

Giving you something different to do

Tom of Finland, the underground illustrator of gay sex fantasies, is enjoying something of a come back. **Katie Coyne** takes a look at the history of the over-sexed Scandinavian icon.

CARTOON CAPERS

The late cartoonist Touko Laaksonen, better known as Tom of Finland – once said: "If I don't have an erection when I am doing a drawing, I know it's no good".

Born in 1920, Tom's early non-erotic sketches of the loggers and manual labourers of his native Finland are seen as an outlet of juvenile homosexuality and a means of escape. Homosexuality was illegal in Finland until 1971 and Tom even kept these innocent drawings secret.

While he was a child he developed an obsession with patent leather boots and begged his parents to buy a pair for him. He secretly wore them to bed until his mother caught him.

By 1939 Tom was living in the Finnish capital city of Helsinki studying art. During this time Finland made a pact with Germany to repel the Russians who had invaded the country.

Tom found the German officer

cers, in their smart uniforms and shiny leather boots, irresistible and he says that all of his early sexual experiences were with German soldiers. Tom told documentary makers of the 1991 *Daddy* and *The Muscle Academy*: "No one made a uniform like the Germans. And the boots!"

"I work very hard to make sure that the men I draw having sex are proud men having happy sex"

While Tom's preoccupation with the masculine physique can be clearly traced back to his childhood, this period confirmed and fuelled his obsession. Tom's later drawings depict engorged crotches of exceptionally well-endowed males with exaggerated male physiques.

Tom faced criticism that he glorified the Nazis but fans defend

him saying his obsession with the German army look was apolitical. With the release of the film *The Wild One* in 1953 starring Marlon Brando, Tom's characters shifted to a biker look. Brando's leather jacket had a similar cut to the Wehrmacht jacket and the style of his boots and hat were also reminiscent of the German uniform.

After the war Tom couldn't fit into the Finnish underground gay scene where, at the time, queerness was associated with effeminacy. It was against Tom's nature to act the fey fop and so he chose, instead, to continue drawing out his masculine man-to-man sex fantasies.

However, during the 1950s encouraged by work of the artist George Quaintance, Tom unleashed more hyper-masculine characters in his art that were more to his own personal taste.

In 1956 he sent some of his drawings to the American muscle magazine *Physique Pictorial* and publisher Bob Mizer immediately recognized Tom's talent. By 1960 Tom was the main artist working on the publication and in 1968 he created his famous character *Kake* – the dark haired, moustached

muscle man. *Kake* wears leathers and usually a t-shirt emblazoned with the words "fucker".

Tom's work was also ground breaking in that it showed kissing and caressing in male gay sex as well as fucking and sucking.

He summed up his work saying: "I work very hard to make sure that the men I draw having sex are proud men having happy sex."

Buy the book

Tom of Finland the Comic Collection is out now published by Taschen priced £19.99.



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Cock-sure: Tom of Finland wanted to draw gay men as proud and happy while enjoying highly vigorous sex lives.