

M+B PHOTO

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BOB MIZER *Naked Ambition*

June 23 – August 18, 2018

Opening Reception

Saturday, June 23 from 6 to 8 pm

M+B Photo is pleased to announce *Naked Ambition*, an exhibition of photographs by the late Bob Mizer. Mizer was one of the most significant figures of twentieth century homoerotic art and was a celebrated pioneer in developing the visual language for post-war gay culture. This is the artist's first solo exhibition with the gallery and will include over 30 never-before-exhibited images from the Bob Mizer archive. The show runs from June 23 to August 25, 2018 with an opening reception on Saturday, June 23 from 6 to 8 pm at the M+B Photo exhibition space located at 1050 North Cahuenga Boulevard in Hollywood.

"I feel more strength now than ever before, but this strength, this driving energy, shall be carefully bridled and directed with wisdom . . . My ambition is everything — pleasure, physical sensations mean nothing compared to great accomplishments."

- Bob Mizer in a letter to his mother from a prison work camp, May 28, 1947.

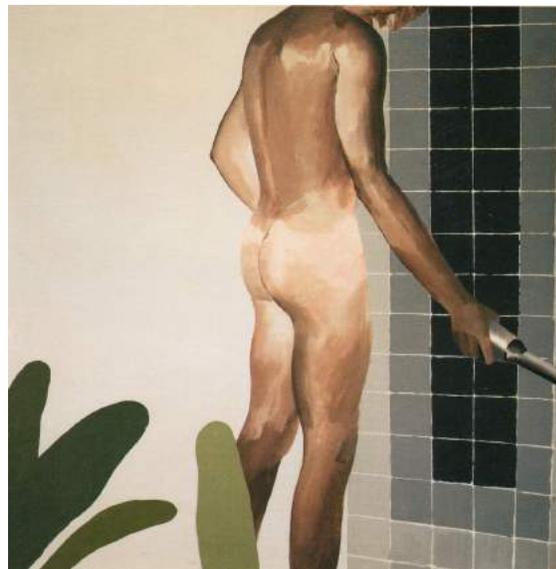
Born in Hailey, Idaho in 1922, Mizer began his exploration and documentation of the male physique in 1945 when, at the age of twenty-four, he photographed the gymnast Forester Miller in the parlor of the home he shared with his mother. Soon after, Mizer began photographing in and around Muscle Beach, the infamous park outfitted with exercise equipment just south of the Santa Monica Pier. Mizer saw no need for discretion and soon befriended the bodybuilders. He learned of the men's eagerness for photographs of themselves and, convincing his mother to surrender her parlor as a studio, offered free prints in exchange for modeling. Unlike many of his contemporaries in the subculture of illicit physique nudes, Mizer took the Hollywood star-system approach and founded the *Athletic Model Guild*, a film and photo studio specializing in handsome boy-next-door talent.

At a time when homosexuality was criminalized in the United States, Mizer's photographs were subversive and inherently political. Mizer always presented an unashamed and gregarious approach to male nudity and intimate physical contact between men. For his perspective on eroticized representation alone, Mizer is often ranked with Alfred Kinsey at the forefront of the sexual revolution. More importantly to a gay community still in its infancy, the photographs were an early and courageously visible representation of the gay liberation movement, which urged lesbians and gay men to engage in radical direct action and to counter societal shame with gay pride.

This brazen eschewal of the norms of the day did not go unnoticed by the authorities. At this time American censorship laws permitted women, but not men, to be photographed partially nude, so long as the result was "artistic" in nature. In 1947, Mizer was convicted of contributing to the delinquency of a minor by taking pictures of a seventeen-year-old and subsequently served a yearlong prison sentence at a desert work camp in Saugus, California. He ran afoul of the US government again in 1954 when he was convicted of the unlawful distribution of obscene material through the US mail. The material in question was a series of black and white photographs, taken by Mizer, of young bodybuilders wearing what were known as posing straps—a precursor to the G-string.

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Upon his release from prison, he continued working undeterred, founding the groundbreaking magazine *Physique Pictorial* in 1951, which also debuted the work of other homoerotic artists such as Tom of Finland, Quaintance and many others. Models included future Andy Warhol superstar Joe Dallesandro, actors Glenn Corbett, Alan Ladd, Susan Hayward, Victor Mature and actor-politician Arnold Schwarzenegger. During the mid twentieth century, Mizer was one of the only photographers exploring the male form with an unabashedly homoerotic gaze, thus making his photographs hugely impactful to later artists who drew inspiration from his work and added to their cult-like following. Through his photographs and films, Mizer influenced the work of Gore Vidal, Robert Mapplethorpe and David Hockney, who first came to America partially to meet Mizer and used his photographs as source material for some of his well-know paintings.



Left: *Model Earl Deane, in Mizer's Office Shower, 1961*, by Bob Mizer.
Right: David Hockney's *Boy About to Take a Shower, 1964 – 1969*, acrylic on canvas, 36 x 36 inches

Robert Henry Mizer (1922 – 1992), known as Bob Mizer, was a trailblazing photographer, filmmaker and publisher. His work has been exhibited widely in the US and internationally, including the landmark exhibition *Bob Mizer & Tom of Finland* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles in 2014. In 2009, Taschen published *Bob's World: The Life and Boys of AMG's Bob Mizer*, a monograph accompanied by an oral history with contributing artists David Hockney, Jack Pierson and John Sonsini. This was followed in 2016 by the extensive two-volume edition of *Bob Mizer. AMG: 1000 Model*. Mizer's photos are in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. The artist's archive is held with the The Bob Mizer Foundation, which is dedicated to the promotion and preservation of progressive and controversial photography.

Location: **M+B Photo**, 1050 North Cahuenga Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90038
Show Title: Bob Mizer: *Naked Ambition*
Exhibition Dates: June 23 – August 18, 2018
Opening Reception: Saturday, June 23, 2018, 6 – 8 pm
Gallery Hours: Tuesday – Saturday, 10 am – 6 pm, and by appointment

For more info, please contact John T.D. Murphy at M+B Photo at (323) 745-0145 or john@mbphoto.com.