

MEN & MR. JONES

This Carolina Candide has channeled a lifetime of glamorous mishaps and sexual adventures into his gloriously erotic art.

“Living is pleasure and little remorse. Aging is easier than imagined in the world of art, friendship, and intimacy. ... I enjoy more than ever being gay and at peace with the world. Bob Dylan sings us forward, surfers are surfing, kids and old folks show the way to be or not to be in a world that is big and complex, terrifying and wonderful. Tomorrow, the forecast is for the sun to come out and then it will be raining men. All over this city, shirtless, in shorts and swimsuits, buses and beaches full of them. So many men, so little time.”

—January 2007, Rio de Janeiro, from Tom Jones’ journal

BY KIT CHRISTOPHER

Tom Jones’ muscular models often seem saturated in bastard amber—the name given to a certain color of theatrical light gel. Small wonder, as his peripatetic life has been lived out on the stages of New York, London, Paris, and Morocco. As a young man Jones landed in Manhattan as a dancer. A strapping Southern boy from North Carolina, Jones experienced his queer awakening during the Belle Époque of the gay sexual revolution, starting with the infamous Continental and St. Marks bathhouses. Working as a waiter at the legendary Blue Whale Bar on Fire Island expanded his man-on-man curriculum. A fashion student on summer break, Jones would taper his shirts, retailor his jeans, and use abrasives to highlight his denim in all the right places to show off his impressive physique. In a way, he was becoming his own work of art.





A subsequent stint living in Hollywood at the YMCA and hitchhiking around Los Angeles provided thrills until the tug of home pulled him back to North Carolina and a “regular” job as an award-winning designer. But the lure of dance and New York pulled him east again, and soon he was working as a costume designer for an all-black dance company. This was the launching pad for the first of his many European adventures.

Moving from country to country with the love of his life, a teenage Swedish hunk named Ulf, Jones experienced the bohemian existence that only the young, talented, and beautiful can afford. Passion and drama followed the couple as they parted and recoupled again and again while Jones’s dance career took him from nude performances on the Champs-Élysées to eye-opening corners of Japan and Lebanon.

Jones’ pinball lifestyle never quite ended, even when he returned to rustic mode on his family’s property. Dancing tours continued, and his mystical imagination was opened by the teachings of Carlos Casteneda in Mexico.

As his art career advanced, Jones also began making extended treks to Rio de Janeiro, which became his spiritual, sexual, and soul-enriching home. He now divides his time between the two continents and creates a bountiful harvest of work for a coterie of enthralled collectors.

Is there a Tom Jones type? A guy that will always inspire you?

Not really. Life is a smorgasbord of sexual types and energies. If you mean a visual type, no. If you mean an energetic type, yes. Someone who loves his body and loves sharing it, whether freely or for money. A friendly, suggestive look gets me every time.

I see the influence of Harry Bush in your work. Who would you call your biggest artistic inspirations?

In terms of idealism, anatomy, and drawing technique, Harry Bush. Painting: Western art centered in Santa Fe—Harley Brown and Oleg Stavrowsky, in particular. Nikolai Fechin, for sure. Russian realism and German stuff just before World War II. N.C. Wyeth and Pino, who does romance novel covers. Most practically, Helen van Wyk, whose PBS series gave me the determination to try.

In terms of “attitude,” Tom of Finland. For years I was a Kake wannabe, but, like Tom himself, didn’t have the necessary equipment. But then no one else I met during my European years [1972–82] did, either. Wait—there was that hot, fun Paris stud. Hung, muscled, and in leather...but he was younger than me and kinda short.

Which male erotic artists working today turn you on?

I’m not being snotty here, but none. I like a lot of different artists’ work, but I can’t say it turns me on. At the moment, Brazilian porn videos turn me on.

Tell us about those guys.

Lots of the guys from Marco Studio, for sure, but I doubt I’d get much art done. In that scenario, instead of peering from behind the easel, I’d be unzipped and getting my cock sucked, for starters.

Reading about your spiritual explorations is interesting. Does your spirituality influence your art? Or your sex life?

What, you want me talking about spiritual explorations when I just told you getting my cock sucked was more important than a painting? Let’s say my “spirituality” is most often explored when there’s a lack of sex in my sex life. But seriously, one’s sex life *is* one’s spirituality, don’t you think?

Does making art make you horny? Or does being horny make you want to make art?

It’s textbook psychology that an artist sublimates his sexual desire into his art. So if we define “horny” as heightened sexual desire, yes to both questions. But, like sex, it is at times frustrating and exhausting. You hope for something, a new face, a blank canvas, you give it your best shot, but it’s not always reciprocated. Being horny is important, but controlling that energy, not ejaculating too soon, not getting discouraged, is also part of it. My favorite





paintings are ultimately very satisfying, sometimes better than sex. Of course, assuming it wasn't the last time for either...

Do you feel that your work as a dancer informs your art?

My work as a dancer informs every aspect of my life. Everyone must dance as often and as best as they can.

You're candid about your steroid use in your writings. Can you sum up your experience with them?

I asked a doctor to prescribe them, saying either he would or I'd buy them at the gym. He gave me a bottle of something that within a week turned me furious with the world. I flushed those pills down the toilet before I ended up doing jail time. Some months later Dianabol became available at the gym, and I started. Nice results and no fury. But I didn't have much money, so I let it slide. Then I got a contract to do a stage show in Italy, and being buff wouldn't hurt. So I did a couple more bottles and arrived kinda beefy. Problem was, during the show I didn't have the pills, and so the heavy lifts with my partner were getting shaky. She glared at me a lot, thinking I was gonna drop her. Anyway, the show closed, I moved on in another direction and I didn't feel them necessary.

Today in Brazil there's so much steroid use. It's hard to reconcile the effect externally with the effects internally. My friend doesn't use them and has a beefy muscular body, proving definitely life is better for me without them.

You're still in great shape. What's your physical regimen?

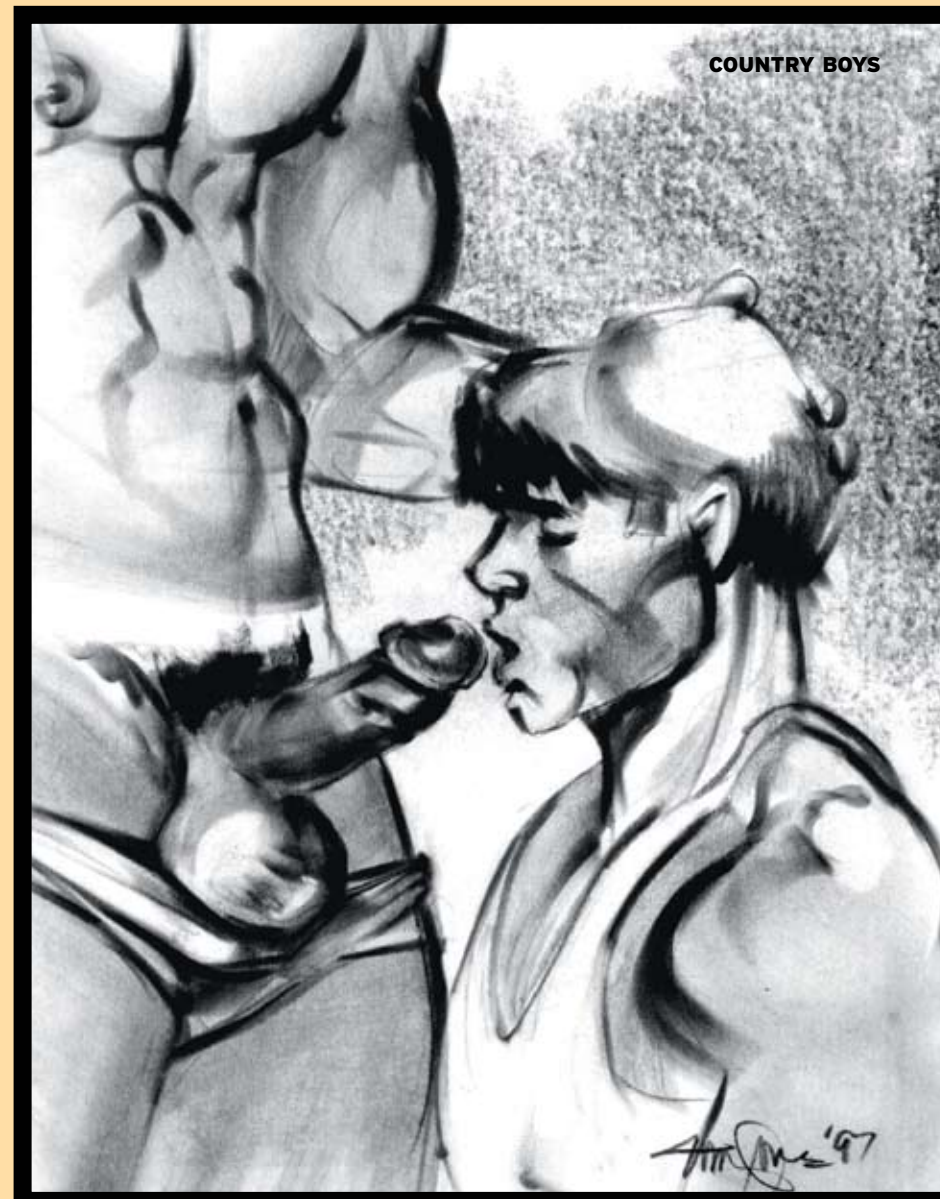
When in Rio I work out, swim, bike, and walk a lot. Here in the states I lift sporadically, do abdominals on my trampoline, dance to videos, and sweat a lot in my garden. I'm not as strong as 10 years ago because my heart sometimes fibrillates thanks to my genetics. Either that or it's a psychosomatic reaction from watching U.S. politics and economics go to hell.

Any good stories about having sex with your models? Or using the model-artist relationship to get some sex?

I don't kiss and tell. I used to, but not now. If you find something I wrote on the Web, it's all true. But you'll have to dig for it.

Well, you do tell lots of stories on your site, including some interesting experiences with your collectors.

My collectors are almost always a pleasure to deal with.



It's not easy parting with a painting, but it's healthy to not be attached to things. Besides, it's the only way I make money. Almost always it's done via e-mail, because I don't like to talk on the telephone and I don't like selling or showing face-to-face.

There are basically two types of collectors, and I like both. The first is very businesslike, and I respond similarly. The second type and I share a lot of info, and the actual "transferring of property" feels almost secondary to a feeling of friendship or family.

That having been said, at the beginning of last summer I got an e-mail from a guy who said he really liked my stuff and wanted to buy a print of everything. Said he would drive up from Atlanta and get them and wanted to see everything I had. Sure enough, about 11 one night a car drives up and out gets this hot dude, and he walks across the yard totally naked. I'm thinking, *Fucking cool*. He's really personable, and we spend the next two hours looking: him at my art, me...well. He really likes all the frontal stuff, the bigger the dick the better. Then we get in bed and carry on just like you think we might. It's really nice. Next morning he's in no hurry and we have a nice breakfast conversation. He showers, then I shower, and around noon he gathers what he wants and asks me how much. I'm in the



mood to give good prices, but he still wants a lot for a little. Finally we strike a bargain. He hands me the cash for a couple of drawings, framed, and a couple of paintings. Then he gets back in his SUV, still naked, and drives off, and I'm left in the afterglow.

Well, now the glow has dimmed and gone. First I noticed some missing paintings, then a missing drawing. I've been seriously going through stuff and find a lot of my best drawings missing—the full-frontals with big dicks. It's taken me months to realize they were gone.

What's just so confounding is how nice the guy was to be with, so intelligent as well as sensual. When he got my e-mail with my suspicions a few weeks back—those suspicions are certainties now—he asked me to read *A Separate Peace* by John Knowles, implying that would assuage me of my doubts.

There's nothing I know to do in a situation like this. I'm locked up. You could say it's my fault for trusting a stranger. So I just wanted to tell the story. Who would think someone would like an artist's work, go to meet him, have sex, charm him through breakfast, and then steal his stuff while he's in the shower?

Sounds like my ex. What about recounting some happier encounters from your minimally clothed dancing days?

Ulf and I had wonderful friendships in Lebanon with lots of Muslims, male and female, young and old, and we rented an apartment on the roof of a Muslim household. All of us bounced around in the local buses together, sweated together stuffed in the communal taxis, worked out and cold-water showered at the Beirut gym together, and ate the same delicious food. In the Palestinian camps desperation grew, but no ill will ever came our way.

And yes, when Ulf left me and went back to Sweden, I had sex with some of those guys, too. But truth be told, I was somewhat a snob—being the lead dancer in the then-largest casino stage show in the world—and played hard to get when I should have been more open to the invitations. One of the few regrets in life I have is that I didn't have more sex then and there than I did. Now, as then, I like Arabs and Muslims a lot, and in my heart there is much concern for their well-being.

Now, religious fundamentalism is there—as it is here—but at that time we swam in a warm sea of tolerance, mutual respect, understanding, and horniness, not knowing that even then the tides were changing. The oil tar that stuck to the beach pebbles and then to our feet was an omen of bad things to come. ■

Get to know more about Tom Jones, his art, his loves, and his life at TomJonesMen.com.