

SPECTATOR

Books

# Ladies' Man

*Tom of Finland is well-known for his hypermasculine drawings of men, but with the publication of the massive new Taschen book Tom of Finland XXL, readers get a glimpse of his rarely seen portrayals of women*

By DIAN HANSON

**"I NEVER LEARNED TO DRAW WOMEN BECAUSE I COULDN'T FIND ANYTHING ATTRACTIVE ABOUT THEM."**

—Tom of Finland

TOM MADE NO SECRET of his preference for men, and yet he did draw women—not many, and certainly not well—throughout his career. Sometimes it was simply for money, but as early as 1954 Tom made a little panel story for his own amusement in which a strutting Finnish stud succumbs to casual sex with a woman before discovering his true desires with a strapping logger. Since Tom created all his work to arouse himself first and foremost, it seems odd he'd include a character that contributed nothing, so it's safe to say that Tom's women did serve an important purpose in his fantasy life, though certainly not as objects of desire.

Tom grew up surrounded by women—his mother and three sisters—but his fantasy world revolved around hypermasculine occupations such as logging, construction, military service, and law enforcement. While the citizens of this invented world all longed for the male touch, most of their real-world inspirations were stubbornly heterosexual. When I hear straight women complain that all the best-looking men in the gym/bar/office are gay, I imagine how Tom felt knowing the buff loggers and cops he so admired went home each night to wives who would never appreciate their masculine perfection as he did. In his alternate world Tom showed them the error of their ways. What Tom's man wouldn't prefer his own gorgeous doppelgänger when seen naked and erect beside an inferior Tom's woman? Where male curves are lovingly shaded and highlighted, female curves are simple outlines. And while Tom gave his men wide, generous, smiling mouths with plush, inviting lips, his women's mouths are pinched and thin-lipped. No way could such inadequate little holes accommodate Tom's phalluses.



**FEMALE TROUBLE**

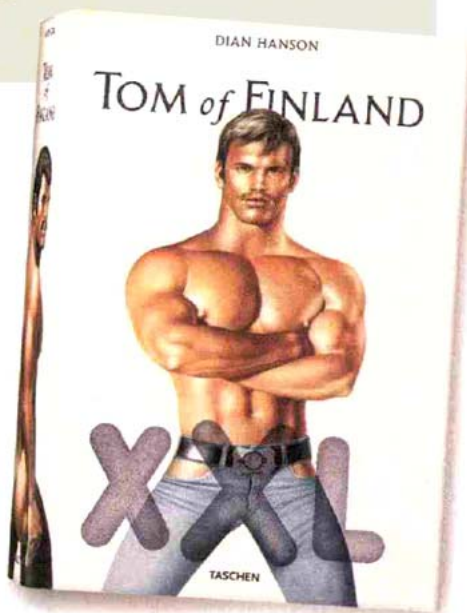
*Tom often portrayed women as poor sex substitutes for men.*



The female mouth is also inadequate for kissing. Tom was a romantic, so no matter how rough the bondage or spanking in a story, you can count on a kiss at the end to prove the pleasure is mutual. Tom created just one image of a man and woman kissing, however. Like the hustler who will perform any intimate act except kissing his clients, Tom could show men having sex with women in simple lust but couldn't bring himself to portray affection.

Tom's handling of female subjects evolved in step with gay liberation. In 1968 he created a distinctive drawing of a man in a suit—Tom's recurring symbol of straight society—being felled by a man on his knees, while in the next room we see hetero couples drinking cocktails, oblivious to the sex act. The suited man watches the party warily, his expression saying discovery would bring severe consequences. Contrast this to a drawing from 1974 where two suited males stand brazenly having sex behind the back of a seated woman, presumably one's wife, while watching home movies. The suits advertise straight identity, but now the sex is barely concealed, as if the lovers are begging to be caught and released from their heterosexual lie to join Tom's party.

And what a party it was. By the mid '70s thousands of proud gay men conformed



to Tom's masculine ideal, inspired by his enormously popular art. As muscular perfection replaced effeminate gay stereotypes, the girls disappeared from Tom's drawings.

There would be no women in Tom's art for more than a decade. During those years he became an international celebrity, with no need to draw anything just for money. Yet, in 1986, when he decided to bring to a close his long-running series of comic books starring his ultimate stud, Kake, he included a heterosexual couple in the final episode and let them enjoy the only straight kiss of his long career. Durk Dehner, cofounder and president of the Tom of Finland Foundation, jokingly suggests Tom took so much flak from women about his unflattering portraits of female characters that he drew *Oversexed Office*—the title of this final book—to shut them up. I like to think that the day finally came when Tom looked around and saw there were enough handsome, masculine, proud gay men in the world to assure every man like him of all the sex and love they could ever want, and flush with omnipotence, thought, *Maybe it won't hurt to give the women one little taste of the good stuff.* ♣

*Hanson is editor of Tom of Finland XXL and has been Taschen's sexy-book editor since 2001.*

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