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# THE KAKE MAKER



*Haydon Bridge on a new compilation of some of Tom of Finland's most famous drawings...*





**THERE ARE GOOD-LOOKING GUYS**, classically beautiful men, and drop-dead gorgeous hunks. And then there is complete and utter perfection, the fantasy males created by artist Tom of Finland. Tom's men are Michelangelo's, it's true, but they're raunchier than David and literally ten times as impressive in the trouser department. Also like David, Tom's men are timeless. What's extraordinary about Tom's most famous character, Kake, whose sexcapades have now been collected together for the first time in Taschen's *The Complete Kake Comics*, is that after 40 years he still looks and dresses exactly like the guy we'd like to climb through our bedroom windows tonight. (That's what happened in the first Kake comic book in 1968.) Tom not only created the definitive gay leatherman, he put him in situations that still work as fantasies in 2008. It's hard to think of an artist who's had more influence on gay lifestyle than Tom of Finland.

The international success of the Tom of Finland brand has resulted in the artist's real name, Touko Laaksonen, and career becoming relatively well-known in gay circles. Last year QX helped commemorate the 50th anniversary of Tom's first published drawings in the American magazine *Physique Pictorial*. In the 1950s and 60s Tom's work was regarded as pornographic. But it was Mabel Lucie Attwell compared to what was to come. In 1968 Tom created his perfect man, Kake, a dark-haired, hairy, muscle-god in leather, who enjoyed casual, no-strings sex in parks, toilets and bars, often with similarly built (and hung) guys in uniform. From the very beginning the Kake drawings were hardcore. They couldn't be published anywhere except Denmark, which had just become the first country in Europe to abolish censorship. Elsewhere the little Kake comic books became underground legends.

Because Kake was aimed at the world market (the few words that appear with the pictures are always in English), it's surprising that Tom's publisher didn't demand a name change for the sexual superhero. (Another Tom character, Vicky, quickly became Mike). Although Kake works in Finnish (pronounced "car-kay", it means "butch"), the word sounds silly in English. But that didn't stop Kake and other Tom drawings changing gay society. Tom mixed his favourite images to create the archetypal leatherman, which has survived decades of changes in fashion. He also helped break down once rigid gay stereotyping by having the predominantly active Kake also take the bottom role.

Whether Tom did this with any sense of purpose is unlikely. He admitted that he was mostly indulging his own fantasies, which are obvious from *The Complete Kake Comics*. Originally inspired by German soldiers and Finnish labourers, Tom switched almost completely to an American look, mainly to please Bob Mizer, publisher of *Physique Pictorial*. Tom's men, who all look the same, are exaggerated versions of American comic book heroes. But they do the kind of things we wanted Superman to do, like reject his girlfriend and fuck another guy (see Kake 6). Very often Kake will spy on someone and then, while the two are having sex, a third guy will arrive and join in. Some of the Kake comics, which ended in 1986, when the AIDS panic was at its height, are by today's standards sensationally politically incorrect, mainly because of rape and sexual violence (see Kake 14, "Sadist.") But art often involves "going too far", and it's probably the galleries of the world who have exhibited Tom of Finland that are more reliable arbiters of what is acceptable than the moral minority that has disapproved of his fine work for more than 50 years.

**The Complete Kake Comics by Tom of Finland is published by Taschen and available in Prowler and Clone Zone and all good bookstores.**

