

Review

Tom of Finland: XXL

Edited by Dian Hanson

Published by Taschen

Review from e-book by Randall Perry

If you're a gay man of any age and you've not heard of the artist Touko Laaksonen, otherwise known as Tom of Finland, even in passing, then you must have been living under a rock for the past five decades or so. If you're one of those rare few who've not heard the name, you most certainly have seen the art. The flawless faces. The impossible bubble-butts. The perfect bodies. The uniforms. And, of course, the cocks. I've always said cocks in porn come in three sizes: huge, gigantic, and Tom of Finland. "XXL" has an abundance of all this and more.

Tom of Finland is arguably the creator of the contemporary gay macho archetype. At a time when homosexual men were the weak sisters of society, he envisioned a different kind of queer: manly and potent, the alpha male equally comfortable with dominating other men with his cock while taking a big one up the ass. His unique brand of hyper-masculine has defined entire generations and sub-cultures of gay

men. The look and feel of the art has been emulated in style by visual artists and photographers and in practice by devotees of the muscular and masculine.

I first encountered the art of Tom of Finland as a university freshman, coming to terms with my sexuality and coming out of the closet, in the mid-1980's. While ensconced in an overstuffed chair in a quiet corner of the library, leafing through a book on gay history I flipped to a page full of painted sailors, leather men and cops, all of them getting



it on and getting off in a public park under the moonlight. It was my first encounter with the gay as fully-realized masculine and the visual before me was a sharp slap across the face—a pivotal moment in my life, one which I have never forgotten. Each page of "XXL" took me back to the very beginning of my awakening.

Divided up by decade, beginning with the 1940's and continuing through to the 1980's and including a section with rare and lost (and reconstructed) work, the artist's career is carefully traced with art representative of the period and essays by such creative luminaries as Camille Paglia, Armistead Maupin, Todd Oldham, Jim French, John Waters and more. As is common with Taschen, the text is presented in English, French and German, giving the book an international feel and relevance. The book is introduced by Durk Dehner, president and co-founder of the Tom of Finland Foundation. Photos from the artist's life are liberally sprinkled throughout.

As an electronic book, "XXL" is stunning; I can only imagine how the content pops off the actual printed page.

Make no mistake; this book is not a Tom of Finland primer. At nearly 700 pages "XXL" is a big, meaty tome, spanning the entire compass of Laaksonen's career. It's jammed full of the good stuff, lovingly assembled and edited by Dian Hanson—one of her earlier efforts, the fabulous "Big Penis Book," sits proudly on my coffee table. I believe this authoritative study of Tom of Finland's work will be a treat for long-time fans, and its long shelf life will definitely garner new fans of the master's work. Worth every penny.