

## **SOME THINGS SHOULD ALWAYS REMAIN UNDERGROUND, AWAY FROM PRYING EYES**

“Work # 965: [a few] Kake Comics (Updated)” (2026) is an open-edition portfolio of one hundred and thirty 35.6 x 27.9 cm (14” x 11”) black and white photographs (including title pages and artist’s statement) presented in a 30.2 x 39 x 7.6 cm (11.75” x 15.25” x 3”) acid-free box. This collection revisits and updates six graphic (in every way) narratives by Touko Valio Laaksonen (1920-1991) aka Tom of Finland. In total, twenty-six narratives were produced under the logo of “Kake” (followed by the volume number and subheading) and were published as small booklets of twenty pages each beginning in 1968 and appearing periodically over the next couple of decades until the final one in 1986. Kake, like Dada before it, had innocent origins. Allegedly, dada was found by accident while perusing a French dictionary and initially was a child’s word for hobbyhorse; but in the hands of artists became so much more. . . Kake translates from Finnish as cake, but in the mind of a young child (and an adult with a satirical frame of mind, it’s the descriptive of shit. Nothing high-flown here!

When I tracked down the dates of his little narratives I realized instantly that he was always being slyly political – or at the very least, often couching his social conscience with a humorous outlook lurking behind his self-described “dirty pictures” – because in each case there was a direct parallel between the drawings and, if not the headlines of the day, at least the general zeitgeist of the moment. I think there’s an unacknowledged belief at work here that some of our deepest sexual fantasies often involve our sworn mortal enemies.

This work ponders the question of who actually owns queer culture, and wonders if some things should simply remain off-limits, away from the voyeurism of the unworthy. The premise here is quite simple – appropriate Tom’s graphic narratives and pixelate the individual twenty 35.6 x 27.9 cm images that make up each narrative so heavily that they are beyond easy readability (unless from a very great distance), thus denying the casual viewer access to something they are, perhaps, not welcome to look at. It’s elitist, I know. So what?

While the movements for homosexual emancipation have taken many forms after the first iteration in late 19th century Germany, I’ve concentrated on the period that affected my life directly. I’ve focused on six out of the twenty-six narratives that, in their own way, chronicle the rise and fall of the gay liberation movement – beginning in 1968, just before the action began as an outcome of the Stonewall riots in 1969, and ending in 1977 before everything went to hell in 1980 with the emergence of the HIV/AIDS pandemic . . .

The six (almost) all-male narratives manipulated here are #3: Cock Hungry Cops (1968), #6: Threesome (1970) #11: T.V. Repair (1972), #12: Service Station (1972), #15: Violent Visitor (1974), and #20: Pleasure Park (1977) representing from first to last: Police Hypocrisy Behind Closed Doors; a Sexual Awakening Involving a Woman, a Sailor, a Leatherman, and a Cop (guess who gets cut from the action); Two Situations of Comfort and Being Happily at Ease; a Violent Backlash; and finally a More and More Crowded

Accumulation of Men in an Outdoor Romp blissfully unaware of what was right around the corner.

I think (subconsciously) the reason I look, act, and how I present myself, is because of Tom. This is not for any fashion or sexual reason, but because he affirmed what I realized was inherent. I could be myself as I was rather than conform to some external demand. Everyone I know feels the same, and that is why Tom of Finland was foundational in forming the very model of the modern homosexual (to paraphrase Gilbert and Sullivan). In a way this is a merging of present and past; and only an idiot would try to imitate, or be foolhardy enough to try and outdo, Tom of Finland; and that is, I'm sorry to say, what I've seen going on out there ever since his death in 1991 . . .

I'd once been in the same room with Tom but was prevented from meeting and thanking him for his helping me find my way as a young pup, because he was surrounded by a phalanx of faux-menacing Leatherman. This was in 1980 at the Robert Samuel Gallery in New York and he appeared to be a very sad man, even though there were many, many, many red dots on the walls. I later learned that, at that time, he was earning his living accepting commissions to Tom-of-Finlandize the dead partners of grieving widowers; the other reason for his sadness was perhaps the gallery itself. Robert Samuel was a very probable New York name. Years later I learned the gallery name had been the amalgam of the two owners – Samuel [somebody] and Robert [Mapplethorpe]; and that our hero had been fleeced out of all the pricey sales because what was his due went up a couple of noses. The gallery is long gone.

I don't think he would have been upset with my "updating" (and bear in mind that it's always far easier to apologize than to ask permission), mostly because there is a marked similarity to his very last works which was simplified in the extreme due to the ravages from emphysema.

Even though our master draftsman has, since his death, received a fair degree of attention in the mainstream artworld, the reason for my employing heavy pixelations is quite simple, and made plain in the first sentence here – I have no interest in encouraging masturbation (at best) or (at worst) slumming among the hypocrites within the entrenched homophobia of the artworld (whom I deem simply unworthy). Where is it written that we have to share? Why should we abide by odious demands for "family friendly" nonsense? Maybe Pride Day should be a ticketed event? Maybe baby strollers should be banned from Church Street on Hallowe'en? If you're coming to ogle, it'll cost you . . . If you're not in full costume there'll be an entry fee, the proceeds of which would benefit important community-focussed projects or charities. But the "community" should be understood as a somewhat artificial construct (as any other huge, multi-voiced diaspora is lumped together under simplified monikers – ours is the worst). Perhaps its time to break up that unsexy, unpronounceable acronym into thirds. Men on one side, Women on the opposite side, and everyone else in the

middle; just like Magnus Hirschfeld proposed in his book *Geschlechtsübergänge*, published in 1905 (!) There's already been that formulation for years now – with a Trans March, a Dyke March, and then the Big Event. I want our culture to be apart. Notwithstanding the occasional calls for a new morality in the arts, these hypocrites dutifully rely, for appearances sake, on the safely dead in their facile gesture to (presumably) appear daring.

The heavy pixelations allow for the images to be approached aesthetically, referencing crossword puzzles, bathroom tiles, Lego, and Pacman (on the one hand) and late-Mondrian – never married, no offsprings, always lived alone . . . hmmm (on the other) – linking the works to both low pop and high cultures. But the ultimate goal of this project is to present an immersive environment that addresses all of these questions about who owns queer culture and whom is it created for. In the words of Tom's biographer, F. Valentine Hooven wrote that "the worst thing that can happen to a subculture is being hedged in; its signs, its symbols have been watered down, have become public property." Needless to say, adding a note of Finlandian sadism, the content of the pixelated images only come into optical focus when viewed from a very great distance, thus thwarting any temptation for unnecessary, up-close, auto-hanky-panky . . . Bruce Eves. (April 12, 2026)