

TOM OF FINLAND

b. May 8, 1920

d. November 7, 1991

ARTIST

“My whole life long I have done nothing but interpret my dreams of ultimate masculinity, and draw them.”

Five Tom of Finland's drawings are featured in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art.

Tom of Finland was an artist whose sexually charged drawings of musclemen made a significant impact on gay culture. He is known as the most influential creator of homoerotic images.

Born Touko Laaksonen in a small Finnish town, he was the son of two school teachers. At 19, Laaksonen moved to Helsinki to study advertising and began drawing erotic images.

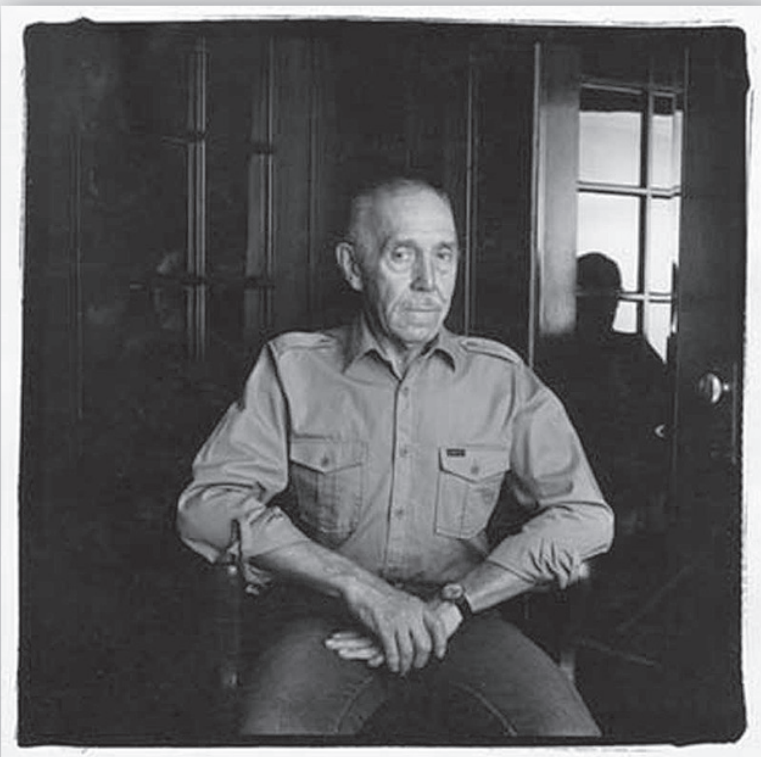
In 1957, he submitted drawings to Physique Pictorial, an American magazine, under the pseudonym Tom. When his gay-themed illustrations were published, the magazine credited Tom of Finland, a name he assumed for the remainder of his career.

Tom introduced to mainstream culture a stylized masculinity in sharp contrast to the effeminate stereotypes of gay men. His work, which embraced sailors, bikers, lumberjacks and construction workers in leather and jeans, became popular and widely distributed in the gay community.

In the late 1950s, U.S. censorship codes restricted depiction of “overt homosexual acts” and limited the distribution of Tom’s work. In the 1962 case of *MANual Enterprises v. Day*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that nude male photographs were not obscene. As soft-core gay pornography flourished, Tom’s illustrations became more explicit, including exaggerated musculature and genitalia.

By 1973, Tom was publishing erotic comic books and exhibiting his work in the mainstream art world. In 1984, he cofounded the Tom of Finland Foundation, which is dedicated to the preservation of homoerotic artwork. In 1995, the Tom of Finland Clothing Company introduced a fashion line based on his art.

Tom created more than 3,500 illustrations in his four-decade career. Five Tom of Finland’s drawings are featured in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art. Harvey Miller, an art patron, said, “Tom of Finland is one of the five most influential artists of the 20th century. As an artist he was superb, as an influence he was transcendent.”



© EQUALITY FORUM

lgbtTM
HISTORY
MONTH

www.lgbtHistoryMonth.com

Copyright © 2013 – A Project of Equality Forum