



10 PHOTOS

Photo: Courtesy of The Artist and The Bob Mizer Foundation

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Fantasy Camp: Photographs by Underground Legend Bob Mizer Come Up for Air

By Carl Swanson



compound, surrounding a boardinghouse his mother owned where he lived his whole life, served as headquarters for what he called the Athletic Model Guild, and as home to a churn of young, often troubled men he photographed for AMG's magazine *Physique Pictorial*.

This was a risky operation at first—Mizer even went to jail for distributing his photos through the mail. But he was, in his way, both a visionary and a relentless entrepreneur, serving, and to some extent stoking and shaping, what was then an outsider market for idealized depictions of male beauty. Painter David Hockney credited *Physique Pictorial* with inspiring his move to L.A., and Mizer took pictures of notable hotties like Alan Ladd, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Joe Dallesandro, and Jack Pierson, along with 10,000 less famous men he captured in 3,000 sometimes peculiar films and over a million photos, many of them still undeveloped. Some were documentary, others more or less conventionally athletic or heroic, but over time the compound became like a studio lot, churning out odder, often jarringly dreamy compositions of young men in various stages of undress and costume (in antlers, or as Nazis or cowboys), in images that seemed to combine totally discordant eras and places.

Two exhibitions opening next month argue for Mizer's significance: "Excavating Bob Mizer," at NYU's 80WSE gallery, and one at MOCA in Los Angeles (both arrive on the heels of an archival exhibition at the Invisible-Exports gallery this past winter). "Back in the seventies, I followed *Physique Pictorial*," says Jeffrey Deitch, the former MOCA director who set the Mizer show in motion before he left this summer. "I've always been a student of vanguard culture, and I understood that Mizer was doing much more than just showing seductive images of men. He was part of the process of creating this new masculine identity, which coincides with the invention of the teenager and biker movies and surf culture." Mizer cooked up "this private world but also this public world," explains MOCA curator Bennett Simpson. "He knew the archetypes of masculinity. This was at the same time as James Dean and Marlon Brando. He was good at plucking these things out of the air."

"Bob is like three or four artists," says Billy Miller, who works with the Mizer estate and is co-curating the NYU show. "So much of it has been branded as kitsch and camp, but people don't realize that it was once a subversive underground language." Miller does admit that "he's sort of called a pornographer," a reputation reinforced by the plethora of



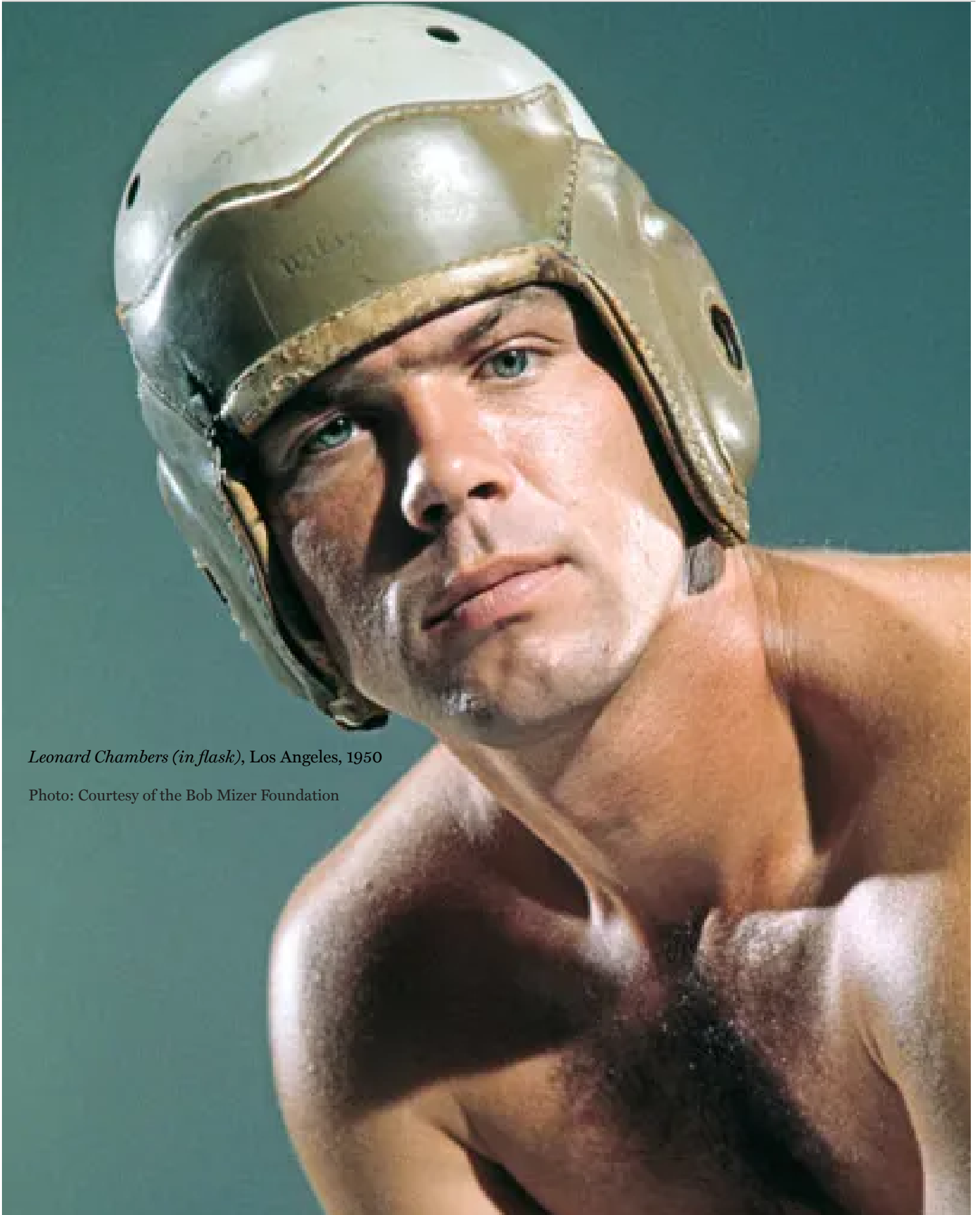
petri dish. “His work could never have happened here or Chicago or even San Francisco,” Miller says. “It was the environment of L.A. after the war which made it possible.”

**This article originally appeared in the November 4, 2013 issue of New York Magazine.*



Untitled (Marine without pants), Los Angeles, 1973

Photo: Courtesy of the Bob Mizer Foundation/Christian Sigmund



Leonard Chambers (in flask), Los Angeles, 1950

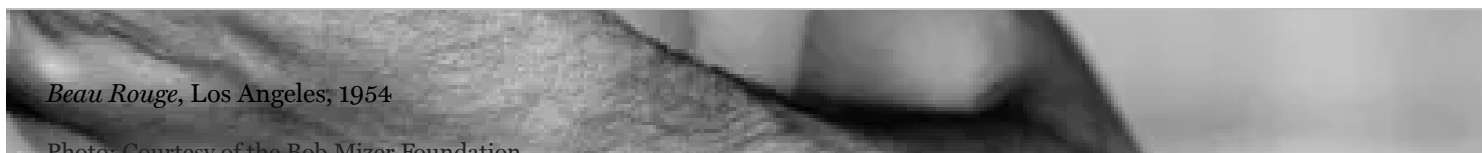
Photo: Courtesy of the Bob Mizer Foundation



Terry Hayes (helmet), Los Angeles, 1974

Photo: Courtesy of the Bob Mizner Foundation





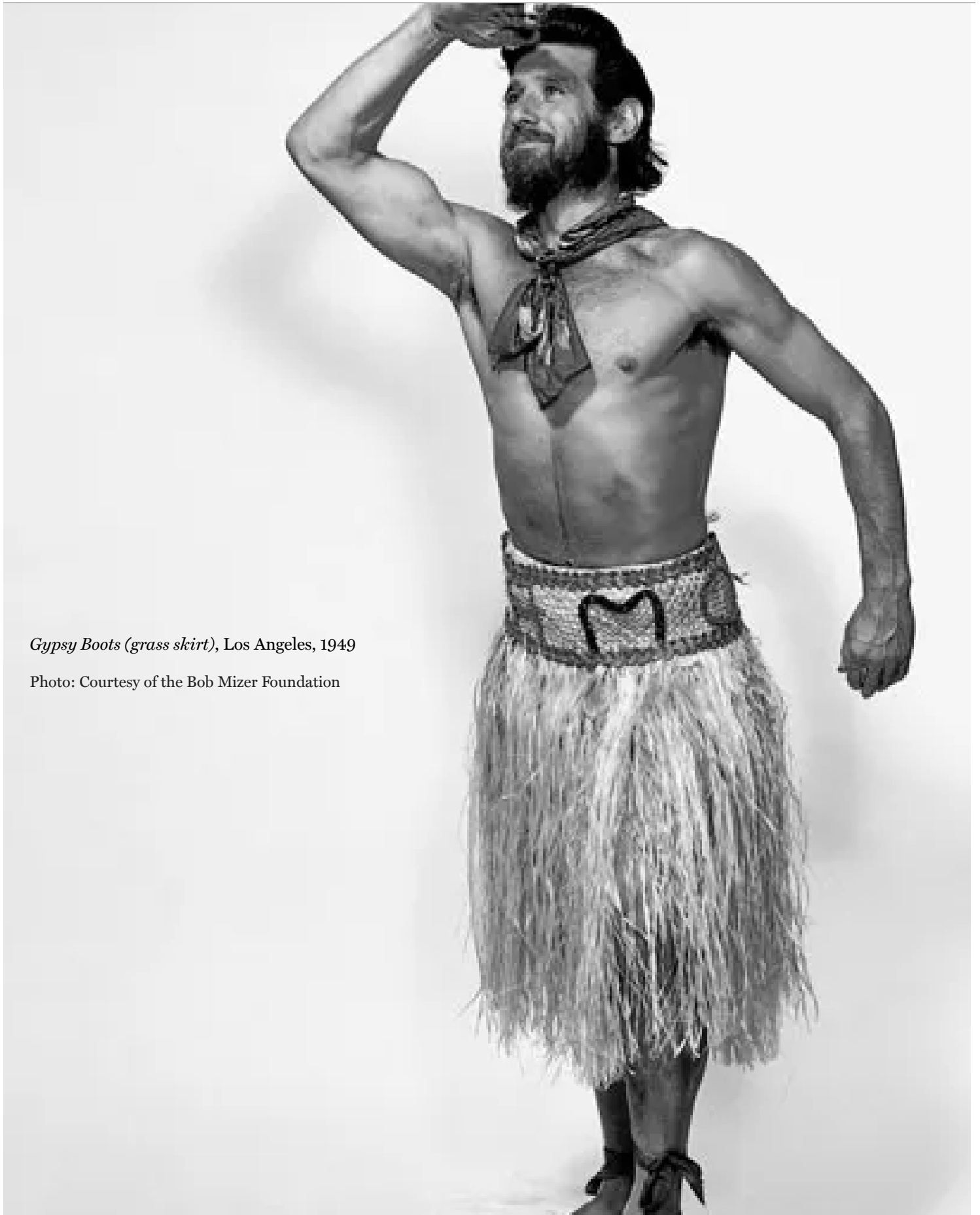
Beau Rouge, Los Angeles, 1954

Photo: Courtesy of the Bob Mizer Foundation



Untitled (acrobats with child), Santa Monica, California, 1946

Photo: Courtesy of the Bob Mizer Foundation



Gypsy Boots (grass skirt), Los Angeles, 1949

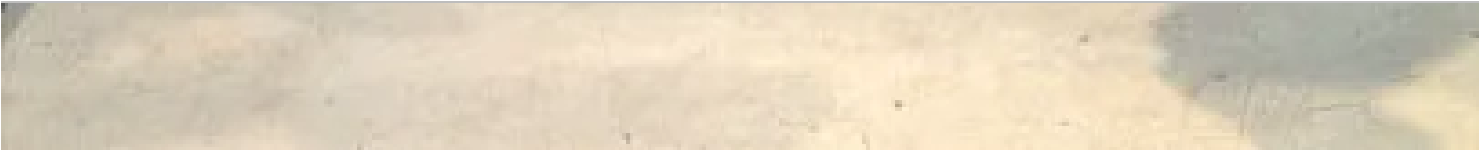
Photo: Courtesy of the Bob Mizer Foundation



Ed Geary & Judy Stockton, Santa Monica, 1940s

Photo: Courtesy of the John M. Gizer Foundation/Christian Steinhilber







Unknown, Los Angeles, 1972

Photo: Courtesy of the Bob Mizer Foundation





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