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Preview unseen, early collages by Tom of Finland

A new zine compiles early cut-up photographs and sketches from the influential Finnish artist's own personal collection



Tom of Finland (Photo: Protagonist Pictures)



Recognised for his stylised, hypermasculine depictions of gay men in his artwork, Tom of Finland's never-seen-before collages have been assembled together for the first zine published by the foundation, in collaboration with Innen.

Working in the late 1950s as an advertising executive, the Finnish artist had a hand in establishing the sterilised, heteronormative vision of the nuclear family unit by day. By night, however, Tom's own artistic vision was being developed: the gleefully homoerotic world of leather boots, broad-shouldered men and handlebar moustaches, a pointed subversion of the print advertising that he worked on professionally.

As senior art director at one of the first global advertising agencies, Tom gained access to a variety of images from mainstream publications from around the world – images that would greatly inspire the collages included in this new zine.

Formed from found imagery and his own photos, Tom used these as studies from which to sculpt his now iconic visuals. Cutting out images from both mainstream and early gay magazines, then assembling the results on paper, he called these experiments and sketches reference pages, sometimes scribbling and drawing onto these new designs to change or accentuate them.

Repurposing the straight, conservative aesthetic of strong masculinity – which was already, inadvertently being assimilated into gay culture through beefcake magazines of the era – a lot of the graphite treatments here reaffirm Tom's efforts to provide an alternative to the historic stereotyping of gay men as passive, "sissy" and effeminate.

Divided into separate categories (motorcycles, beards, hairdos, uniforms), Tom's reference pages are sure to get a fresh perspective, especially in light of the upcoming Tom of Finland biopic, a web store and Finland's announcement of their special Tom emoji. The work in this zine accurately shows the painstaking dedication to an oeuvre of work that, until the late 60s and 70s, was largely unpublished in accordance with strict (and homophobic) US censorship codes.

The zine is available from Innen