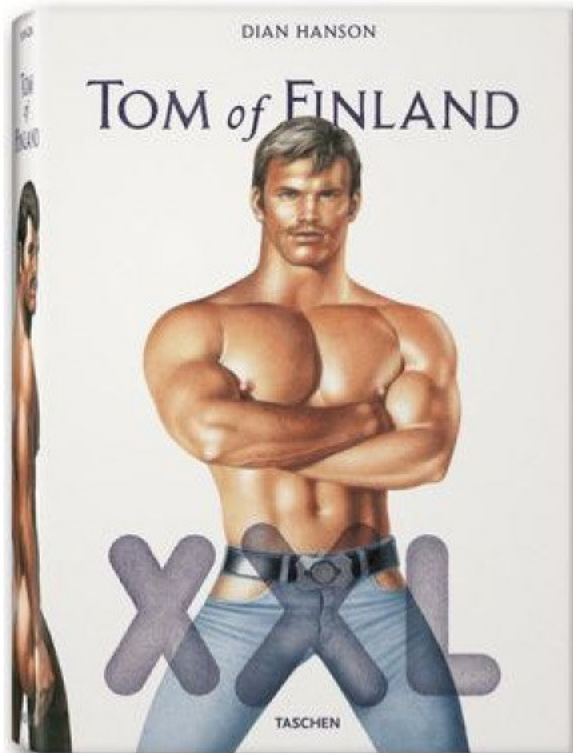


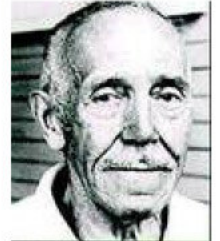
Band of Thebes

May 08, 2012

Born May 8: Tom of Finland



In an era when merely entering a gay bar could mean jail time and the instant end of a career, Tom of Finland was boldly visualizing a world of healthy, happy, all-male sexual camaraderie that was hot and had a sense of humor. Then again, his fantasies of hyperidealized, turboerotic, uberbuilt masculinity guaranteed that reality would never measure up. For generations of gay men since the mid-1950s, his art has created an endless coupling of inspiration and insecurity.



Born in Kaarina, Finland in 1920, Touko Laaksonen moved to Helsinki when he was nineteen and soon was drafted to fight in World War II. Afterward, he worked in an advertising agency while American physique magazines began to publish his drawings of rugged lumberjacks, cops, jocks, sailors, soldiers, prisoners, lifeguards, musclemen, and his enduring character Kake. In 1973, at the time of his first gallery show, in Hamburg, he was able to quit his job to draw fulltime. His second gallery exhibit, in Los Angeles, was not until 1978, followed by shows in San Francisco and New York, where he became friends with another artist whose work explored gay S&M, Robert

Mapplethorpe. In 1981, Veli, his partner of twenty-eight years, died; Laaksonen survived him by ten years. The Finnish Culture Institute hosted an exhibit of his work in Paris in 1999, and in 2004 MoMA added several of his drawings to their permanent collection. Taschen's gigantic, oversized Tom of Finland XXL runs almost 700 pages, contains nearly 1,000 images, and includes essays by John Waters, Camille Paglia, Armistead Maupin, and Todd Oldham.