiece of the AMG compound -a small Hollywood-style studio that spanned four city lots. Here Mizer would build an internationally known photography business, producing images that focused on representations of American masculinity. In his fifty years as an artist, he photographed bodybuilders, US servicemen, male prostitutes, and his fair share of cultural figures, including Victor Mature, Alan Ladd, Susan Hayward, Arnold Schwarzeneger, Joe Dallesandro, and others.

He died of cardiac arrest at White Memorial Hospital in Los Angeles on May 12, 1992. During his fifty-year career, he influenced artists like David Hockney and Jack Pierson, and was instrumental in bringing the works of others, like Tom of Finland, to the public's attention. Following his death, the contents of Mizer's home and studio were either discarded, given away, or salvaged. This collection was housed largely in public storage units and residential garages until 2004, when photographer Dennis Bell purchased the photographic collection and what remained of the Mizer estate.

With donations and purchases from Mizer's friends and contemporaries, some of whom rescued props and equipment from abandonment, Bell founded the Bob Mizer Foundation and has since managed to gradually rebuild the estate, which is now part of the Foundation's permanent collection.

His works have been published and discussed in multiple journals and books, including *Bob's World: The Life and Boys of AMG's Bob Mizer* (Taschen, 2009) and *The Complete Physique Pictorial* (Taschen, 1997), and have appeared in galleries and museums all over the world.

The work is currently represented by Exile gallery in Berlin, Germany, where the exhibition "The Private Bob Mizer," curated by Billy Miller, debuted earlier this year, showcasing the artist's never-before-seen pioneering color photography.

Mizer began making films in the 1950s and as times progressed, his films reflected changes in both the adult film market as well as the society at large. The sampling here is mainly culled from the 1960s and gives a small taste of his output during that period when laws and the adult market was evolving. Mizer's films were originally produced and distributed to be viewed privately; then in the late 60s they were shown at theaters, and then later still, as the market changed and the videotape was introduced, his product was once again consumed in the viewer's private domain. This program is not meant as a mini-retrospective but simply as a sample of a certain period of production.

— Billy Miller, guest curator, in conjunction with the Bob Mizer Foundation.