

DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY

David Kordansky Gallery is pleased to present Tom of Finland: Highway Patrol, Greasy Rider, and Other Selected Works, an exhibition of collages and drawings, including the complete Highway Patrol and Greasy Rider series from Tom's Kake graphic novels. Curated in close collaboration with Tom of Finland Foundation, the exhibition will be on view in New York at 520 W. 20th St. from January 13 through February 25, 2023. An opening reception will take place on Thursday, January 12, from 6 to 8 PM.

Tom of Finland (Touko Laaksonen, 1920–1991) has long been recognized as a great visual innovator of the twentieth century. A masterful draftsman and prolific artist, Tom produced an expressive and extensive body of work in which masculine, empowered gay men are fully engulfed in intimate moments of unabashed ecstasy. Tom reveled in the entire rendering process, from the transformative immediacy of collage-making to the narrative development and sketching of his more elaborate pen and ink drawings. He entered a euphoric state of mind—free of censorship and societal restrictions—when building his utopias where the men were half-clothed, overtly sexual, and deeply indulged in themselves and with one another.

For Tom, drawing started as a hobby and a way to see the world as only he envisioned it. He began incorporating—and embellishing—found imagery early in his practice, often adding nipples or mustaches to images of seemingly heteronormative men. This appropriation quickly became integral to the development of his figurative iconography. Tom pulled images from a vast collection of materials, including mainstream advertisements and early gay magazines, and organized them into thematic reference pages that analyzed anatomy, posture, and expression, all characteristics that eventually helped shape the signature “Tom’s man.” He established a cyclical repurposing of his images, often creating collages from his own photographs, which could then be further enhanced and act as a catalyst for a future drawing. Tom subverted traditional masculine roles associated with men of action and service—soldiers, police officers, bikers—by drawing attention to their tight-fitting uniforms and bulging jodhpurs while also playing with the authoritative narrative potential inherent to these roles. Tom’s bold line work, delicate pencil shading, and

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reference collages portraying a range of poses and attributes demonstrate his admiration for—and total devotion to—his subject matter. His mixed media collages detail his revolutionary representations of the male body and demonstrate the building blocks of Tom's aesthetic.

The print medium provided a space for Tom to produce and disseminate his fantasies in the fullest possible capacity. In 1957, while Tom was still working in advertising, his once private drawings began to appear in Physique Pictorial, one of the few all-male magazines of that time. This motivated him to continue developing his detailed, photorealistic illustration style and eventually create his own graphic novels. The ability to mass produce and widely distribute his drawings allowed Tom to easily share his work with the global gay community. Circulation of the graphic novels was equally important and often done in clandestine efforts until they were officially released as comic books by various publishers starting in the late 1960s and then by Tom of Finland Company beginning in the early 1980s.

At the center of the exhibition is a full suite of impeccably rendered drawings from the series Kake vol. 21 - “Greasy Rider” (1978) and Kake vol. 22 - “Highway Patrol” (1980), both of which reference Tom’s collages and evolved from the artist’s preparatory sketches. These rarely exhibited panels are part of a larger collection of 26 Kake graphic novels made between 1968–1986. Titled after the comics’ protagonist (and the artist’s alter ego), the illustrations showcase Tom’s diverse material approaches to his meticulous figurations and underscore the intricacies of his artistic process. First published in 1968, the Kake series was revolutionary for the time and quickly inspired a broad scope of gay and queer zines to come. The fantastical stories and iconic imagery created a form that inspired sexual awakenings, emboldened members of the gay community to have more agency over their sexuality, and eventually extended into, and influenced, real-world queer liberation movements.

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Tom of Finland's legendary representation of the male body grew out of his own desires and lived experiences, drawing from his careers in advertising and the military as well as significant time spent living in Helsinki and Los Angeles. Over the course of his career, as Tom's audience and global reach grew, so did his commitment to the explicit depiction of gay erotica. By sharing his work so broadly, especially during periods when public displays of homosexuality were heavily policed, Tom's pictures extended well beyond the sexual to a more holistic and inherent understanding of—and equitable access to—pleasure. [Tom of Finland: Highway Patrol, Greasy Rider, and Other Selected Works](#) offers a nearly complete glimpse into the transformative desire-driven approach to artmaking that has long distinguished the persona and vision of Tom of Finland.

Tom of Finland (Touko Laaksonen, 1920–1991) has been the subject of numerous solo and two-person exhibitions across the globe, including [Tom of Finland: Pen and Ink 1965 – 1983](#), David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles (2021); [Tom of Finland – The Darkroom](#), Fotografiska, Stockholm, Tallinn, Estonia, and New York (2020–2021); [Tom of Finland: Love and Liberation](#), House of Illustration, London (2020); [Reality & Fantasy: The World of Tom of Finland](#), Gallery X, Tokyo and Osaka (2020); [TOM House: The Work and Life of Tom of Finland](#), Mike Kelley's Mobile Homestead, Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (2018); [Tom of Finland: The Pleasure of Play](#), Artists Space, New York (2015) and Kunsthalle Helsinki (2016); and [Bob Mizer & Tom of Finland](#), Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2013). Recent group exhibitions include [Art & Porn](#), ARoS Aarhus Art Museum, Aarhus, Denmark, and Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen (2020); [Camp: Notes on Fashion](#), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2019); [Keep Your Timber Limber \(Works on Paper\)](#), Institute of Contemporary Art, London (2013); and [We the People](#), Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York (2012). His work is in the permanent collections of The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, Helsinki; Art Institute of Chicago; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, among many other institutions.

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Tom of Finland Foundation, dedicated to preserving Tom's legacy and supporting erotic art since 1984, operates out of the Tom of Finland House (TOM House), the artist's former shared residence and now a Historic-Cultural Monument in the Echo Park neighborhood of Los Angeles.