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## Go west, young man

by **John Brendan** on February 21, 2011

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Photo courtesy of BMF and EXILE

"There are certain requirements to being a viable commercial gallery," says EXILE's founder, documentary photographer Christian Siekmeier. Siekmeier opened gallery-cum-project space EXILE on Mitte's Alexandrinenstraße in 2008. After 24 exhibitions, EXILE round one closed in summer of 2010. Siekmeier explains: "Everyone loved the garage door. I loved it, but it wasn't practical."

The gallery's new space on Köpenicker Straße lies just west of the listed GDR Eisfabrik, surrounded by multimillion-euro Mediaspree real estate developments. The building looks either half-erected or half-destroyed. It is to be fitted with a gated entrance: an art compound at the centre of a gridded development.

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The new EXILE's opening exhibition – the world's first solo show dedicated to American photographer Bob Mizer – is, in a sense, a celebration of a compound of another kind. When Mizer's mother and closest confidant died in 1964, he turned her LA home into an infamous and prolific studio. Ten hours a day, until his death in 1992, Mizer photographed men who made his poolside chaise lounges their home.

'Resident-models' ranged from wholesome athletes to gay-for-pay SoCal hustlers. He discovered Joe Dallesandro before Andy Warhol, and he captured Arnold Schwarzenegger in a leopard-print bikini brief, child held overhead. Born in 1922, Mizer pioneered the objectified male form, founding his studio, the Athletic Model Guild, in 1944 and later establishing *Physique Pictorial*, considered the first American gay rag. He went on to do time in farm prison for distributing pictures of Johnny instead of Jane, but was later exonerated.

Working with the newly formed Bob Mizer Foundation, Siekmeier and Miller have selected 26 never-before-seen, never-before-printed slides from a cache of more than a million works. Including aerial bondage and Christ crucified with an erection, the portraits show a playful use of color, penchant for dramatic settings and Mizer's desire to push boundaries – of society, himself and his models. Never a part of the 'art scene', Mizer's commercial output through AMG subsidized his personal ambitions. The EXILE show is a research project as much as an art exhibition, the first attempt to comprehensively identify the artistic vision Mizer captured beneath the California sun.

**BOB MIZER: SELECT PRIVATE WORKS 1942-1992 | Through March 19**

## Exile Gallery

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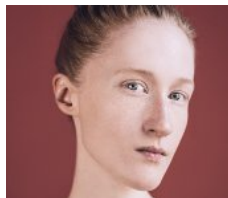
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