

Durk Parker

Ghost-edited and produced with captions written April, 15, 1977, this centerfold photo spread was published in *Drummer* 15, May 1977.

I. Author's Eyewitness Historical-Context Introduction written July 29, 2007

II. The centerfold text and photograph as published in *Drummer* 15, May 1977

III. Eyewitness Illustrations

I. Author's Eyewitness Historical-Context Introduction written July 29, 2007

In a kind of synergistic trifecta when I first began ghost-editing *Drummer*, I scooped up 1) my friend Lou Thomas' photographs of 2) model "Durk Parker" aka Durk Dehner whose leather style and sultry look channeled 3) pure Tom of Finland. Eight years before *Drummer* debuted, photographer Lou Thomas had started up Colt Studio (1967) with Jim French (aka Rip Colt) who bought him out and moved Colt from Manhattan to Los Angeles. It was a separation of geography, and a separation of erotic vision: Jim French photographed muscle gods who showed up on the sunny beaches of the West Coast; Lou Thomas shot leathermen who inhabited the dark leather bars in New York.

With the split in 1971, Lou Thomas invented his own Target Studio with Bob Lewis and operated Target for thirteen of the first fifteen years after Stonewall.

Like the neo-Californian Jim French and like the European Tom of Finland, the Lebanese-American Lou Thomas was formative in creating the 1970s Platonic Ideal of the emerging identity of the international homomasculine man whose archetypal symbol is DaVinci's strong *Vitruvian Man*. Michelangelo's louche *David* is the symbol of the effeminate gay male.

Carousing in Manhattan, Lou Thomas and I became longtime friends in 1968, and his seminal Target photography appeared on the covers of *Drummer* 13, *Drummer* 14, and *Drummer* 23.

As much as I liked my friend A. Jay's drawing on the cover of *Drummer* 15, I thought in 1977 that if Lou Thomas had not shot the covers of the two immediately preceding issues that his photograph of "Durk Parker" would have been chosen for issue 15 instead of simply as the centerfold. (Cover and centerfold traditionally are from the same shoot.) If that perfect trifecta of photographer, model, and magazine had happened, *Drummer* would have had an instantly iconic cover.

Never was it easy for a photographer or artist to get an image on the cover of *Drummer*. In the way I divided Lou Thomas' work, I also divided Robert Mapplethorpe's.

Gallia est omnis divisa in partes tres.

Near the beginning of expanding his career the young Mapplethorpe, age 31, was an American unknown, nationally, outside certain Manhattan galleries, European salons, and leather venues. On October 16, 1977, he flew TWA to California from JFK to my desk at *Drummer* where he hoped to get an "inside photo spread." When, instead, I said, "Wow!," I gave him the coveted front cover that officially introduced him to leatherfolk when I assigned him to shoot my pal Elliot Siegal for *Drummer* 24 (September 1978).

As editor in chief, I moved what would have been Mapplethorpe's photo centerfold to anchor *Son of Drummer* (September 1978), and within *Drummer* 24, I promoted the photography of David Hurles' Old Reliable Studio ("In Hot Blood: We Abuse Fags") and of my longtime domestic-and-photo partner David Sparrow and myself ("Castro Street Blues").

I gave the centerfold spread to Jocks Studio because it featured one of the hottest men on Castro, the blond model known as "Holst" who was part of our salon who ate breakfast everyday at the Norse Cove on Castro Street where he incarnated the image of the Marlboro Man over coffee and cigarettes. Holst was a pal whom I photographed a year later in Reno at the Gay Rodeo that Randy Shilts and I covered for the Associated Press and the San Francisco *Chronicle*, August 6, 1979. One of my Reno shots of Holst, produced by Mark Hemry, appeared on the front cover of my book of mostly *Drummer* fiction, *Rainbow County and Other Stories*.

This is how I parsed and sorted images at *Drummer* to keep a morphing flow page to page to accommodate the diversity of readers' tastes.

Looking back as a keeper of the *Drummer* institutional memory, am I the only person to note that Tom of Finland was never on the *Drummer* cover? The reason—which I have detected from archived documents—appears in volume four of this series: *The Drummer Salon*.

In disclosure of the zero degrees of our salon which preceded *Drummer*, Lou Thomas and I had been involved sexually and in publishing

since 1968. We had been introduced by the Catholic leather priest, Jim Kane. In 1969 when I was thirty, Lou Thomas shot me with a tough 42nd Street hustler for a photo series he was producing before he started Target; and in 1972, he published a samizdat limited edition of my 1969 novel, *I Am Curious (Leather)* aka *Leather Blues*, later excerpted as “a *Drummer* novel” in *Son of Drummer* (1978) and in *Man2Man Quarterly*. We continued to work together into the 1980s when I wrote fiction such as “The Best Dirty Blond Carpenter in Texas” for his *Target Magazine*. Hugely successful, in 1983, he became editor of the mass-media gay magazines *FirstHand* and *Manscape*. After the death of Lou Thomas (March 10, 1933-January 7, 1990), the grave robbers at 1990s *Drummer* continued to publish his photographs uncredited, and, disrespecting Lou Thomas as the creative source, had the nerve to label them: “From the *Drummer* Archives.”

In the reveal that is the uncloseting and documenting of true leather history, model “Durk Parker” was more than a model. Having internalized the leather ethos, he made the rounds of various leather ateliers and galleries as a patron and sometime model. He became the image and the champion of homomale art and artists. In the 1970s, the Target model “Durk Parker” came out as Durk Dehner, when he became friend, champion, and business partner of Tom of Finland. Dehner was mentored by *The Advocate* owner, David Goodstein, who understood startups for a business or for a nonprofit 501(c)(3)—(*Dispatch*, Tom of Finland Foundation Newsletter, Spring 2006). Dehner became the co-founder and longtime president of the Tom of Finland Foundation, and has dedicated his life to collecting, preserving, and protecting the art of Tom, as well as of emerging and established erotic artists and photographers.

Durk Dehner has given written permission for this *Gay San Francisco* reprinting of his photograph shot by Lou Thomas at Target Studio. On July 29, 2007, Durk Dehner confided in an almost mystical email that he, as did I, believed the most important contributors to *Drummer* were the men who poured their identities, hearts, and sexuality into the classified personals ads in *Drummer*. He wrote:

Drummer magazine was a get-down-and-dirty experience where a real pureness existed. Artists like Tom of Finland, Etienne, A. Jay, Rex, and Domino, to mention just a few were delivered unto us amongst the prayers and salutations from the Hellion Priests of the times—known better as the classifieds where words and images were pure in cravings and desires; they were the new reality.

Durk Dehner understands the principle that popular culture is the distillation of what ordinary people like.

That's why I groomed *Drummer* to reflect the reader because I had studied the thousands of classified personals that revealed precisely what the demographic wanted.

Lou Thomas and I agreed on that theory of popular culture.

Colt Studio under master artist Jim French idealized men beyond one's reach; Target Studio photographed men one might touch; David Hurles lensed straight street toughs one could hire; for my Palm Drive Video, I shot masculine men one could meet at a bar, a street fair, or a building site.

Of that group of four studios all channeling the homomasculine mystique, Colt alone, except for a stray ad or two early on, was never published in *Drummer*.

In the interactive mix of editorial text (magazine leading the readers) and classified personals text (readers leading the magazine), fantasies could become realities. The ads offered reachable postal boxes and phone numbers.

As if anticipating reality TV shows, *Drummer* was the first gay reality magazine.

Durk Dehner is a perfect eyewitness of how the reciprocity in *Drummer* worked.

In 1979, Durk Dehner clipped a certain personal ad from *Drummer*, pasted it on his mirror, and memorized the text like a prayer. As a matter of history, that particular ad, which ran for years like a note in a bottle in *Drummer*, became famous as a classic among readers. After some time, and by chance, Durk Dehner was cruised by a man in LA. His nickname was "SS" and he turned out to be the author of the ad. They are still together at the Tom of Finland Foundation.

About SS's ad, Durk Dehner wrote to me: "The words were to my spirit. I first read them in 1979 and I keep them up to now, because I met the righteous one who spun them...."

Durk Dehner quoted the ad:

L.A. FILTH

Tough, hard, beer-drinking, cigar-smoking, foul-mouthed dirt dude with rank armpits, slimy asshole, and a cruddy uncut cock wears greasy, rotten, stinking boots, socks, jocks, T-shirts, Levi's and leather. Digs spitting, pissing, shitting, puking, sweating, and farting. Gets off with chains, tires, concrete, mud, tools, rubbers, and oil. Box 294V8.

Because a picture is worth a thousand words, I kept my centerfold caption to a minimum when, with Lou Thomas and I trading favors, I produced this photo feature introducing Durk Dehner as a smouldering icon to the leather world of *Drummer*. He was what queer men were looking for in the *Drummer* classified personals where the most frequently used keyword was *masculine*.

In addition to their art foundation dealings, Durk Dehner was without question the favorite model of the homomasculine artist Tom of Finland; and, most importantly, they were legendary friends together.

II. The centerfold text and a photograph as published in *Drummer* 15, May 1977

Durk Parker is somewhat a *Drummer* discovery. In these heretofore unpublished photographs, he brings to the pages of this issue a strong, brooding sensuality unusual in photographs of real leathermen. Originally from the Rocky Mountain area of Canada, Durk has lived in New York, Honolulu, Los Angeles, and Seattle thus far.

III. Eyewitness Illustrations

Invitation, Tom of Finland opening and exhibition at the Ambush bar, Friday, February 9, 1979, South of Market. Long before gay galleries emerged in the late 1970s with Eons in LA, Stompers in New York, and Fey-Way in San Francisco, leather bars were the gay art galleries featuring their own original murals and the work of ever-changing artists and photographers. See *Life* magazine June 26, 1964. Tom of Finland's first shows in the United States were during his first trip to America in January 1978 when he met and dined with *Drummer* art director Al Shapiro and editor in chief Jack Fritscher who introduced him to Robert Mapplethorpe who shot Tom's most important portrait. Tom, in turn, drew an almost German Expressionist portrait of Mapplethorpe as a virtual Dr. Caligari. Eyewitness Fritscher is the first to ask, "Why was Tom of Finland never published on the cover of *Drummer*?" Invitation ©Tom of Finland Foundation. Used with Permission.

“Eyewitness Durk Dehner,” billed as “Durk Parker,” debuted in the quintessential 1970s sultry centerfold of *Drummer* 15 (May 1977), perhaps the hottest homomasculine centerfold ever in *Drummer*. Photograph by Lou Thomas, Target Studio. ©Lou Thomas. Leather pioneer Lou Thomas was co-founder with Jim French of Colt Studio. Dehner became a favorite model for Tom of Finland, and the two shared a legendary friendship that resulted in the creation of the Tom of Finland Foundation. Fritscher first wrote about Durk Dehner—and introduced the term *homomascularity*—in *Drummer* 31 (September 1979) when Dehner was first runner-up in the first International Mr. Leather contest (1979). Used with permission of Durk Dehner.

Insert: In the salon around *Drummer*, the Chicago artist Etienne was one of the hosts of that first IML contest. Like Tom of Finland, Etienne idolized Durk Dehner whom he personally invited to compete live on stage. So taken was Etienne that, months before the contest, he painted a full-length color portrait of Dehner (face subliminal) that was published as the black-and-white logo for the international advertisements and posters for that IML, May 1979. Fritscher positioned Etienne’s ad as the full page 69 in *Drummer* 28 (April 1979). Thirteen years later, Etienne’s leather-heritage painting of Dehner was published as the full-color cover of *Drummer* 153 (March 1992). Used with permission of Chuck Renslow and the Leather Archives & Museum.

Excerpt source: ©[Jack Fritscher](#), [Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer](#), San Francisco: [Palm Drive Publishing](#), 2008