

IF BOOKS are about a marriage of subject, content and style, then it is hard to beat the production values established by Taschen. Each new volume from the repertoire of the Arts and Media division, is a triumph of design married to subject. Taschen's highly successful *Collecting Contemporary* was issued in a diary like format, with rounded corners and an expanding tie, at once an object of desire matched by a dynamic content. The treatment given to *The Wonderful World of Bill Ward* is equally as alluring.

Bill Ward (1919-1998) was essentially an accomplished illustrator who developed a speciality at which he became the unassailable master. Ward's signature was the glamour girl, a completely sexist, non-PC representation of the American woman, which started life as a light hearted character called Torchy in a wartime GI magazine. The UK had its own equivalent in the *Daily Mirror's* dippy Jane cartoon, but whereas Jane innocently giggled her way into numerous silly situations, Torchy sashayed her way through life oozing sex appeal and smarts.

After the War, Ward developed this character into a full blown sex siren, and the busty, long legged starlet in stilettos was born. Ward's method was the sepia Conte crayon tonal drawing, which naturally lent itself to publishing by taking on a photographic quality when coloured in, and from the 1950s onwards his work appeared in a mass of what used to be known as 'mens magazines'. This success lasted until photography started to dominate the genre, a imagery a lot more explicit – but strangely less erotic – than Ward's drawings. In the decade that spawned *Playboy*, Bill Ward had to change his style to survive and he did this by developing a line in fetish characters which brought him into contact with transvestites and lifestyle bondage clubs. He rapidly attained cult status within this hidden world.

It would be a mistake to dismiss Ward as a cheap pornographer pandering to a salacious audience, using the drawing medium to avoid the full attention of the law. Many artists who attempted to imitate his style have failed miserably, and of those that used some of Ward's extreme imagery for inspiration, a few are cult comic hero's themselves, most notably Robert Crumb. It's true that Ward did enter a bad patch in his career, when social mores changed and the permissive 60's heralded in the *Deep Throat* era. He was forced to turn his skills to suggestive cartoons – a vulgar and more overtly sexual version of the seaside postcard, but without the element of innocent fun embodied by Donald McGill. He also illustrated lingerie



catalogues selling risqué underwear (to good effect) and a host of 'adult reading' story magazine covers. All these artworks are now collector's items and Taschen have done an outstanding job in presenting the complete Bill Ward, sourcing images and examples from the many facets of his long career. Ward's original works are now avidly sought after by collectors across the world. Produced in a large format and in full colour, using a cartridge paper stock that reproduces the qualities of the originals perfectly, this book is itself destined to become a collectors item.