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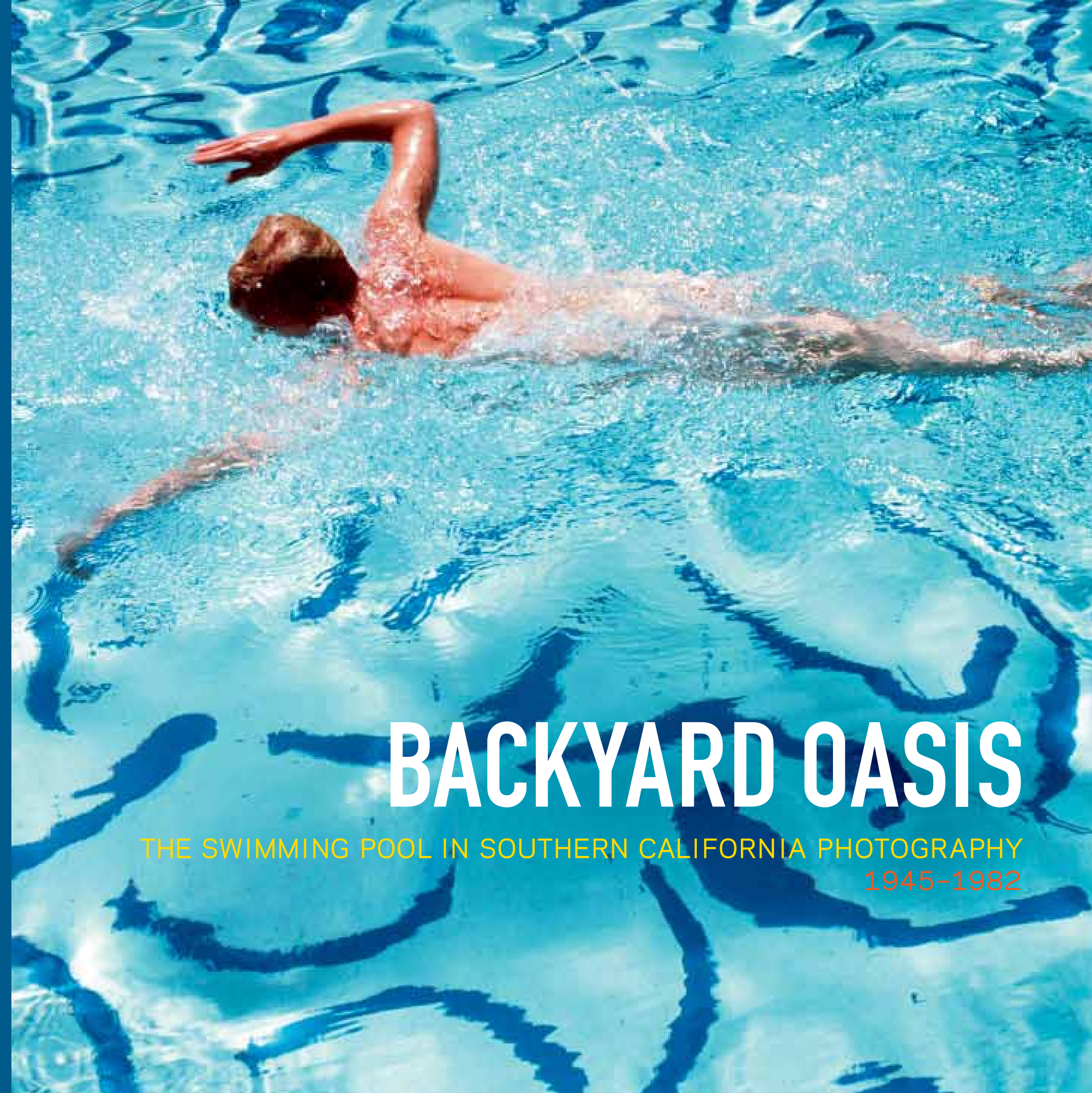
BACKYARD OASIS

THE SWIMMING POOL IN SOUTHERN
CALIFORNIA PHOTOGRAPHY 1945-1982

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PALM SPRINGS
ART MUSEUM



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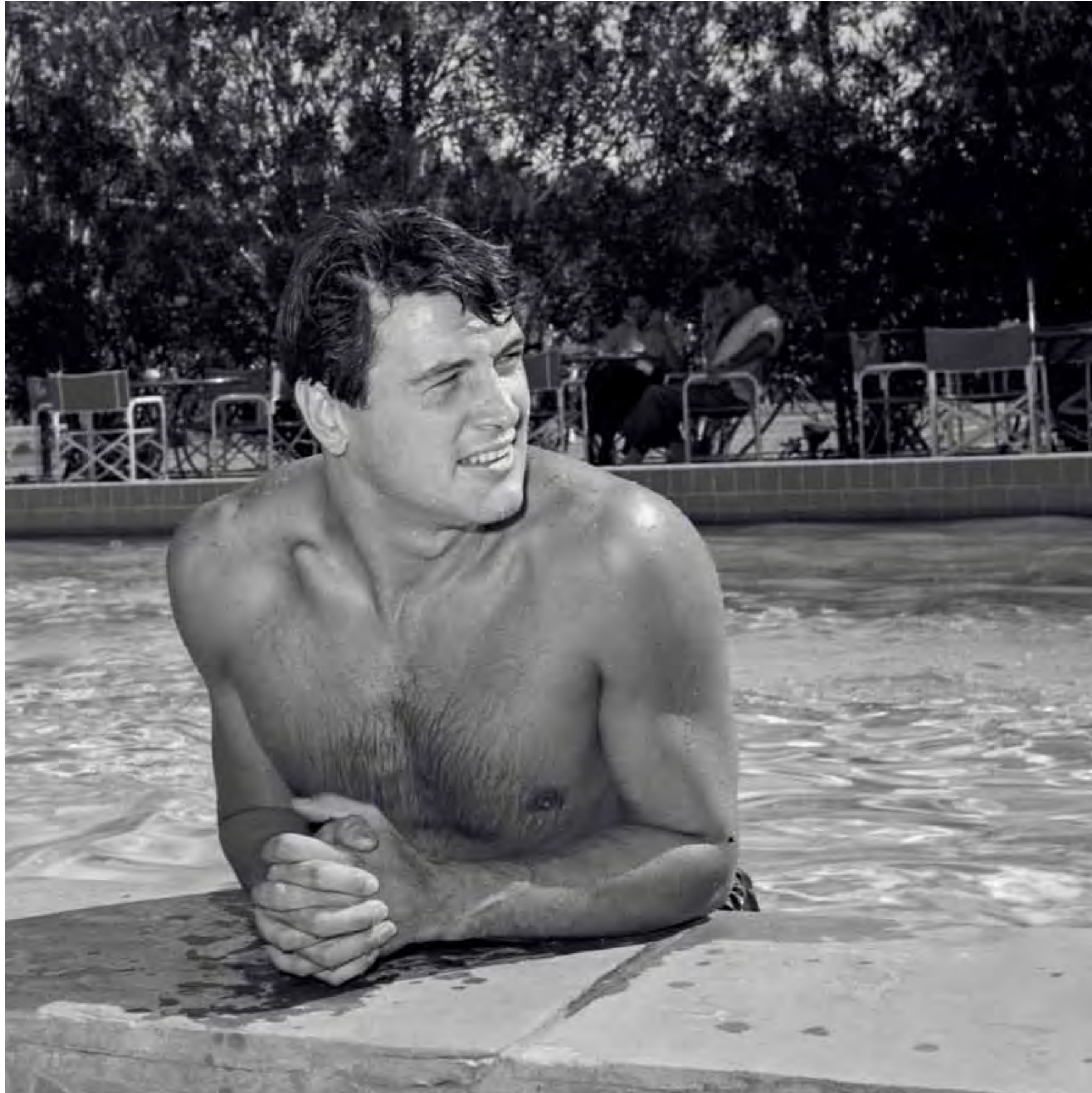
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1945-1982

Edited by Daniell Cornell
With texts by Robert Atkins, Daniell Cornell, Dick Hebdige,
Tyler Stallings, Robert Stearns, Jennifer A. Watts

Southern California's pool culture is the subject of this unique and luscious collection of photographs that explore the parallel evolution of an iconic symbol and an artistic genre.

Since the end of World War II, Southern California's backyard pools—those blue-green oases in an otherwise often arid landscape—have symbolized any number of American ideals: optimism, wealth, consumerism, escape, physical beauty, and the triumph of people over nature. Simultaneously, the field of photography developed as a transformative method for recording the human condition. This exhibition catalog celebrates the nexus of these two phenomena in a one-of-a-kind collection that features more than two hundred works by more than forty postwar artists and photographers. It presents works by photographers and artists including Bill Anderson, John Baldessari, Ruth Bernhard, David Hockney, Herb Ritts, Ed Ruscha, Julius Shulman, and Larry Sultan. Thematically grouped into topics ranging from the rise of celebrity culture, suburbia and dystopia, avant-garde architectural landscape design, and the cult of the body, these images offer a rich study of the cultural connotations of the swimming pool. Six insightful essays provide a comprehensive overview of the development of the swimming pool and its attendant aesthetic and social culture.



BILL ANDERSON *Rock Hudson*, 1954 (Detail)

BACKYARD OASIS

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FROM BEEFCAKE TO SKATECAKE: Shifting Depictions of Masculinity and the Backyard Swimming Pool in Southern California

BY TYLER STALLINGS

"I came to Los Angeles for two reasons: The first was a photo by Julius Shulman of Case Study House #21, and the other was AMG's Physique Pictorial!"¹
—DAVID HOCKNEY

MOST OFTEN, in midcentury architectural images of homes and pools, whether taken by Julius Shulman or by a staff photographer for any number of home-and-garden magazines, people are largely absent from the pool. The pool is clearly just an ornament to reflect the home's implied occupants—predictably, the family unit—either to enhance their glamour by way of its Hollywood associations, or to illustrate a rise in social status, as a newly minted consumer in the postwar era (fig. 1).

Although the dominant image of the backyard pool was as a backdrop for family values, privacy, and consumerism, there existed alternative uses and representations of the backyard pool as a site for expressing erotic desire, voyeurism, and a liminal state between nature and culture (fig. 2).

Contrary to Shulman's often reproduced images of architecturally significant, clean-lined, modernist homes with placid backyard pools, such as the Kaufmann House in Palm Springs, this essay will look at photographs made between 1945 and 1980 that show men at play in backyard swimming pools. It will consider the work of two Los Angeles-based photographers: the beefcake photography of Bob Mizer (fig. 3) and his peers from the 1940s–60s published in his *Physique Pictorial* magazine, and Craig Stecyk's photo documentation of the DogTown Z-Boy skateboard team for *SkateBoarder* magazine in the 1970s (fig. 4). Each focuses on a redefinition of masculinity in relationship to the swimming pool towards a new vision embracing hedonism. This shift in values associated with the masculine—from a man as hardworking breadwinner for his family to the single, unattached, self-obsessed, and leisure-seeking man—accompanies a cultural shift from the early 1950s to the late 1970s from an economy based on production to one based on consumption.



Fig. 1
JULIUS SHULMAN
Edgar J. Kaufmann House,
Palm Springs, California, 1947



Fig. 2
BOB MIZER
Pool-Bob Glennon, 1950s

Fig. 3
BOB MIZER
Bob Saputo, Los Angeles, 1958

Fig. 4
CRAIG STECYK
Jay Adams, Northridge, California,
ca. 1973



"The introduction of the swimming pool as a pretext to show nude or seminude bodies was a spectacular opportunity," writes Thomas van Leeuwen in his groundbreaking book, *The Springboard in the Pond*, as "Eros could be shown in an athletic and hygienic context, providing legal as well as tasteful entertainment for the voyeur as a family man."² Here, van Leeuwen underscores the way the pool as family site provides cover for erotic desires that challenge mainstream modes of masculinity and domesticity.

Indeed, instead of creating images for families who may see their values reflected in magazines such as *House Beautiful*, or for the "family man," seeking out heteronormative, erotic images in men's magazines such as *Playboy*, both Mizer and Stecyk depict worlds of young men playing, posing, and emphasizing physique and performance. The work of



each of these photographers was widely influential since their images were first published in magazines that could be found on most any magazine rack, as opposed to the rarefied setting of the fine art gallery or museum. However, decades after their first appearance in magazines, their works are now finding a place within these milieus.

BOB MIZER

Pioneer of gay, nude photography, Bob Mizer (1922–1992) founded the Athletic Model Guild, or AMG, in 1945. The



business was located in his home, shared with his mother, located in downtown Los Angeles, and was formerly an old, rambling funeral parlor. After the photographer's death, Wayne E. Stanley, a friend and legal advisor, tended to his archives. In 2003 the company was sold to former physique photographer Dennis Bell, who continues to develop the brand and offers access to AMG archives through its website.³ Mizer published *Physique Pictorial* for close to forty years, from 1951 to 1990 (fig. 5).



Fig. 5
ATHLETIC MODEL GUILD
Physique Pictorial, Summer 1957



Fig. 6
BRUCE BELLAS (BRUCE OF L.A.)
Bob Gentry, USMC, 1957

Fig. 7
BOB MIZER
Richard Dubois, 1953

Fig. 8
JIM FRENCH
Tony Regalia, Malibu Canyon, 1973

Fig. 9
UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPHER
Equilibrists (Two Men), ca. 1950

Fig. 10
MAX YAVNO
Muscle Beach, 1954 (Detail;
full image pp. 178-79)



early twentieth century (fig. 7). Up until several significant Supreme Court cases in the late 1960s, United States obscenity laws allowed women, but not men, to appear in various states of undress in images for publication.⁴ After the U.S. Supreme Court lifted the ban on representing full frontal, male nudity in 1967, "the market was flooded with shots of every scrawny street kid willing to bare his all for a nickel bag."⁵ Photographers such as Roy Dean, Lou Thomas,



and Jim French were among a handful that maintained Mizer's aesthetic, one that was more admiring of the male physique than given to gratuitous display (fig. 8).

Like the Muscle Beach photos by Max Yavno found in museums and fine art books, beefcake magazines focused on presenting an abundance of photographs in each issue of brawny young men in sporty, fit poses (fig. 9). However, Yavno came out of a social-documentary aesthetic from the Photo League, a group with whom he associated in the 1930s when he was in New York, and thus was perhaps more concerned with the odd juxtapositions of personalities found at Venice Beach, rather than a predilection for beautiful bodybuilder bodies (fig. 10).

Wayne Stanley, in his introduction to the recently published complete reprint of *Physique Pictorial*, characterizes Mizer in counter-distinction to Yavno:

Venice Beach provided Bob with the impetus to formulate the direction of his career, and by 1945 he was eager to earn his living as a professional photographer . . . As a result of his years at Venice Beach, Bob did not want for models after having turned AMG into a photographic studio. After a short while, handsome young men, in

very large numbers, merely began appearing at the gates of AMG with the desire to be photographed. *Manna from heaven!*⁶

What was groundbreaking about Mizer's work for *Physique Pictorial* was that he had no pretense about showing men without their clothes and celebrating their beauty (fig. 11). He was neither secretive nor apologetic. Historian, F. Valentine Hooven III, author of *Beefcake: The Muscle Magazines of America 1950-1970*, has called Bob's vision "unique at a time when there existed an enormous, untapped, and mostly closeted gay population hungry to see the beauty of the young male physique artistically photographed for its own sake."⁷

In the past ten years, Mizer's pioneering work has received increased recognition. This includes a feature film, *Beefcake*, that dramatizes events in his life, largely around a trial involving censorship of *Physique Pictorial*; exhibitions of his work in commercial galleries, such as Western Project in Culver City, California, and Exile Gallery in Berlin, Germany; reprinting facsimiles of every issue of *Physique Pictorial* in a three-volume set published by Taschen; and most recently the publication of *Bob's World*, also from Taschen, which focuses on Mizer's color photography, and includes interviews with past associates, and biographical detail gleaned from Mizer's diaries (fig. 12).

CRAIG STECYK

Craig Stecyk, Jeff Ho, and Skip Engblom opened the shop Jeff Ho Surfboards and Zephyr Productions on Main Street in Venice Beach in 1973. They developed a surfing team called the Z-Boys, who caught waves at Bay Street in Santa Monica and were infamous for adventurous surfing amidst the dilapidated pier-pilings of the Pacific Ocean amusement park, an area nicknamed "DogTown."

They were also passionate skateboarders, especially when the surf was down. Based on their surfing skills, they came to use banks of concrete throughout the city, especially at

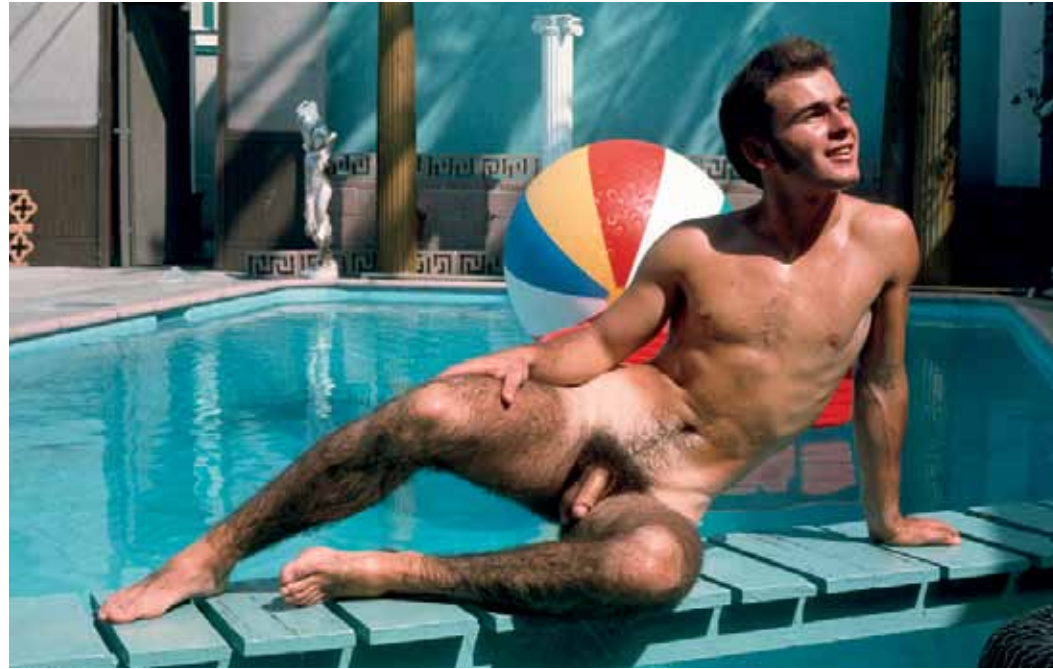


Fig. 11
BOB MIZER
Antonio Montez, ca. 1970

Fig. 12
BOB MIZER
Mad Dog, ca. 1970

Fig. 13
ANTHONY FRIEDKIN
Craig Stecyk, Surfer/Artist,
Shot at P.O.P. Pier, 1976



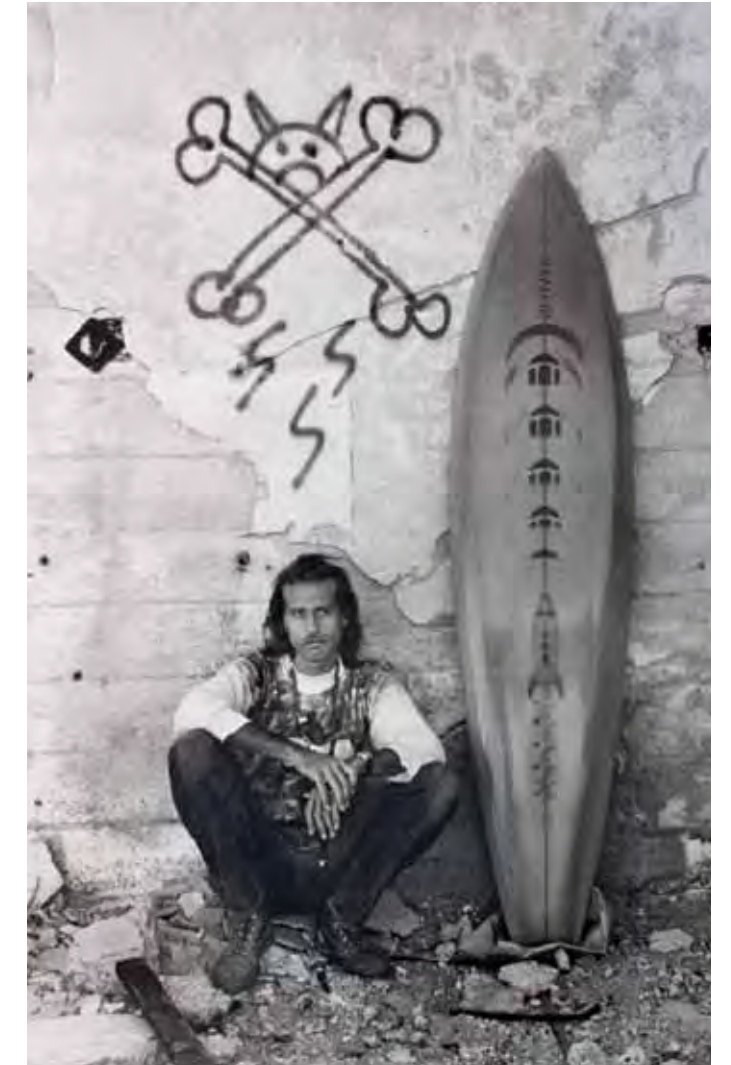
schoolyard playgrounds, to invent new, stylish moves. Instead of standing straight up, which had been the dominant stance, even in competition, they crouched low on their boards. It was a low-slung style, akin to a surfer guiding one's hand through a wave to steer their surfboard.

In the thirty years after the first issue of *Physique Pictorial*, Southern California had experienced rapid postwar suburban expansion, accompanied by the construction of a few hundred thousand, backyard swimming pools—made affordable and accessible through bank loans and cheaper building techniques. But in the 1970s in Los Angeles, a prolonged drought forced many homeowners to drain their pools. Word got around about these new "cement oases." The Z-Boys took their surf style of skating and their attitude of treating the urban landscape like their personal playground to the empty pools. In essence, Stecyk's photographs and the Z-Boys they depicted represented a draining of the Edenic California dream.

Stecyk wrote and photographed a series of innovative reports and interviews for *SkateBoarder* magazine that became known as the DogTown articles, which immortalized the Z-Boy lifestyle. His stories inspired a generation, and he is referred to as the godfather of the sport of skateboarding as it is known today (fig. 13). In the introduction to a collection of Stecyk's contributions to *SkateBoarder* magazine, editor Glen E. Friedman writes, "Virtually anyone who grew up during this period and knew *SkateBoarder* magazine as 'the Bible' has been influenced incredibly in his or her outlook and approach toward life and living by Stecyk's articles."⁸

Stecyk is one of the founders of *Juxtapoz* art magazine and has contributed to many different books. His life and that of the Z-Boys were portrayed in the 2001 award-winning documentary *DogTown and Z-Boys*, as well as the feature film *Lords of DogTown* in 2005.

In 2011, forty years after his initial skateboarding forays, Stecyk still embodies his peripatetic attitude and challenges notions of private property. This viewpoint is reflected in a recent interview with him, on the occasion of his work being included in Los Angeles's Museum of Contemporary Art's sprawling, historical take on graffiti art since the 1970s, *Art in the Streets*, when he comments on the relationship between art and the urban landscape:



*In this country we spend over \$5 billion a year on graffiti abatement and prevention. It's strange to me. What's the difference between the Sistine Chapel and the side of an underpass? Not much. So why do we criminalize beauty?*⁹

Similarly, although there is a dystopian aspect to a dry pool, it also invites trespassing, not only literally onto someone else's property, but also into the privacy and secu-

rity of the nuclear family. Even though this notion suggests a provision for criminal acts, it also represents an act of rebellion against the traditional, rational-grid plan of cities. This urban layout can be found among many cultures going back centuries, but is perhaps best epitomized in the Western imagination by ancient Rome and its colonies, whose notion of the grid reflected the regimentation of its military camps. In this respect, as a tribe of men traversing Los Angeles's city streets, ending up in empty backyard pools, the Z-Boys came to break from this hegemony and embrace the irrational and nonlinear.

MAGAZINES

The broad influence of the magazines in which Mizer and Stecyk published is evident by their circulation numbers. According to Hooven, by the mid-1950s, *Physique Pictorial* routinely sold over 40,000 copies. By 1978, *SkateBoarder* had one million readers.¹⁰ The magazine images were units of exchange in the formation of varying forms of masculine identity around the country, whether gay, straight, beefcake, or "skatecake."

Mizer used campiness and subterfuge to play with identities in the 1950s and 1960s. Mizer's men were caught in a time of transition in which a new relationship between young men and consumption was developing. This was a change for the country as a whole that once based its economy on production rather than consumption. Stecyk and the Z-Boys embraced a new aesthetic of "looseness" that was in the air in the 1970s. In his book, *Getting Loose*, Sam Binkley defines looseness as "an affirmation of direct personal engagement as an active force in the fashioning of experiences, realized through a release of the self into the flow of natural impulses, desires and the sensuality and experience of everyday life."¹¹ In this spirit, the interaction between masculinity and consumerism in this period formed a new definition for a man—one who embraced pleasure and self-fulfillment (fig. 14).



Fig. 14
UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPHER
Seventies Pad, ca. 1970s

Fig. 15
BOB MIZER
Elledge Brothers, ca. 1970

The key to this whole process was the printed magazine. As Bill Osgerby writes in *Playboys in Paradise*, magazines were instrumental in "middle-class America's embrace of lifestyles increasingly at ease with a credo of pleasure, self-expression and personal 'liberation' through consumption."¹² In *Playboy* magazine for example, there was the occasional feature of the ideal bachelor pad. In a plan from a 1962 issue, the editorial reads: "The discerning city-dweller of individual ways and comfortable means is turning more and more to the superb outlets for decorative and architectural self-expression inherent in the town house. He is beguiled by its intrinsic advantages of privacy and spaciousness coupled with a metropolitan location just a shift of the gears away from myriad urban attractions."¹³ The accent is clearly on the single man seeking privacy for self-satisfaction. As in many of the bachelor pad designs published between 1956-70, the emphasis is on the city dwelling too—the place of the

man—rather than the suburbs, the place of the woman, as it were. One might argue that an unintended consequence is a blending of the two—an overlay of feminized interior design onto the masculinized city grid. It represents a new merging of the masculine with consumption, a feature associated with the feminine in the not too distant past.

Writing about the changes of the 1970s as reflected in men's magazines, Jonathan Rutherford writes:

*The aspirant nuclear family of the 1950s began to fail to reproduce a normative version of itself. The advent of a consumer society combined with new permissive legislation on divorce and sexuality challenged the styles of manliness and modes of power necessary to reproduce and sustain traditional heterosexual relations . . . Women's struggle for more independent lives meant that men began to negotiate their relationships with women and children on the basis of equality . . . the decade witnessed the emergence of trends which point toward the end not just of the nuclear family but of the family based on patriarchal domination.*¹⁴

Moving past the 1970s, Rutherford quotes from a 1998 report by marketing consultants that explained to advertisers how best to represent today's "insecure man." They concluded that "the most successful way to communicate with men in today's environment is to reflect the soul of primal man. Man the warrior, the hero. In a world where men find their most basic instincts thwarted, an advertiser who indulges their favourite [sic] fantasies should prosper."¹⁵

However, in a less cynical tone, one might view Mizer and Stecyk's depiction of men and their "primal," body-centered activities around the pool as examples of infusing a new hedonistic sensibility, one enhanced by being in the privacy of the backyard and around the liminal and libidinal swimming pool.

When one peruses all the issues of *Physique Pictorial*, or looks at his films, it is evident that Mizer created a safe zone within the high walls of his compound for his boys to relax

and play (fig. 15). Once oiled up, they enacted scenes of jailor and convict, of Roman emperor and slave, of cop and perp, eventually ending in a fall-down orgy in which everyone gave in to the pleasure of their bodies, no matter how many "laws" had been broken. At other times, the pictures simply showed the boys lounging, weightlifting, or stretching.

What made it all work was that Mizer could get close. Unlike a studio set where there might be a lone artist with a model, or at most with some assistants looking on, Mizer created a crowd scene of boys in his backyard. It is as though he transported Muscle Beach to downtown L.A., and could enter the crowd when he wanted, as if he were a street photographer or a cinéma vérité film director in his own backyard. All of this was done in an effort to not only keep hidden that which was against the law at the time,¹⁶ but also to





create an artificial environment that then becomes natural within the context of his compound (fig. 16).

In a similar vein, Stecyk was part of the team, so to speak, as a founder of the original surf shop from which the skateboarders arose. He hunted for the pools too. In many of his shots, you see his shadow in the frame. He was up close. Like Hunter S. Thompson, he wrote from a gonzo or New Journalism aesthetic in which he was both a reporter and a figure within the story too. Capturing the same uninhibited qualities that Mizer sought, Stecyk, writing in a 1975 *SkateBoarder* article about the high speeds and the “fourth-dimensional” experience of seeming weightlessness while surfing and skateboarding, he said in a most philosophical riff:



Fig. 16
ATHLETIC MODEL GUILD
*Pool in Athletic Model Guild
Compound, 1992*

Fig. 17
BOB MIZER
Bob Starr, Los Angeles, 1957

Fig. 18
CRAIG STECYK
*Bob Biniak, Dogbowl,
Brentwood, California, ca. 1973*

*Pushing the old boundaries establishes the new “limits.” In actuality, the only limiting factor is that of your imagination. You can go as far as you want to take it, or perhaps more aptly as far as it takes you. After you leave the realm of traditional preconceptions, you enter the area of endless freedom. There exists no right or wrong, rules are unheard of, and the course is uncharted.*¹⁷

Stecyk’s promotion of this type of “mobile, flexible and self-responsible self, unconstrained by tradition and collective obligation” is in line with the spirit of other sorts of lifestyle magazines in this period, which were influential in promoting an ethic of autonomous living.¹⁸ The *Whole Earth*

Catalog, published between 1968–72, perhaps best exemplifies this looseness of a melding with nature, and promoting independent living. As stated on the first page of each issue, its purpose was to counteract the failures of big government and big business.

*In response to this dilemma and to these gains a realm of intimate, personal power is developing—power of the individual to conduct his own education, find his own inspiration, shape his own environment, and share his adventure with whoever is interested. Tools that aid this process are sought and promoted by the WHOLE EARTH CATALOG.*¹⁹



Although it is a different guise from *Playboy*’s bachelor pad, these two publications share a focus on being self-made and self-expressive. One might argue that sports magazines and consumer-oriented magazines for men, changed after 1967 and 1969. In 1967, obscenity laws against male nudity were lifted after several groundbreaking trials in the U.S. Supreme Court. And after the Stonewall riot in 1969, gays become more visible in society. These two elements combined began to change how men behaved, as well as how they were depicted and viewed by the mainstream.

SELF-REFLEXIVE MASCULINITY

It was these books and magazines in the 1960s–70s that provided guides and maps to the new loose lifestyle, acting as “a reflexive storying of the self.”²⁰ When skateboarders photographed each other and circulated these images to their readers of the magazines they put into practice a self-reflexivity that redefined masculinity. Similarly, the argument applies to Mizer’s magazine in which he encouraged men from all around the country to send in their own photos for publication in *Physique Pictorial*. Once published, they would see themselves in a new context that celebrated the male physique—their physique.

Bob’s world is one of homoerotic playfulness. There is also the sense that through the playfulness, Bob is helping his young men learn to enjoy their bodies (fig. 17). In Craig’s world of Z-Boy skateboarders, the underlying message is classic male bonding through the shared, extreme experiences of vertical leaps in empty pools and through the brigands’ trespassing of private homes (fig. 18).

Mizer’s magazine represents a gay sensibility acutely aware of the codes of what represents a man in the 1950s and 1960s. This self-reflexivity lies at the heart of the campiness in the images. There is an element of play in the photos and the films produced by AMG. The closed environment of the compound and the parodic nature of commenting upon

traditional masculine roles perhaps enhance the friskiness.

In the erotically charged, coffee-table book *Bob's World*, John Sonsini, a contemporary portrait painter in Los Angeles and friend of Mizer who spent much time at Bob's compound in the late 1980s, reflects on the social atmosphere around the studio. He captures the sense of bonding through participating in an alternative life in the backyard in a pre-Stonewall era: "When you think of AMG being home, in many ways you could say Bob's films were elaborate home movies..."²¹ This is evident especially in Mizer's short films. For example, in *The Booking Of A Hood*, a short five-minute, black-and-white film that would have been for sale through *Physique Pictorial*, you see a cop and his deputy, trying to arrest and jail a delinquent. Eventually, they all fall down into a wrestling match of oiled bodies (fig. 19). Today, it seems much less titillating and feels more like the project of an art student, armed with plenty of gender theory, attempting to be purposefully light about the physicality in an effort to say, "We're all human. We're all not only gay, but sexually polymorphous. It's not about who you are or what you look like, but about desire, touch, and imagination."

The spirit and outcome of this playfulness is described good naturedly by Mizer's associate David Hurler:

*It has been written that AMG often had the feel of a summer camp, with Bob as the camp director. He placed value on traits, such as personality, that many of these men weren't aware could even have value. With Bob's help they easily opened themselves up, and in that process they became more than just pretty bodies, they became sexy and accessible.*²²

In this respect, over the course of the forty years that Mizer published the magazine, *Physique Pictorial* proved a reflexive articulation of masculinities and sexualities. Implicit in his poses is an examination of the construction, strengthening, and weakening of male media icons, as was the case with

much gay porn from this time period. This is why one so often saw the clothes and accoutrements of sailors, policemen, bikers, cowboys, and other representations of authority and traditional manliness, which could become a "costume" in which to "perform" when in the hands of a gay man.

In both cases, men were in taboo situations. For Bob, it was the ongoing harassment from the U.S. Post Office over obscenity—nude, male bodies in publications circulated by mail were not permitted. For the Z-Boys, they were defiantly trespassing on other people's property, and embracing a life of rebellious leisure rather than a work ethic, the fruits of which were the house and property that they invaded.



Fig. 19
ATHLETIC MODEL GUILD
The Booking of a Hood, ca. 1950s

Fig. 20
CRAIG STECYK
T. A. — *Model T Front Side or Transvergence*, 1973

The notion of repetitive acts was central to these magazines' appeal; as Iain Borden writes, "this is a complex intersection of lived experience and mechanically reproduced imagery...the mechanical image projects the skater both back to themselves, and others."²³ And since actions were performed collectively, "the desire to enact the move and to have it reproduced is then the desire to be, at the same time, oneself, oneself as someone else, and all skaters in oneself."²⁴ The skaters become recognizable icons in the magazines.

Stecyk's Z-Boy skateboarders challenged the sports model of military-like discipline and bending the body to rational will. Rather, the Z-Boys were not he-men, but were putting themselves on display for one another. They enjoyed performing and watching one another's bodies in motion. They were aware that they were being photographed by

Stecyk, and being written about, thus becoming new role models for young men around the country who would read *SkateBoarder* magazine.

This self-awareness is evident in at least two ways when one pages through *SkateBoarder*, paying close attention to the images of skaters in empty pools. Either they are looking directly at the camera, usually in a moment of bravado and sometimes self-mockery if they happen to be caught doing a bad trick, or they are flipping their board above the rim of the pool in order to show its underside (fig. 20). And there, one finds the DogTown logo, created by Stecyk himself, but usually hand drawn. The point is that they knew that they were doing something different and wanted everyone to know it when they opened the pages of *SkateBoarder*, whether they were in Malibu, Phoenix, Atlanta, or Boston.

In a *SkateBoarder* article from 1979, Stecyk characterizes the DogTown lifestyle as it came to be known and publicized, "Traveling hundreds of miles, sneaking about in appropriate camouflage, employing hand-drawn maps, eluding security guards, and spending countless dollars and hours perfecting their art, the practitioners exude a fanatical dedication that eclipses the common definitions of total insanity. They are members of an elite group whose only membership requirement is that you attend the meetings..."²⁵ Here, he also evokes the sense of belonging and camaraderie central to this loose lifestyle.

In the context of the postwar backyard swimming pool, so often used as a location for shelter magazines to self-consciously display the nuclear family and its values, Mizer and Stecyk employ the same setting to pose a challenge to those values.

ARCHITECTURAL SPACE AS SENSUAL SPACE

Mizer's and Stecyk's representations and actual use of the backyard pool are an example of architectural space rethought in terms of the body that occupies it. Both Mizer's

boys cavorting and posing around the pool and Stecyk's skateboarders hugging the pool's empty curves emphasize a desire for one's body to be in motion. Their engagement with the architectural and social other represents a rebirth of body and identity.

Skateboarders work with centrifugal and centripetal forces on the body to create new moves within the bowl of the empty pool. Borden describes their use of the pool in facilitating their flowing actions as taking "on more the character of a prosthetic device, an extension of the body as a kind of fifth limb."²⁶

Though only some of Mizer's published images depicted men posing in private, backyard swimming pools, the reality of the studio setting was that most of what was shot always centered on the pool. Clearly, Mizer recognized that the pool created a libidinal context for his boys to be in a constant state of undress, or readiness to be. Over the years, he purchased surrounding properties, expanding his compound and keeping his business behind closed doors (fig. 21).

Despite the compound's sprawling site, recognition of the pool's centrality is underscored by comments on building the set in a warehouse in Nova Scotia for Thom Fitzgerald's *Beefcake*, a film that blends dramatization of key events in Mizer's life along with documentary footage. Set designer D'Arcy Poultney noted:

Bob Mizer left an archive of about a million stills, as well as films made by his agency.... We knew what his house and studio looked like.... First thing we needed, of course, was a pool. We borrowed an above-the-ground pool and built Mizer's house and studio on two levels around the pool.²⁷

The bowl shape of the pool, filled with water, with bodies suspended in it, cannot help but make one think of a baby in the womb. In this sense, both Mizer and Stecyk's images suggest a rethinking of the role of the male, the husband, as



Fig. 21
UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPHER
*Athletic Model Guild Compound,
Aerial View, ca. 1960s*

Fig. 22
LEONARDO DA VINCI
Vitruvian Man, ca. 1487

Fig. 23
TYLER STALLINGS
*Empty backyard swimming
pool at a foreclosed home,
Riverside, California,
September 21, 2008*

a hardworking breadwinner. Rather, their men took pleasure in their bodies. They turned the architectural space of the pool into a transsexual site, as defined by Diane Agrest in her essay "Architecture from Without."²⁸ In it, she discusses how first-century architectural manuals written by the Roman Vitruvius, which were influential during the Renaissance, created a discourse in which a woman's place was "usurped by man who as the architect has the female attributes necessary for conception and reproduction."²⁹ Like the famous, fifteenth-century rendering by Leonardo da Vinci in which man's proportions determine those of buildings (which was based on and illustrative of Vitruvius's theories), Vitruvius called the naval, rather than the womb, both the symbol and literal source of creation; hence he saw man as at the center of creation rather than woman (fig. 22). Although Agrest's



stance is critical, her notion of "architectural transsexuality" is adopted here in order to acknowledge the unique shape of the pool and its symbolism; in a different light, Agrest's critique of architectural patriarchy is one that could be shared by Mizer and Stecyk.

In the case of Mizer and Stecyk, groups of men circulate around the womb-pool, both in its childbearing state, when it is full of water, and in its barren state, when it is drained of water. Their appropriation of this site in order to reconfigure and challenge dominant ideas of masculinity suggests an active process of rebirth. It is a representation in direct challenge to the single-family unit and the suburban identity of the backyard pool, where privacy and security separates and protects from homosexuals and trespassing skateboarders. Mizer and Stecyk, in their depictions of communal masculinity, suggest a

space of shared experience, and in this sharing of an alternate value system find new security and renewal.

BACKWARDS INTO THE 1980S

It is appropriate that the period of time examined by *Pacific Standard Time*, a project developed as a partnership between the Getty Foundation and the Getty Research Institute, ends in 1980. For it was in the 1980s that there was a cultural jump backwards to the 1950s, as if World War II had just ended again, some thirty-five years later—the past is the future and the future is the past. The conservatism of the period managed to co-opt the energy of the liberatory self-reliance of the previous decades as "a countercultural emphasis on expressive self-realization and personal autonomy found an unlikely resonance with neoliberal visions of self-responsibility and enterprise."³⁰ In other words, privilege and consumer excess reared their heads again, in combination with moral restraint, obligation, and respecting so-called public norms.

Now, forty years after the drought of the 1970s, there is another sort of calamity stretching across the landscape of the Southland—foreclosures (fig. 23). The American dream of home ownership is disappearing with the Southern Californian dream of owning an oasis in the backyard along with it. As Stecyk says, "Today, there are more skateboarders than ever riding pools, because of all the foreclosures. Fresno, the Inland Empire...many properties with good shapes. You used to find out about pools by word of mouth, Nowadays, you have guys flying over foreclosed areas with helicopters searching for pools. You got real estate guys on the take to let you know when a property is empty and has a good pool!"³¹ This is a backyard Shangri-La regained for the primal man. Go forth, young man, and be photographed. Your body is the paradise.



STEARNS

1 Thomas A. P. van Leeuwen, *The Springboard in the Pond: An Intimate History of the Swimming Pool* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 224.

2 Transcribed tour commentary by Dion Neutra, son of Richard Neutra, www.neutra.org/tours.html, accessed February 10, 2011.

3 Van Leeuwen, *Springboard*, 174.

4 “Carriage Trade: The People’s Pool,” *Time*, October 6, 1947, www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,779343,00.html, accessed July 9, 2010.

5 Ibid.

6 Ann Christophe et al. *The Laguna Beach Independent*, September 26, 2008.

7 Maxime Bartlett, “Pool with a View,” *Los Angeles Times Home Magazine*, August 7, 1949.

8 Sidney Williams, daughter-in-law of the architect and curator of architecture and design, Palm Springs Art Museum, relayed Williams’s remarks in conversation with the author, March 30, 2011.

9 Joseph Rosa, *Constructed View: The Architectural Photography of Julius Shulman* (New York: Rizzoli, 1994), 88.

10 John Crosse, “Julius Shulman’s First Published Architectural Photograph: Richard Neutra’s Plywood Demonstration House,” *Southern California Architectural History*, January 7, 2011, http://so-cal-history.com/archives/1715, accessed February 10, 2011.

11 Shot originally as Ektachrome transparencies, these images are what little is left of Lee’s work after a studio fire in the early 2000s. The film dyes had shifted badly and were scanned, color-corrected, and printed by photographer Mike Rebholz in 2010.

12 Garrett Eckbo, *Landscape for Living* (New York: Architectural Record with Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1950; Santa Monica: Hennessey + Ingalls, 2002), 61. Citations refer to the 2002 edition.

13 Esther Williams, *The Million Dollar Mermaid: Esther Williams, an Autobiography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 173–77.

STALLINGS

1 David Hockney, *Bob’s World: The Life and Boys of AMG’s Bob Mizer*, ed. Dian Hanson (Cologne, Germany: Taschen, 2009), 229.

2 Thomas A. P. van Leeuwen, *The Springboard in the Pond: An Intimate History of the Swimming Pool* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 159.

3 Athletic Model Guild website, http://www.athleticmodelguild.com, accessed February 24, 2011.

4 Several significant cases in the 1960s brought about this shift in U.S. obscenity laws. H. Lynn Womack (1923–1985) was a headmaster of a boys’ school in the 1940s and then a professor of philosophy at George Washington University. In 1952 he bought the small company Guild Press and, as publisher, editor, and distributor, turned it into a profitable gay publishing company with numerous affiliated enterprises. The United States Postal Service tried to stop the circulation of his publications *Manual*, *Trim*, and *Grecian Guild Pictorial*, but he took them to court and won the case on appeal in the Supreme Court in 1962. (See Guide to the H. Lynn Womack Papers, 1945–1994, Collection Number: 7441, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, http://rnc.library.cornell.edu/ead/htmldocs/RMM07441.html, accessed May 1, 2011.) Subsequently, Manual Enterprises Inc. v. J. Edward Day, 370 U.S. 478, was the first decision by the Supreme Court to hold that magazines consisting largely of photographs of nude or near-nude male models were not obscene under U.S. law, maintaining that “these portrayals of the male nude cannot fairly be regarded as more objectionable than many portrayals of the female nude that society tolerates.” (See http://supreme.justia.com/us/370/478/ and http://uscode.house.gov/download/pls/18C71.txt, as well as Thomas Waugh, *Hard To Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from Their Beginnings to Stonewall* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.) Ultimately, the ban on full-frontal male nudity was entirely lifted on July 26,1967, when the U.S. District Court upheld “the right of all persons to receive materials dealing with the nude male figure” (U.S. v. Spinar and Germain, Decision, U.S. District Court, Minneapolis, Case 4-67 CR 15). After this time, “the artistic, bodybuilding, and classical alibis that had been used to justify male nudity fell away. Within a year publications appeared with cover photos of naked men in bed, the sexual connotations no longer even thinly disguised.” (David K. Johnson, “Physique Pioneers: The Politics of 1960s Gay Consumer Culture,” *Journal of Social History* 43: 4 (Summer 2010): 867–92,

accessed May 1, 2011, http://www.faqs.org/periodicals/201007/2069463751.html.)

5 George E. Haggerty, ed. *Gay Histories and Cultures: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), 342.

6 Wayne E. Stanley, “Introduction,” *The Complete Reprint of Physique Pictorial: 1951–1990*, 3 vols. (Cologne, Germany: Taschen, 1997), 10–11.

7 From an interview with Hooven included in Thom Fitzgerald, Director, *Beefcake*, 1998. Available from www.strandreleasing.com.

8 C.R. Stecyk III and Glen E. Friedman, *DogTown—The Legend of the Z-Boys* (New York: Burning Flags Press, 2000), vii.

9 Jori Finkel, “Street pioneers,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 10, 2011, E1, 12.

10 Iain Borden, “Body Architecture: Skateboarding and the Creation of Super-Architectural Space,” *Occupying Architecture: Between the Architect and the User*, ed. Jonathan Hill (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 201.

11 Sam Binkley, *Getting Loose: Lifestyle Consumption in the 1970s* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 2.

12 Bill Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise: Masculinity, Youth and Leisure-Style in Modern America* (New York and Oxford: Berg, 2001), 3.

13 R. Donald Jaye, “The Playboy Town House,” *Playboy*, May 1962, 83–92, 102.

14 Jonathan Rutherford, “Preface,” *Masculinity and Men’s Lifestyle Magazines*, ed. Bethan Benwell (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 1.

15 Ibid, 2.

16 Dennis Bell at AMG writes that he was told by Wayne Stanley that the aerial photograph of Bob Mizer’s compound, which accompanies this essay, and was reproduced prominently on the inside cover of the book *Bob’s World*, was from helicopter police surveillance in the 1950s (email correspondence to author, April 12, 2011). Mizer obtained the photograph himself from the Los Angeles County Courthouse.

17 Craig Stecyk, “Fear of Flying: Speed, A Strange and Tragic Magic,” *SkateBoarder*, Winter 1975.

18 Binkley, *Getting Loose*, 6.

19 Stewart Brand, *The Whole Earth Catalog* (Menlo Park, CA: Whole Earth Catalog, 1968), 1.

20 Binkley, *Getting Loose*, 9.

21 John Sonsini, *Bob’s World: The Life and Boys of AMG’s Bob Mizer*, ed. Dian Hanson (Köln, Germany: Taschen, 2009), 121.

22 David Hurles, “Tribute to Bob Mizer,” *Outcome* magazine, 1992, http://championstudios.net/amg/mizer1.htm, accessed February 24, 2011.

23 Borden, “Body Architecture,” 211.

24 Borden, “Body Architecture,” 212.

25 Stecyk, *DogTown—The Legend of the Z-Boys*, 102. From an article published originally in *SkateBoarder* (February 1979).

26 Borden, “Body Architecture,” 204–5.

27 William Norwich, “Beefcake: How Bob Mizer Pioneered Male Crotch-Shots,” *The New York Observer*, October 10, 1999, http://www.observer.com/node/42079, accessed February 24, 2011.

28 Diane Agrest, “Architecture from Without: Body, Logic and Sex,” *Gender Space Architecture: An Interdisciplinary Introduction*, ed. Jane Rendell, Barbara Penner, Iain Borden (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 358–70.

29 Ibid, 363.

30 Binkley, *Getting Loose*, 14.

31 Craig Stecyk, interview with the author, October 9, 2010.

HEBDIGE

1. Douglas Harper, *Online Etymology Dictionary*, 2010, www.etymonline.com. Accessed October 27, 2010.

2 Jeff Wiltse links the sudden proliferation of public swimming pools across late nineteenth-century America to a moral crusade conducted on behalf of concerned citizens against a “plebeian and masculine (natural) swimming culture that violated Victorian norms.” He cites the example of one boy in Milwaukee who “received much notoriety in 1878 because he was in the habit of stripping upon the bank of the river and assuming the pose of Michael Angelo’s (sic) Slave just as the little river steamer hove into sight with her load of women and children.” *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 9–10.

3 Gaston Bachelard, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on Imagination and Matter*, trans. Edith Farrell (Dallas: Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 1988).

4 Department of Public Health memorandum, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, September 4, 2001, www.mass.gov/Eeoahs2/docs/dph/environmental/sanitation/pool_memo_20010904_cdc.pdf. Accessed November 8, 2010.

5 Thomas A.P. van Leeuwen, *The Springboard in the Pond: An Intimate History of the Swimming Pool* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 258. And while we’re on the subject, what unconscious insight drove Thomas Church in Sonoma in 1948 to choose the kidney, of all the internal organs, to serve as the template for what turned out to be, throughout the pool construction boom years of the ‘50s and ‘60s, the single best-selling curvilinear swimming pool shape?

6 Narcissus fragment, Parthenius of Nicaea, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, in the original Greek: www.papyrology.ox.ac, uk/POxy; and translated into English: www.papyrology.ox.ac.uk/POxy/papyri/4711.html.

7 See David Keys, “The Ugly End of Narcissus,” *BBC History Magazine* 5 (May 2004): 9. The text, part of the Oxyrhynchus archive excavated by Oxford University archaeologists Bernard Grenfell and Arthur Hunt between 1882 and 1906, was transcribed and translated in 2004 by Oxford University Classics faculty member, Dr. Benjamin Henry. The presumed author, Parthenius of Nicaea, a Greek from what is now western Turkey, was taken prisoner by the Romans in Anatolia around

73 B.C. and served as Virgil’s tutor. See the official Oxyrhynchus website, www.papyrology.ox.ac.uk/POxy. Accessed December 25, 2010.

8 *Sunset Boulevard*, original script opening, December 21, 1948. The full script is available at www.dailyscript.com/scripts/sunset_bld_3_21_49.html. In his in-depth study of the film, Sam Staggs describes the film’s chaotic writing schedule complete with all-night brainstorming sessions and last-minute line changes handed to the actors on scraps of paper. Eye-witness accounts of a typical screen-writing day for the Bracket-Wilder team sets “Wilder in agitated motion, pacing, gesticulating, chain-smoking (cigarettes stubbed out in favor of cigars, then back to cigarettes),” *Close-up on Sunset Boulevard: Billy Wilder, Norma Desmond and the Dark Hollywood Dream* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2002), 21–22.

9 Richard A. Spears, *Dictionary of American Slang and Colloquial Expressions* (Columbus, OH: McGraw Hill, 2007).

10 Staggs, *Close-up on Sunset Boulevard*, 85–86. My description of the shoot is drawn exclusively from Staggs’s account.

11 Ibid, 86

12 The boy is described in the script as “blond, about 11 years old, his swollen child’s face . . . peering through a transparent sheet” In a revised version of the script (March 19, 1949) the boy gets to elaborate on the circumstances of his demise: “I bet Pinky Evans I could stay underwater longer than two minutes and I did, too” The deaths of each of Gillis’s neighbors in the community of the morgue are stereotypically L.A.: the “Fat Man” on the slab adjacent died of a heart attack as the realtor was about to show him the avocado tree outside the retirement bungalow he was about to buy; a bookie has been murdered by the “Eastern Syndicate” and an African-American truck driver has just been killed in a road accident “haulin’ oranges out of San Berdoo.”

13 Staggs, *Close-up on Sunset Boulevard*, 82, 84–85.

14 The “dirty (public) secret” around which *Chinatown* (1974) famously revolves is the monopoly on Owens Valley water rights secured in the early 1900s by operatives working on behalf of a cartel of wealthy Los Angeles-based investors with real estate holdings in the San Fernando Valley. The Los Angeles aqueduct, constructed between 1908 and 1913 by an army of laborers under the direction of Department of Water and Power Chief Engineer William Mulholland brought the water almost three hundred miles over rugged terrain to

Sylmar, in what is now the northern end of Los Angeles County. For the authoritative account of the California water wars see Marc Reisner, *Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water* (New York: Penguin, 1993), 52–103, 332–78.

15 Douglas Coupland, *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture* (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 23.

16 In the early hours of August 28, 1955, Chicago-native Emmett Till, on a summer visit to his great-uncle in rural Mississippi, was abducted by two local white men, Roy Bryant and his half-brother, John Milam, and beaten, shot, and killed for whistling at or attempting to engage in suggestive banter with Bryant’s wife, Carolyn, three days earlier at the couple’s general store. At his mother’s insistence, Till’s body was viewed by tens of thousands of people while lying in repose at the A.A. Rayner Funeral Home in South Chicago before the September 6th burial. Photographs of the mutilated corpse were circulated nationally, most notably in the black press. On September 23, after deliberating for eighty-seven minutes, an all-white jury in Sumner, Tallahatchie County, Mississippi acquitted Bryant and Milam of all charges. In 1956, the two defendants, under double indemnity protection, gave unapologetic (paid) first-hand accounts of the boy’s murder to William Bradford Huie that were later published in *Life* magazine. The case helped trigger the civil rights movement and the push against Jim Crow in the South in the 1960s. See Christopher Mettress, *The Lynching of Emmett Till: A Documentary Narrative* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002).

17 In William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*, Quentin Compson, the neurosthenic eldest son of one of the leading families in Yoknapatawpha County drowns himself in the Charles River (New York: Random House, 1929).

18 In James Dickey’s 1970 novel, *Deliverance*, one of a party of four Atlanta professionals on a canoeing trip down the fictional Cahulawassee River is consigned to the depths by Barger’s three companions, along with the corpse of an anonymous Mountain Man. The film version directed by John Boorman in 1972 ends with narrator, Ed Gentry (Jon Voight), one of the surviving trio, waking up from a nightmare in which the hand of a corpse breaks through the surface of a large body of water (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1970).

19 “Claude greeted (Tod) by doing the impersonation that went with the Southern colonial architecture. He teetered back and forth on his heels like a Civil War colonel and made believe he had a large belly. He had no belly at all . . . While Tod mounted the steps . . . he shouted

to the butler: ‘Here, you black rascal! A mint julep.’ A Chinese servant came running with a Scotch and soda.” Nathaniel West, *The Day of the Locust* (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1962), 68–69.

20 Ibid., 70–71.

21 John Engelen, *Los Angeles Magazine*, January 2009, www.dedeceblog.com/2010/08/31/julius-shulman-last-go. Accessed November 9, 2010.

22 Andy Grundberg, “Julius Shulman, Photographer of Modernist California Architecture, Dies at 98,” *New York Times*, July 17, 2009.

23 Liliane Kaufmann quoted in Andy Gray, “Modern Gothic,” *New York Times Magazine*, September 27, 2001.

24 Ibid.

25 Posted by DRN on July 10, 2006 in a discussion of the controversy surrounding Frank Lloyd Wright’s canceled commission for the Palm Springs Kaufmann “Boulder House”: www.savewright.org/wright_chat/viewtopic.php?t=5069&sid=1c990e4bdd52fafd9ffedc9398adfe08. Accessed November 9, 2010.

26 For an account of the ceremony including this citation, see http://wsoweb.ladwp.com/Aqueduct/historyoflaa/altar.htm. Accessed March 3, 2011.

27 “Summer Splash Time-Line: The Splashiest History,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 16, 2007.

28 Maude Barlow, “The Global Water Crisis and the Coming Battle for the Right to Water,” talk delivered in the Oil+Water series, sponsored by the Interdisciplinary Humanities Center, UC Santa Barbara, May 11, 2010.

29 The pilot episode of *The Sopranos* was first broadcast on HBO on January 10, 1999.

30 *Weeds*, season three, episode one, “Doing the Backstroke,” first aired August 23, 2007.

31 *Weeds*, season five, episode thirteen, “All About My Mom,” first aired August 31, 2009.

32 *Breaking Bad*, season two, finale, “ABQ,” first aired, May 31, 2009.

33 Van Leeuwen, *The Springboard in the Pond*, 297.

34 Ibid.