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Bob Mizer, *Tony Rome and Ron Nichols*, 1971, color photograph, 10 1/2 x 10 1/2".

NEW YORK

Bob Mizer

EXILE@ONETWENTYEIGHT
128 Rivington Street
February 19–March 19, 2011

Photography, porn, criminality—Bob Mizer’s work incorporated all three in the mid-twentieth century, an era when mere suggestive poses of the male figure were enough to land a photographer in jail. This exhibition, curated by Billy Miller (editor of the infamous true sex zine *Straight to Hell*) and artist Christian Siekmeier, is the first to make the case that, beyond the notoriety and glitz, Mizer was also an artist.

Mizer was a workaholic who produced more than a million photographs under the guise of his company, the Athletic Model Guild, which he founded in 1945 and managed until his death in 1992. He practically single-handedly invented the beefcake genre, which has come to define the seamier quintessence of classic gay kitsch. But he was more than just a flesh peddler. One of the earliest artists to work in color—with hues so saturated that you can’t help but be reminded of Technicolor—Mizer spouted camp before most people knew what it was, capturing his models in “macho” athletic poses or “establishment” uniforms (soldiers, cops, etc.) as a way of exposing their underlying sexiness to the randier, aesthetically attuned eye.

Which is not to say that Mizer did not suffer for his efforts. After being busted on obscenity charges for sending his pictures through the mail, he spent time early on in a labor camp, an experience that left a tinge of paranoia in him—without, apparently, detracting from his prolific output. Ultimately, looking at Mizer’s work now reminds us of the repressive society that produced it—one that equated homosexuality with criminality. Then again, criminality is pretty damn hot.

— Travis Jeppesen

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