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THE BLOG

# The Wonderful, Sexual World of Bob Mizer (NSFW)

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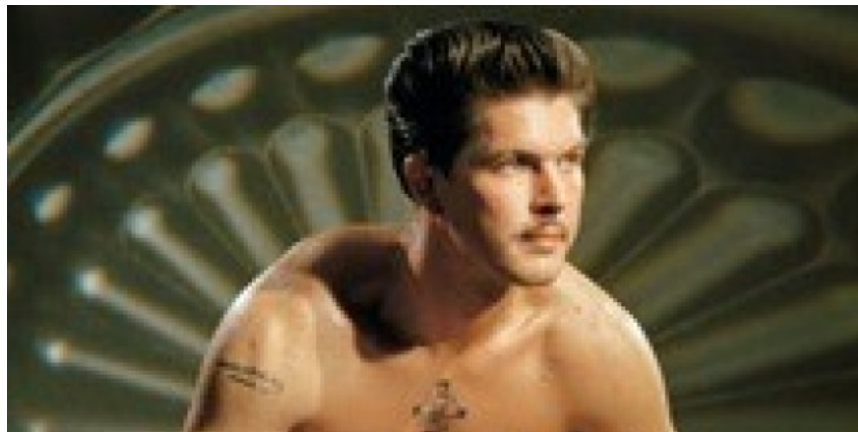


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Billy Miller

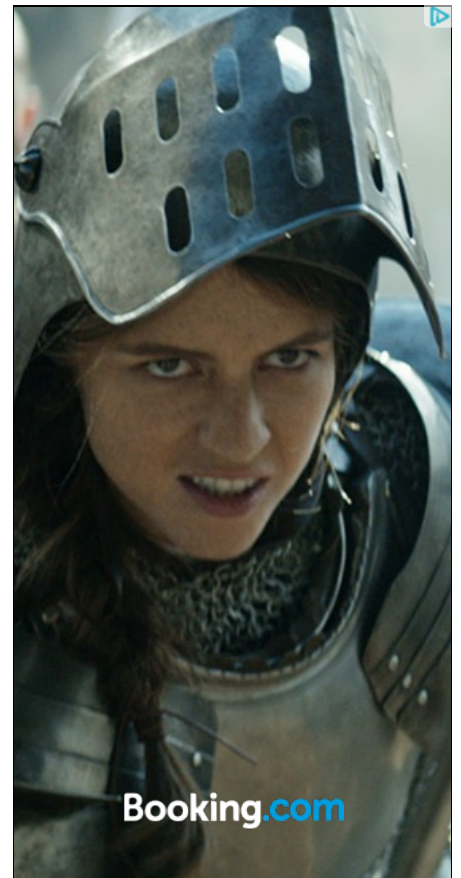
Artist, curator and independent publisher; VP, Bob Mizer Foundation



BOB MIZER FOUNDATION

The art of photographer, filmmaker and independent publisher Bob Mizer (1922-1992) first revealed itself to me by chance one momentous spring afternoon in the late '60s. I grew up in the ghetto of Detroit, and in the tenement where I lived, all but one of our windows faced an alley. On that afternoon, several of my junior high school buddies and I were hanging out in my room, and one of my pals spied the neighborhood's "dirty old man" hiding something in a trashcan. My friends and I wanted to see what that was all about, so we went down, got the bag out and dumped the contents on the ground.

Out came a collection of homo porn of the '60s variety (before "gay" would have been used to describe it), mainly those muscle boy chapbooks like *Grecian Guild*, *VIM* and, notably, Bob Mizer's *Physique Pictorial* — along with a couple more hardcore magazines. This was the first time I'd ever seen anything like that. It was a revelation: My heart and mind were racing. My pals picked them up, flipped through the pages a bit, and started throwing them around and laughing; then, after a few minutes, they tired of it and headed off. Although I left with them, I hurried back to investigate, stuffed as many as I



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could into the same paper bag, and went to the park and into the bushes, where I pored over them for a long time. I wanted to bring them home, but there was nowhere to hide them in the small apartment where we lived, so I stashed them in the bushes and returned the next day to study them again. And, man, did I ever study that stuff! When I came back the day after that, my stash had been discovered and was gone, but the memory of those images was the inspiration for many jerk-off sessions to follow.

Those books revealed an exciting world to explore, but at 12 I didn't have a clue about how to step into it, although a few years later I stumbled into an opportunity to do so. I hated school and started playing hooky, eventually dropping out, hanging out downtown and becoming a street hustler. Around that time, I got a part-time job working for another dirty old man who ran a used bookstore with stacks and stacks of porn (mostly kept out of view and available by request only). Working there afforded me the opportunity to carefully study those things for as long as I pleased. It was then that I discovered that Mizer wasn't just one of the pack but in fact the leader and the most prolific of them all. I also saw how his product was different from everything else. It was erotic, but it had a unique aesthetic that set it apart in key ways.

In the late '70s I moved to Chicago and found Boyd McDonald's *Straight to Hell* chapbook series at a bookstore there. That was a revelation of a different, though kindred, sort. And I couldn't fail to notice that Mizer's imagery was everywhere in *STH* and on almost every cover. As nutty as it may sound, it was also significant to me the Mizer, McDonald and I had the same initials, which gave me the sense that there was some sort of higher meaning and purpose to it all, as if they were talking to me in particular and I were somehow destined to discover all of this. For me, Bob Mizer and Boyd McDonald were as important as da Vinci or Socrates and remain so.

I wrote to Boyd McDonald, and he wrote back. So when I moved to NYC in the '80s, I wanted to meet him. Long story short, we became close friends for many years. Toward the end of his life, he abruptly announced that I was going to be the next editor-publisher of *STH*. I could never be as brilliant as Boyd was and have never even tried, but I've kept the same format of true, reader-written sex histories, and that's something that will always work, because it's a direct, uncensored document of real homosexual desires. The other thing I wanted to do was meet Bob Mizer, which I did on a couple of occasions near the end of his life. Just like Boyd, Bob was encouraging and lived up to my expectations, and then some. Boyd and Bob died around the same time; I miss them both and sometimes think about all the great things they could have done had they lived just a few years more, since they both died right at the dawn of the Internet age.

After Bob's passing I called the number he gave me several times to try to figure out what was going on with his estate and if we could still feature his work in *STH*. Twice I got his lawyer, Wayne Stanley, who told me that he was going to start taking photos (a statement that astounded me, since he didn't sound like he knew what he was doing), and I also talked to his assistant, the artist John Sonsini, who has since become a good friend, although it took us a couple of decades to meet in person.

A few years ago I noticed that Bob's studio, Athletic Model Guild, was being

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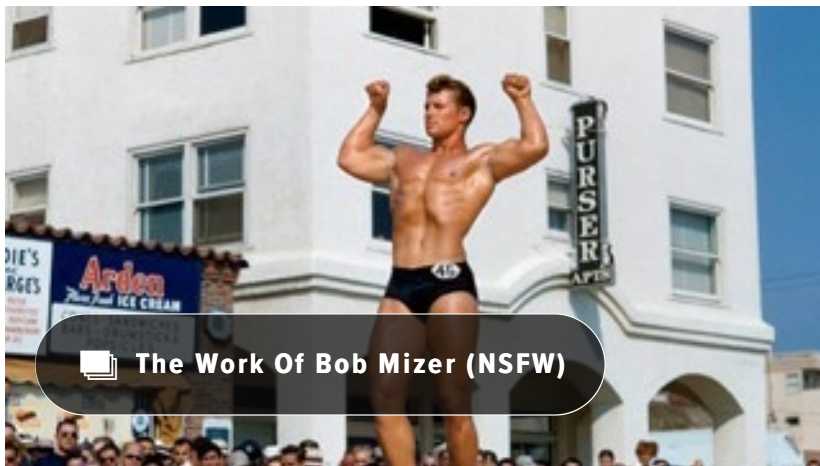
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revived by filmmaker Dennis Bell. I also found the AMG blog, wrote to the designer Chris Trout and asked if it might be possible to promote AMG again in STH. While working on an ad for AMG, Dennis and I began plans for other projects. Mr. Bell is the world's leading authority on all things Mizer, and a mutual friend, Trent Dunphy of San Francisco's The Magazine, has said that he was born to do what he does now and I tend to agree. When I found out that Mizer's mother's maiden name was Bell, well, it all seemed to fit.

There are an estimated million and a half individual images, thousands of films, plus costumes and other archival material in the collection, which will take a very long time to archive and present. The Bob Mizer Foundation is really a larger group of people who are too numerous to mention here (but they know who they are!), and the show at the MOCA in Los Angeles, along with the upcoming New York City and Berlin shows, will further expand understanding and appreciation of this important artist and cultural figure.

As more material comes to light and a more nuanced network of influence and connections is realized in the process, the deeper and more expansive the picture becomes.



Bob Mizer & Tom of Finland *opened Nov. 2 at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in Los Angeles.* DEVOTION: Excavating Bob Mizer *opens Nov. 23 at the NYU Steinhardt School's 80WSE gallery in New York City.* Please visit [the Bob Mizer Foundation's official website](#) for more information. [Billy Miller](#) is also editor of [Straight to Hell](#).

More: [Bob Mizer](#)

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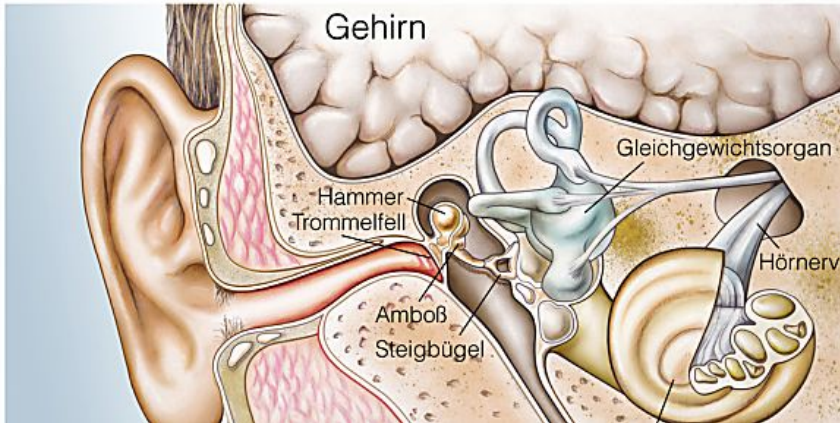
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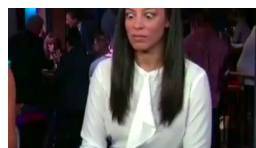
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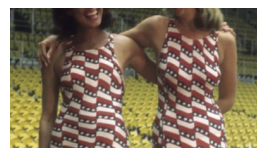
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