



Extra Large

Coffee-table publishing giant Taschen is bringing their comprehensively artistic expertise to gay artist Tom of Finland. Where the straight world had the bomber-vixen pin-ups of Vargas or oh-so-'70s new waves of Nagel, we had Tom. Prudes and moralists have been writing off Tom (real name Touko Laaksonen) of Finland's art as nothing more than homopornography. But in this massive

retrospective of his work, Tom's artistry can be viewed for what it is—a unique, erotic, and yes, sometimes shocking, exploration of the male physique, gay fantasy, situational sex, power roles, and influential take on the pleasure principle. Containing nearly 1,000 images, Tom of Finland XXL (edited by Dian Hanson, 666 pages, \$200) also includes

essays by the likes of cultural critic Camille Paglia, filmmaker John Waters, author Armistead Maupin, tastemaker Todd Oldham, and others, making XXL a valuable art history lesson with one of our own at its lecture's center. While a bit of a stretch to put Tom in the same league as Michelangelo, his often orgiastic, and infamously generous renderings of the human form cannot be written off as simple porn. Get past your initial shock (or arousal), and you realize that many of these images are clever contemporary recreations of, say a 17th-century levee, with courtesans now recast as sailors, pumped up on sex, power, and steroids; or Mona Lisa as a smoldering, lantern-jawed GQ coverboy. Sex isn't degrading as de Sade saw it, but a pleasurable exploration on the world of role play, sexual subordination as liberation. There's an old argument that says "you'll know porn when you see it." But writing off Tom of Finland as a dirty-minded fag who could draw is like shorthand-ing Hugh Hefner as a creepy old man who beds triplets. And of the two, it's Finland who's having his legacy lauded by a powerful publishing company and hyper-cool cultural pundits, not turned into punchline on E! —*Steven Foster*