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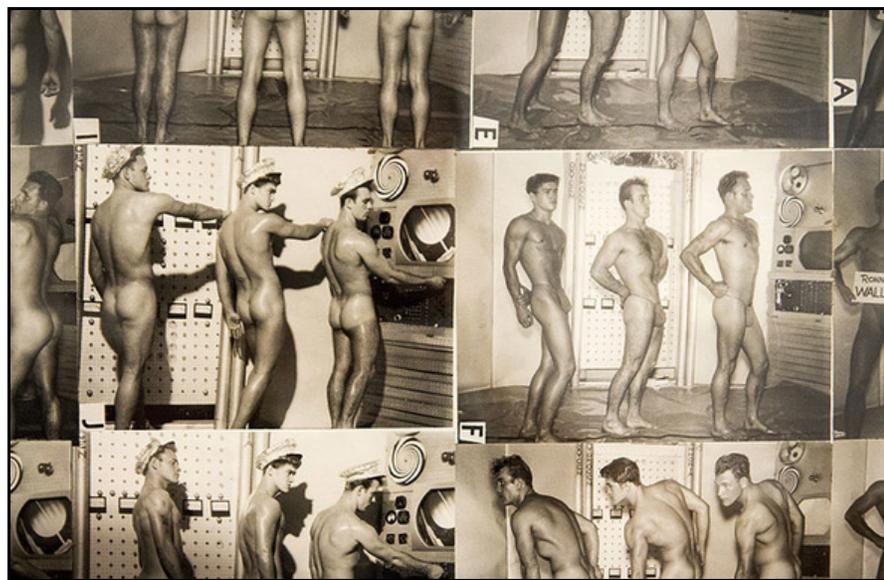
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Bob Mizer, MOCA Pacific Design Center

Getting to the Bottom of the Homoerotic Art of Bob Mizer and Tom of Finland

A load of exhibits are in the works that showcase the midcentury homoerotic photographs of Bob Mizer and, perhaps more notoriously, the drawings of Tom of Finland (aka Touko Laaksonen), he of exaggerated bulges, lurid male-on-male gazes, leather scenes, and occupational fetishes. The largest of these exhibits, "Bob Mizer and Tom of Finland," has just opened at MOCA Pacific Design Center in Los Angeles, the first museum to examine the

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daring work of the two artists, who were often at odds with the law. It spans five decades and runs the gamut from tame to lewd, humorous to subversive.

We asked filmmaker-archivist and **Bob Mizer Foundation** president Dennis Bell and artist-curator and BMF vice-president Billy Miller (also editor of the infamous gay fanzine Straight to Hell) to bring us up to speed on the changing landscape of homoeroticism in the art world.

As custodians of the Bob Mizer Foundation, can you tell us how long you've been working on this exhibition and how the idea started?

Billy Miller: There are a few major exhibitions happening in the next several months highlighting different aspects of Bob's art and times. "Bob Mizer & Tom of Finland" at L.A. MOCA, curated by Bennett Simpson and Richard Hawkins, explores the art and connections between those two figures. The Mizer materials are specific examples of catalog boards used in the production of his groundbreaking publication *Physique Pictorial*. "**DEVOTION: Excavating Bob Mizer**," opening November 23rd at 80WSE gallery NYC, combines a few ideas the Bob Mizer Foundation has had in mind for the past couple years. Curator Jonathan Berger added a performative aspect, so now New York University students from different departments will be working on discovery, archiving and restoration projects in the middle of the gallery for the entire run of the show. We're excited to show the public a peek into the material and how much work is involved. There are around a million and half negatives, thousands of films and videotapes, costumes and other archival materials in the collection, and a very sizable chunk of it is being shipped to New York. Considering that much of the material will be unseen, since Mizer himself placed it in those boxes, everyone who visits the gallery will be a part of the process. SALVOR Projects has created a related installation utilizing Mizer imagery at NYU's "Broadway Windows," on view 24/7. "**Art & Physique Circa Bob & Tom**," curated by David Frantz, opens November 9th at the ONE Institute, while **L.A. Invisible Exports NYC** is featuring Bob's art at this year's Miami Art Basel fair. Bob's work is additionally featured currently in a large show at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris titled "**Masculin / Masculin**." And, there's a solo show happening this spring at **EXILE Berlin**, which we're looking forward to. Different ways of looking at Bob Mizer are beginning to unfold.

Dennis Bell: The exhibition at NYU is in a sense a progress report of the archiving effort we've been undertaking at the the Foundation for the past several years. It's not the pinnacle, as there is still a very long ways to go, but this is the first time we have the opportunity to show off the physical work and workflows of cataloging Mizer's work. A couple of years ago, we had a successful kickstarter.com fundraiser, which allowed us to purchase a large amount of archival materials to re-house Mizer's negatives. We have volunteers at the Foundation who donate their time towards this effort. Carrying this archiving process to other institutions as an installation piece was Jonathan Berger's idea, and we'll see how it works. We are only about 20% of the way through Mizer's vast output, and this exhibition is a way to show off not only Mizer's physical negatives, but also some of the amazing unseen images we have discovered along the way.

Did you know Bob Mizer before he died in 1992? What would he have thought about being the center of attention at MOCA, etc.?

Billy Miller: I met Bob towards the end of his life in conjunction with the publication I edit called Straight To Hell. It's difficult to say how he would have reacted to a wider acceptance of his art, but I suspect he would have adapted to it as he did with other changes in his life.

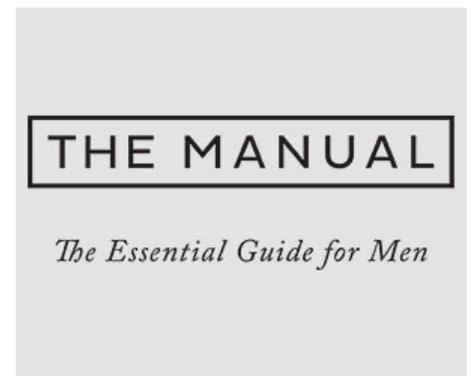
The work of Bob Mizer and Tom of Finland intersected in the early issues of Physique Pictorial. How well did they know each other?

Dennis Bell: Mizer and Laaksonen didn't actually meet for about 20 years after Mizer first began showing his work in *Physique Pictorial* in 1957. There is a lot of discussion about who first influenced who, and that will always be debatable. All I can say is I've seen plenty of Mizer photographs of shirtless sailors alone in the forest being watched by other uniformed men that date back to at least 1951.

How has acceptance of male erotica changed since Bob Mizer and do you think gay rights are going in the right direction now?

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Dennis Bell: Perhaps one of the most important ideas the work of these artists shows is what obstacles our predecessors had to cross just to see some skin 50 years ago. It's interesting today to watch a younger generation try to figure out all these "types," "fetishes" and "niches." Today, young gay couples just want to get married, have kids and live in the suburbs. We're approaching a new era.

Straight to Hell magazine is infamous and very different from Bob Mizer's polite portrayals of men. Where does polite end and explicit begin?

Billy Miller: The first thing that comes to mind is Bob's big-dicked Jesus on the cross, a Nazi bent over and spreading his ass in an occult ritual, Tico Patterson's huge erection poking out of a burial casket, and thousands upon thousands of spread asses, macro shots of raging boners, blowjobs, fucking, hanging bondage, cum-covered faces, and synchronized asshole puckering that went on in his later films and photos.

Dennis Bell: Bob Mizer's images cannot be fairly called "polite." He went to prison and had years of legal troubles simply for creating images that, in their own time, were as subversive and controversial as any image you see today in Straight to Hell. You have put it in context. In the 1950s, naked male bodies with only an outline of a cock seen through a posing strap were just as explicit...probably more so.



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