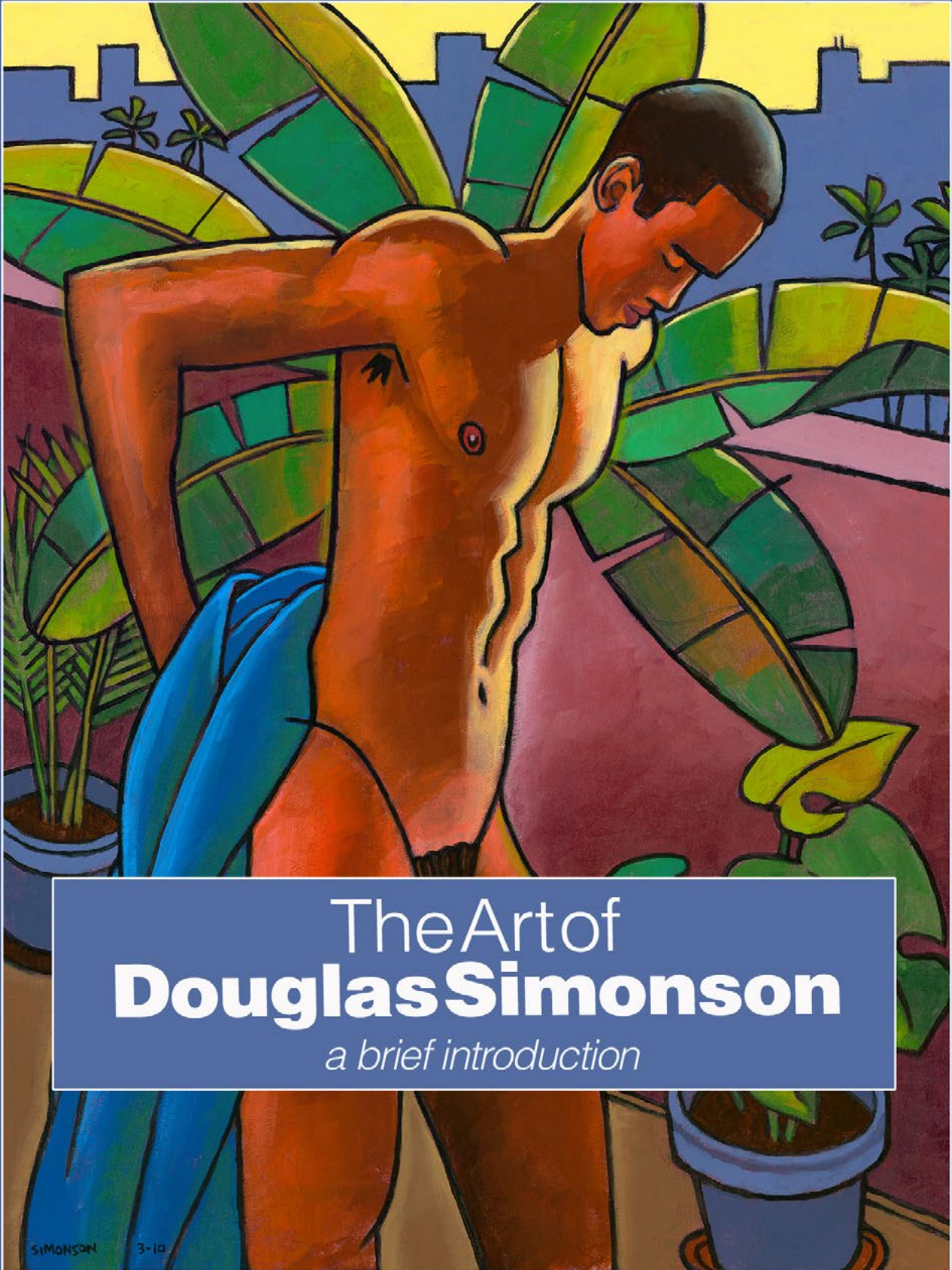


Kelly S. **Neill**



The Art of  
**Douglas Simonson**  
*a brief introduction*



# The Art of **Douglas Simonson**

*a brief introduction*

Kelly S. **Neill**

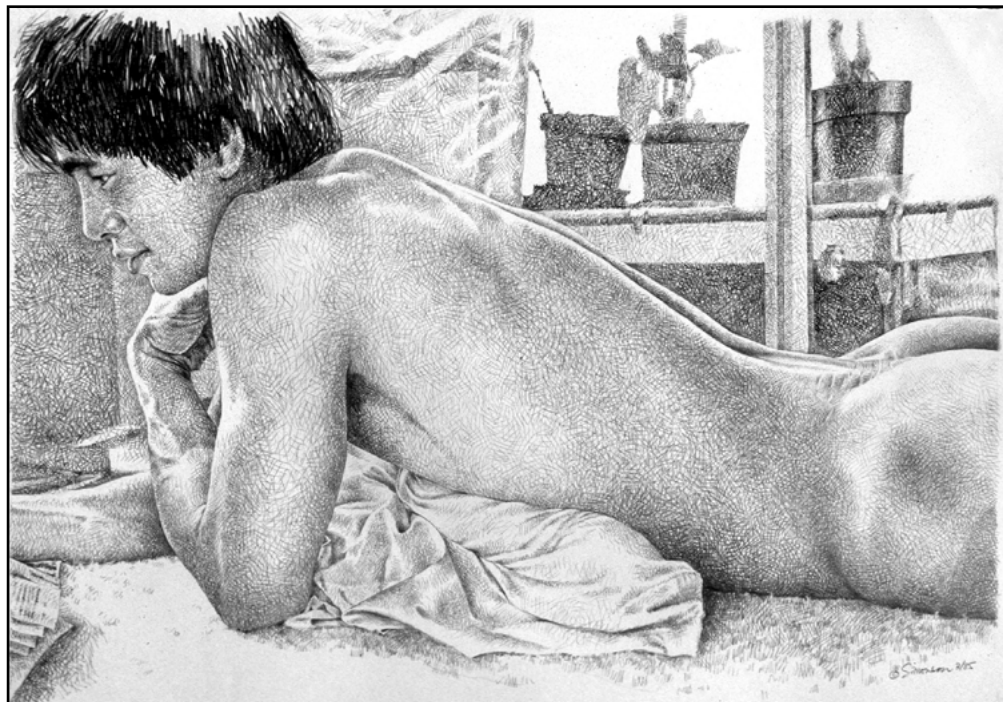
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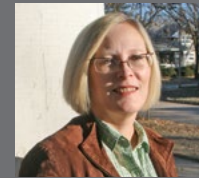
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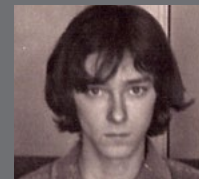


(clicking on the image will take you to the indicated page)



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# my brother **doug**



*Doug and myself on Oahu's Waimanalo Beach in 1978*



## introduction

In this book I refer to him somewhat formally as “Douglas Simonson” or “the artist,” but to me he’s always been my brother Doug, who would come home from college and let his little sisters eat TV dinners, and would stay up until midnight playing monopoly with them—things Mom and Dad would never have allowed.

I’ve been a fan of Doug’s art since I was 7 or 8 and he would write me letters from Hawaii filled with drawings. I loved getting those letters, and now, all these years later, I’m a Simonson collector myself. Most of the Simonson art on my walls was given to me by my brother, but there are a few I loved enough to actually buy (I did get a special sister-of-the-artist deal!).

There was a popular book in the 1960s called “Teach Your Baby to Read” and my mom and Doug got hold of it and decided to make me their guinea pig. I was 18 months old. I will be eternally grateful to them

because it actually worked. I started reading before I was two, and I’ve had a deep love of books and reading ever since.

So when I decided it was time to write my first book, I thought of my brother. I think his art is amazing and the idea of doing a book on it, and sharing it with even more people, was really exciting.

I’m grateful to Doug for helping me put it together—he’s an experienced author and I’m not—and for helping me choose the art to put in the book. It was hard to narrow several thousand beautiful works of art down to the few dozen we had room for in this book.

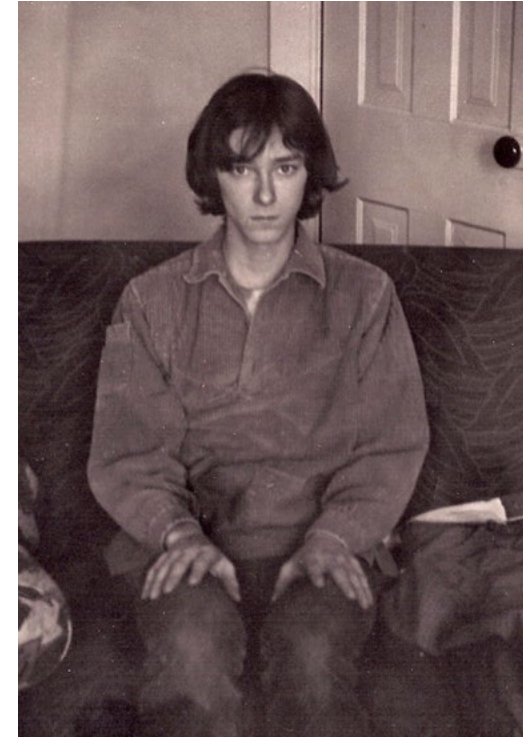
I’m also grateful to him for sharing many of his personal photographs from the past 50-some years. I learned a lot about my brother doing this book—and I’m still a fan!

—Kelly S. Neill



*Douglas in the driver's seat, with sister Jerri and brother Steve in Nebraska, around 1956.*

**before he was**



# simonson

Douglas Simonson spent his first 19 years in Nebraska. He had a clear artistic talent but not much idea what he wanted to do with it. In the photograph above, aged 18 and attending the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, he looks like he wishes he knew where he was headed.

(Where he was headed was away from Nebraska and its cold winters, toward the tropics...)

# 1970s hawaii



Simonson moved to Hawaii in 1971, and realized that's where he belonged. Freed from the confines of cold, covered-up Nebraska, he discovered the joys of surfing, going shirtless, and Asian boys. He wasn't yet comfortable enough with himself to paint a male nude, but his 1972 self-portrait (left) hinted at what was to come.



*Above, Simonson around 1978, with Diamond Head in the background. Left, Simonson with boyfriend Noly, around 1979.*

# the male nude



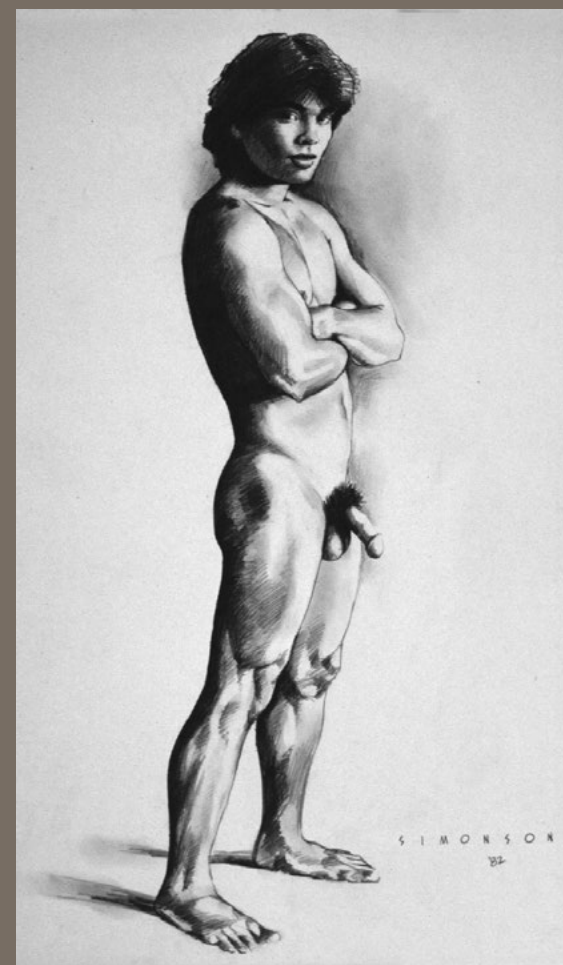
In the late 1970's the inevitable happened: Douglas Simonson's art and his passion came together and he began photographing the male nude, in the person of his boyfriend at the time, Ben. Those photographs became the source for his first serious exploration of the male nude in his drawings and paintings.

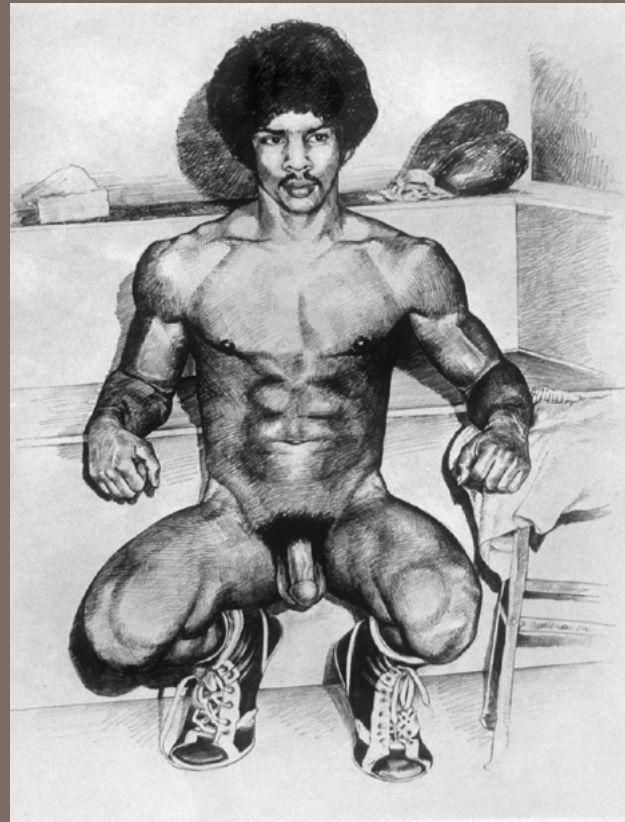


# early works

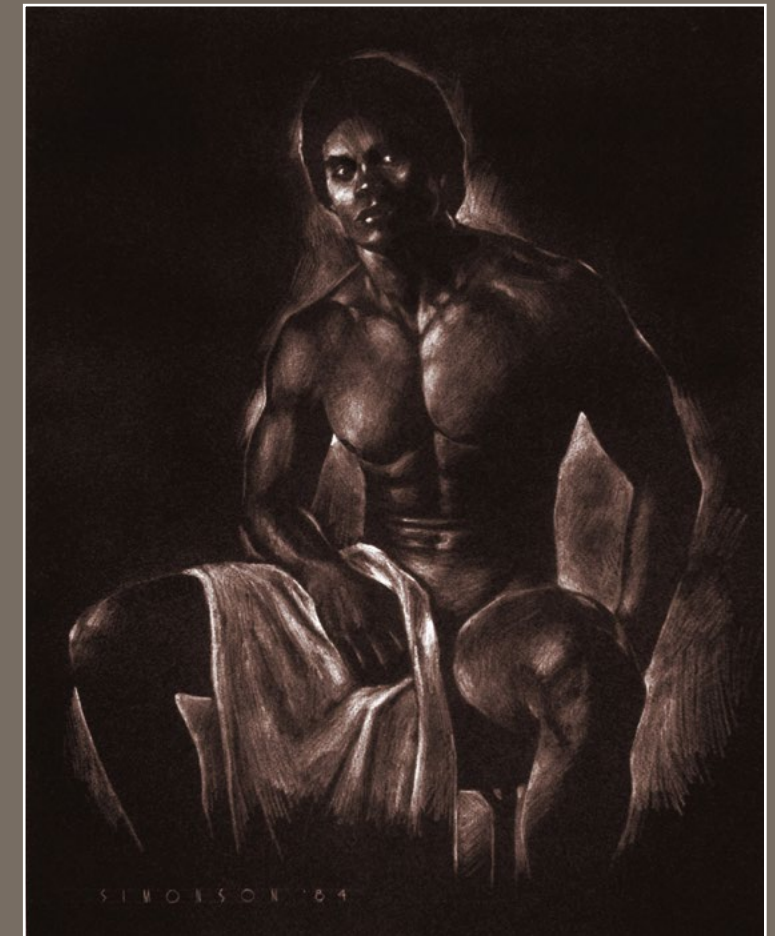
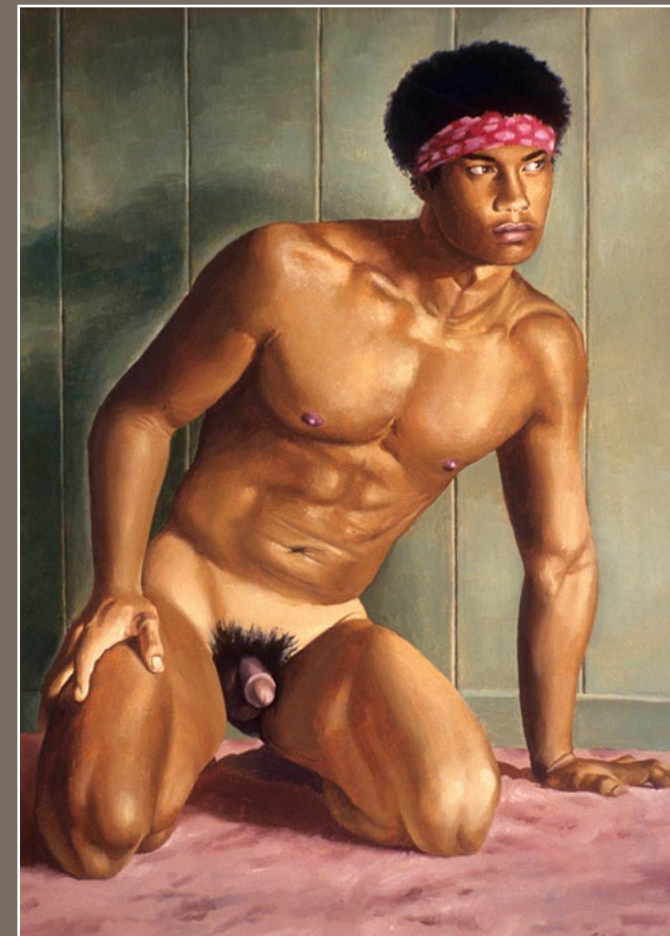
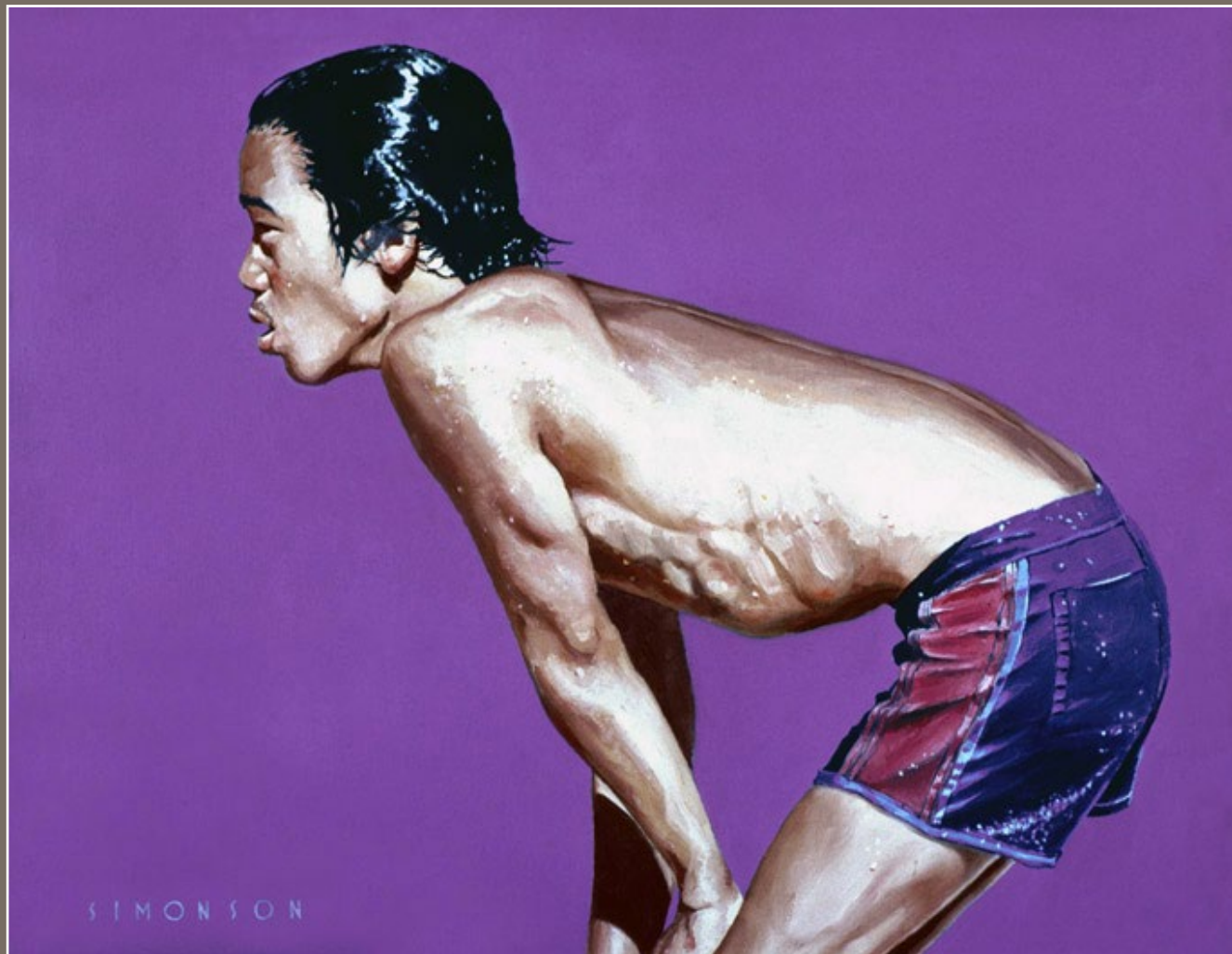
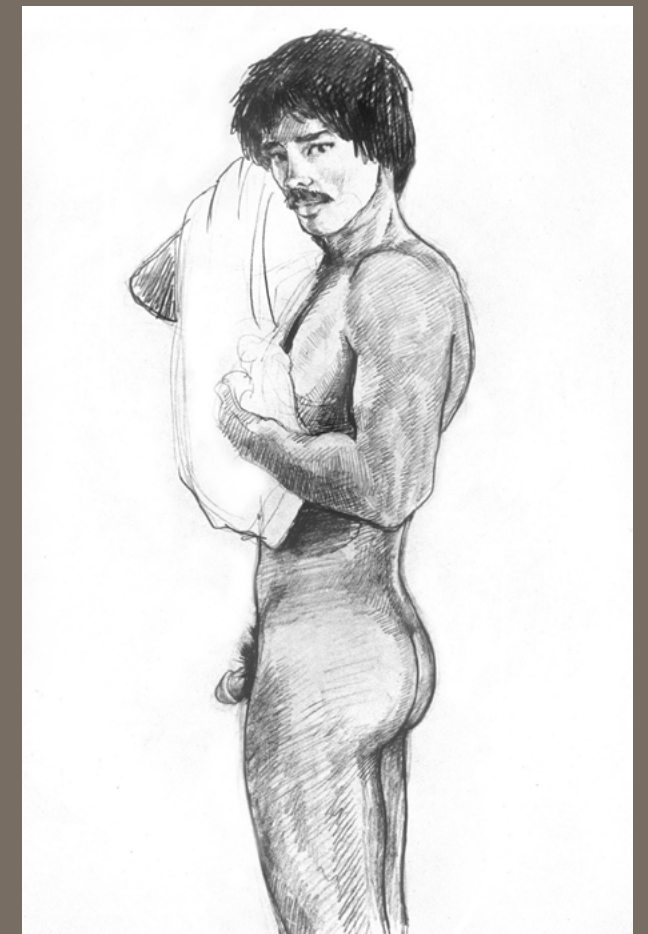


One of the best of Simonson's early pencil drawings of the male nude is *White Towel* (opposite page), from a photograph of Ben. Ben starred in many early Simonson drawings (below left). Snapshots of surfers at Oahu beaches also supplied the artist with some of his early inspiration.

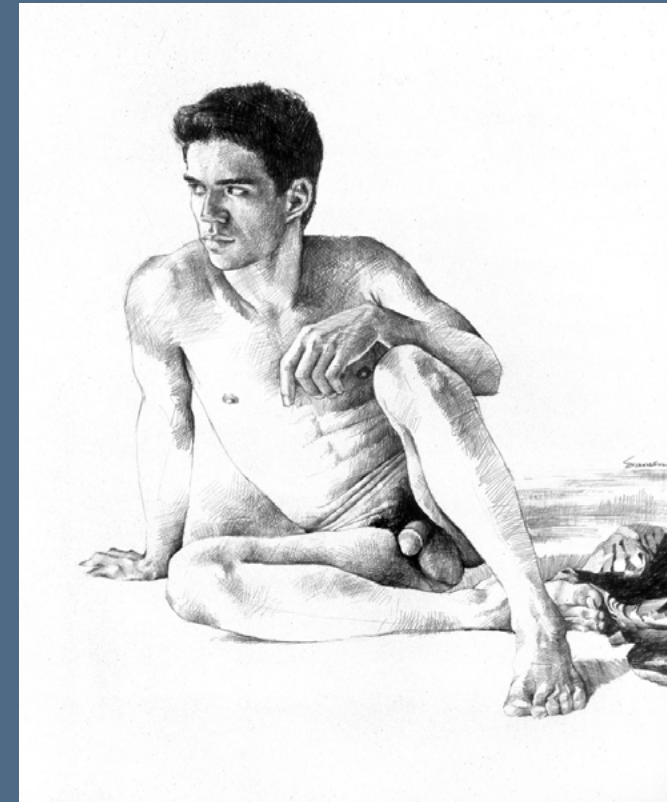




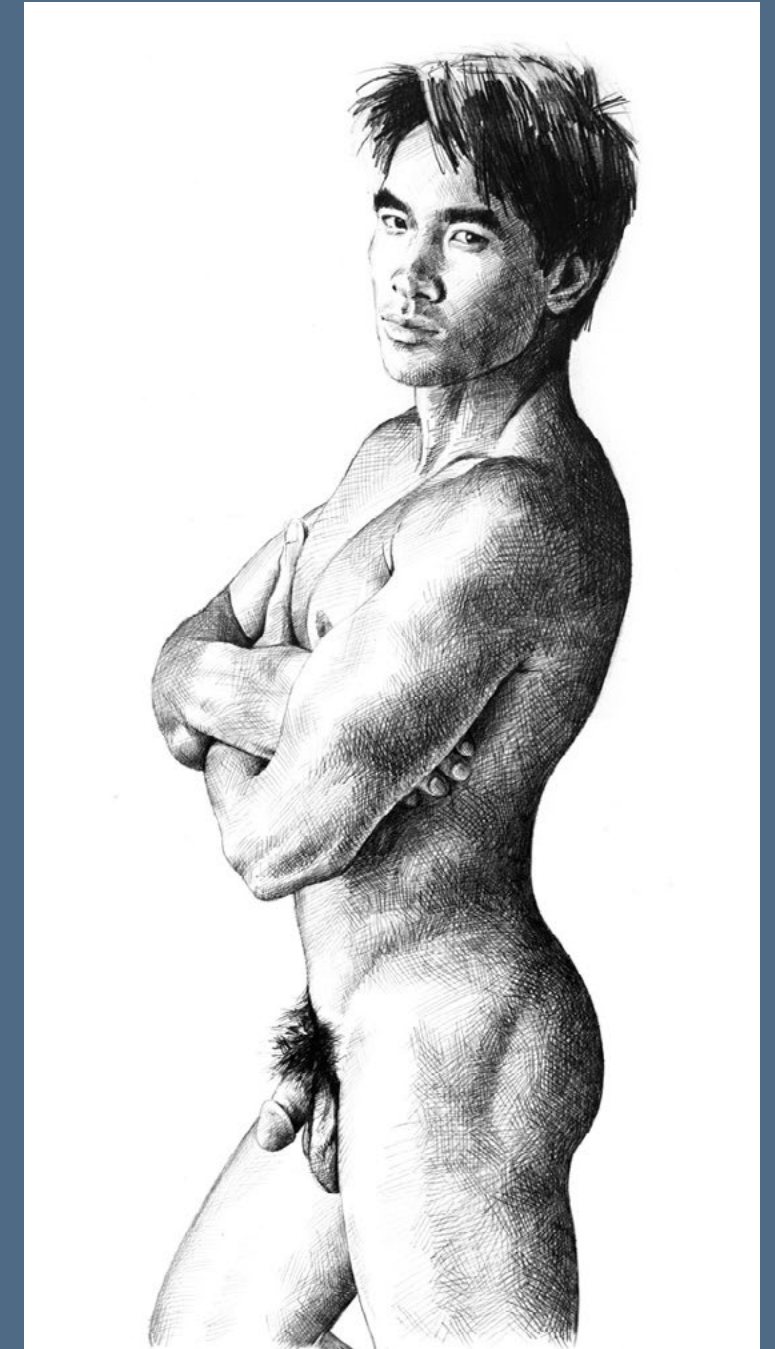
Simonson used found photos as sources for some of his early works, since he didn't always have access to nude models. He found another solution to the lack of models when he used his own nude body for the drawing at right, altering the hair and facial features to more closely match his fantasy male of the time.



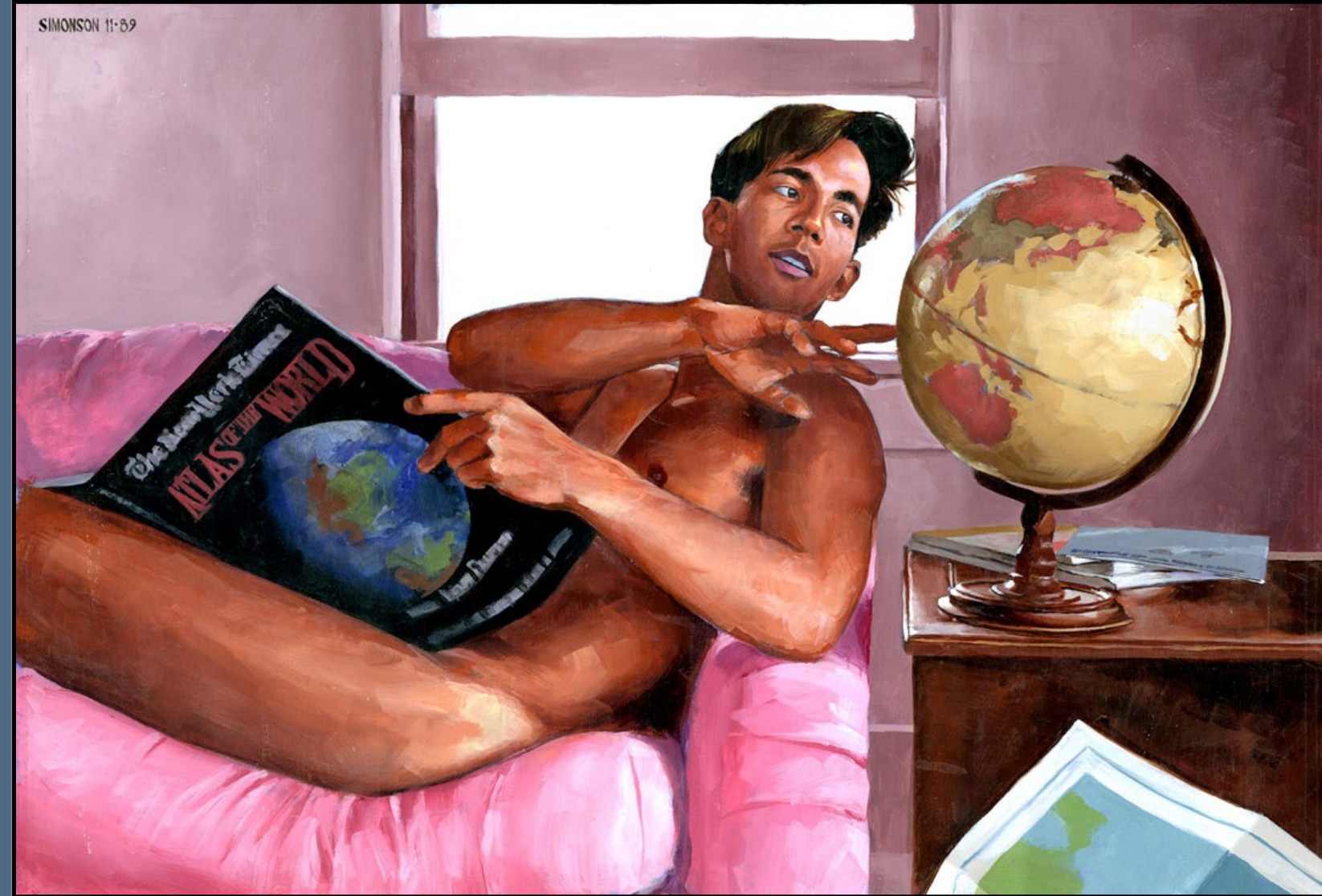
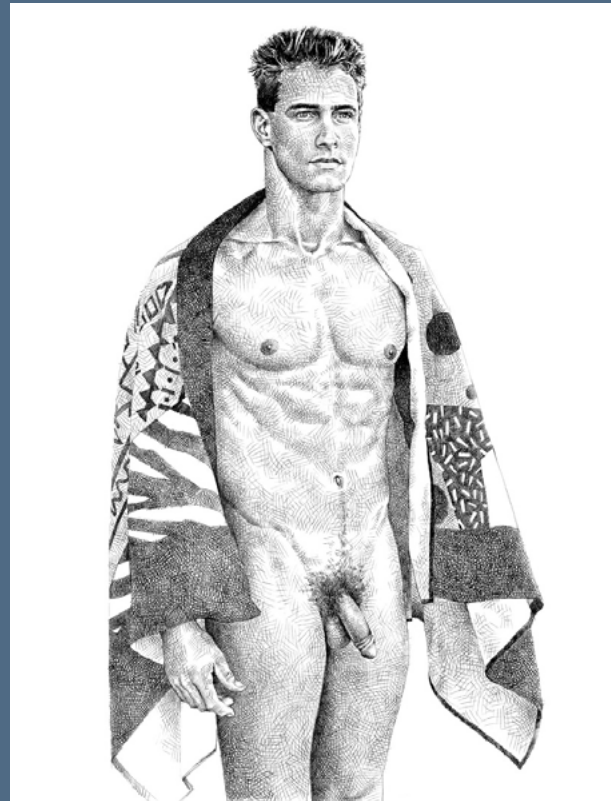
# 1980s



Favorite Simonson models of the 1980s included Nugan, also known as Thai Michael (left), Dwayne (above), and Randy (right).

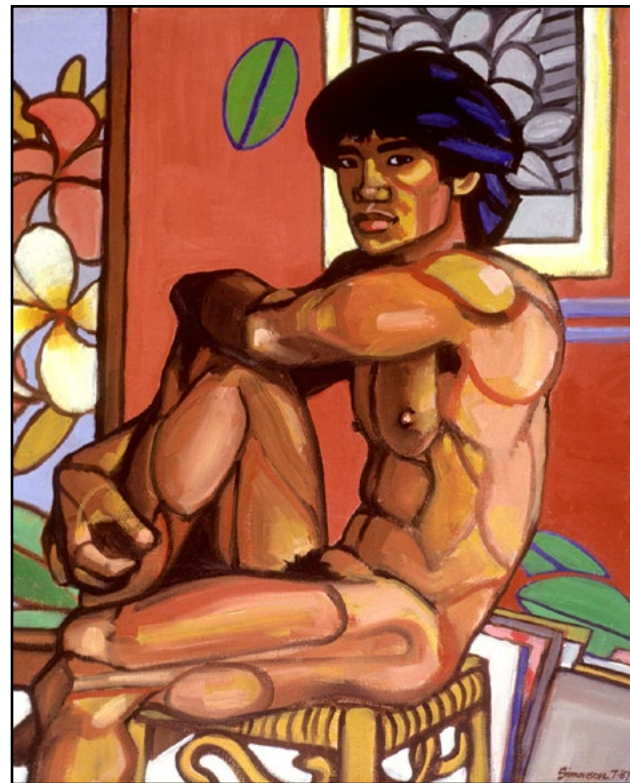


# 1980s



Simonson honed his drawing and painting skills throughout the 1980s. As his knowledge of anatomy and his technical proficiency grew, so did his appetite for experimentation, as you'll see on the next page.

# 1980s

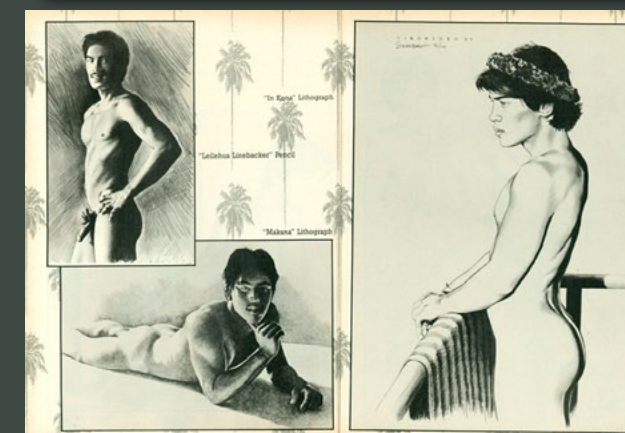


In the mid-1980s Douglas Simonson began experimenting with line, form and color, taking occasional trips away from his usual naturalistic approach into the neighborhood of Expressionism. Probably the best example of his stylized work from this period is *Bird of Paradise* (above), 1986.

# getting known



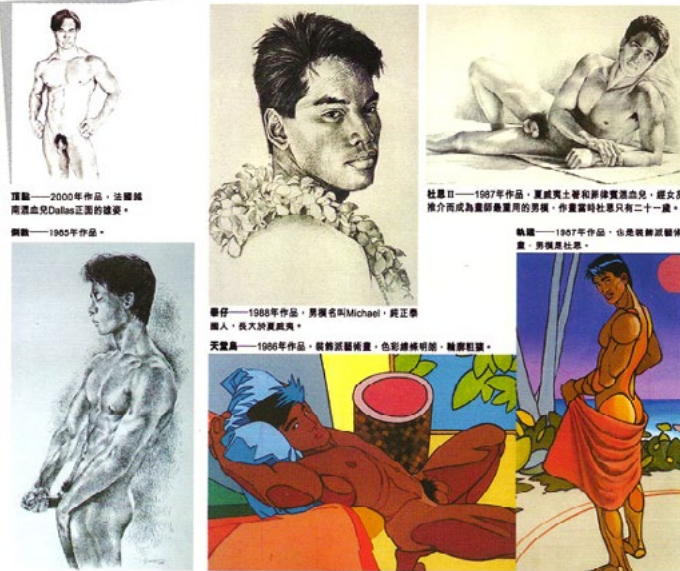
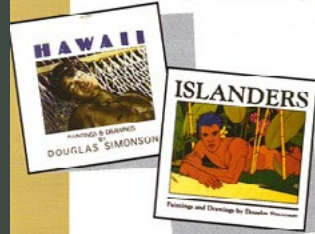
Simonson started getting noticed by the media, gay and otherwise, in the mid-1980's. By then he'd been doing one-man shows in Hawaii and on the Mainland for some time, and a new magazine, *Advocate MEN*, ran six pages of Simonson art in 1986.



# getting known

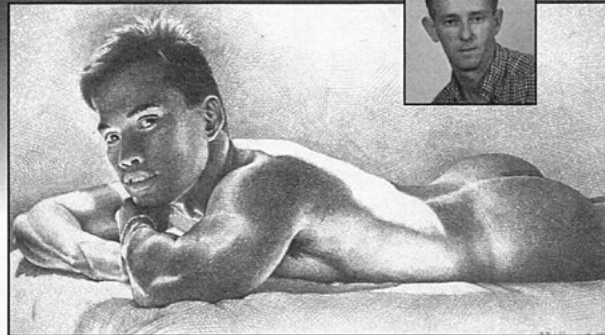
## 夏威夷大師西蒙遜 繪盡檀島俊男風情

筆者多年以來按時接到一位來自夏威夷畫家的作品目錄，他所推薦的畫作，清一色描繪夏威夷當地英俊小伙子們迷人的面龐，捕捉檀島俊男日常生活萬種風情。無論在陽光燦爛的沙灘上、海浪擊打的礁石上、椰林樹影的叢林中，或在家裏床榻上、沙發上，這位大師都把那些赤裸的人物演繹得淋漓盡致。由於大師畫作中的人物多以東方亞裔男子為主，故此筆者特別在這一期《雄風》向各位讀者介紹，並徵得大師的同意，選了一批精彩的作品同時刊登，以供讀者欣賞。



## Entrevue Douglas Simonson

Le rebelle au coeur tendre!



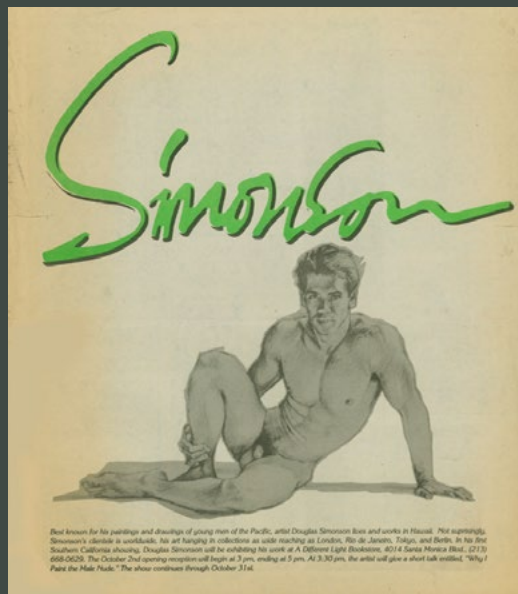
par Marc Antonios

Sans le savoir, vous avez peut-être déjà vu des oeuvres du peintre et dessinateur Douglas Simonson. Cet artiste a su tirer partie de ses modèles en les plaçant dans un univers fantasmagorique des plus exotiques et ce, sans vulgarité aucune, sans rudesse. De son studio à Hawaï, il peint des oeuvres empreintes de ces lieux idylliques. Mais Simonson n'a pas toujours voulu être artiste-peintre, tout au contraire même. Finalement, c'est son coeur et ses émotions qui l'ont emporté et Douglas Simonson s'est laissé guider par son rêve de peindre des nus masculins...

Si les îles de Hawaï sont reconnues pour leurs eaux d'émeraude, leurs plages à perte de vue, leurs palmiers, la brise légèrement salée du Pacifique, les montagnes volcaniques rougeâtres et luxuriantes, le sourire et la beauté des Polynésiens, Hawaï est aussi synonyme des oeuvres de M. Simonson qui a élu domicile dans cet Eden depuis 27 ans maintenant.

C'est peut-être ce cadre paradisiaque, avec le charme des Polynésiens, qui l'a incité à peindre. Né dans l'État du Nebraska, Douglas Simonson n'aimait pas le rude climat de la prairie. «Lorsque j'étais enfant, je détestais le Nebraska et ses hivers froids, je désirais plutôt vivre dans un endroit chaud et exotique, avoue-t-il. Déjà à l'âge de 8 ou 9 ans je rêvais d'aller à Hawaï. Il me semblait que cela devait être très agréable de vivre là-bas.» À 19 ans, il quitte l'ouest américain pour les cieux plus cléments de ces îles perdues au milieu du Pacifique. Il était comblé!

Sa mère étant déjà artiste-peintre, on croyait qu'il était tout naturel que Douglas devienne artiste lui aussi. Non? «Tout le monde s'attendait à ce que je devienne artiste, mais j'étais rebelle. Je ne voulais, pas nécessairement le devenir, et j'ai fait plusieurs choses avant de me lancer dans la création. Pendant longtemps j'ai été rédacteur publicitaire [pour la télévision et la radio] et j'aimais ce travail d'écriture. C'est vraiment parce que



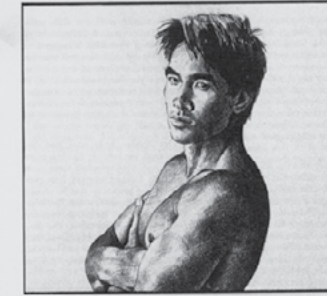
Best known for his paintings and drawings of young men of the Pacific, artist Douglas Simonson lives and works in Hawaii. His specialty, Simonson's slender is unbreakable, his art hangs in collections as well as reaching as London, Rio de Janeiro, Tokyo, and Berlin. In the San Francisco California gallery, Douglas Simonson will be exhibiting his work at a Different Light Bookstore, 4014 Santa Monica Blvd., 0711 4088-0828. The October 2nd opening reception will begin at 3 pm, ending at 5 pm. At 3:30 pm, the artist will give a short talk entitled, "Why? Paint the Male Nude." The show continues through October 31st.

In the past 25 years hardly a month has passed without a story on the art of Douglas Simonson appearing somewhere in the world.



## Tom of Finland, Commentary on two visionaries of the

Some two years ago I spent a delightful afternoon with Douglas Simonson at his studio in Honolulu. I fully intended to write up his life and work for PASSPORT, but the spirit didn't move me. I like to think about things in pain. Without appropriate contrasts and comparisons, I wasn't sure what I wanted to say about Simonson, except that he paints and draws gorgeous male nudes, a bit of information that I'm sure isn't news to PASSPORT readers. Then I saw a documentary about the renowned Tom of Finland, called *Daddy and the Music Academy*, and suddenly I had my theme.



## Doug of Hawaii homoerotic male form by Mario Polo

Tom and Douglas are radical visionaries of the homoerotic imagination. They've expanded the ways gay men see themselves, and in so doing, they have helped gay men be themselves. Granted Tom and Douglas are from different backgrounds and their representational art could hardly be more different, yet there are some intriguing similarities between the two. Tom (his real name has more syllables than I could keep track of) really did live all of his life in Finland. Douglas was born and raised in Nebraska. Neither of these places is exactly homo heaven, but I think that may have worked to the advantage of both men. They had to rely on their own sense of being gay, so it is perhaps not surprising that the images they have produced owe little to the work of earlier and contemporary gay artists. Tom, who died recently, was born in 1918. Douglas was born in 1960. What strikes me about this is that both men experienced their adoles-

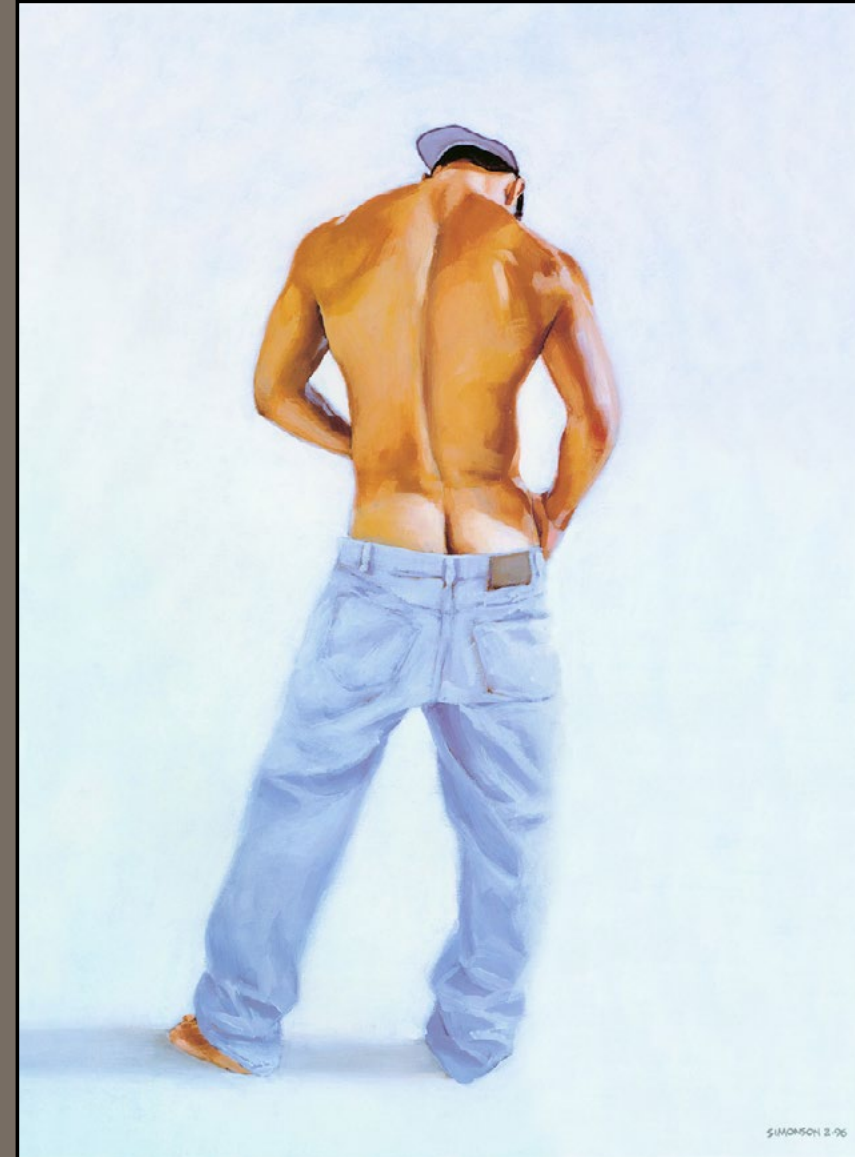
OUT FRONT Color YOUR PULL OUT GUIDE TO NIGHTLIFE

# OUT AND OUT

'Hawaiian Wildlife' by Douglas Simonson  
This stylized Simonson painting features a young Filipino-Hawaiian surfer named Dwayne. This image is now available as a limited-edition giclee printed on canvas.

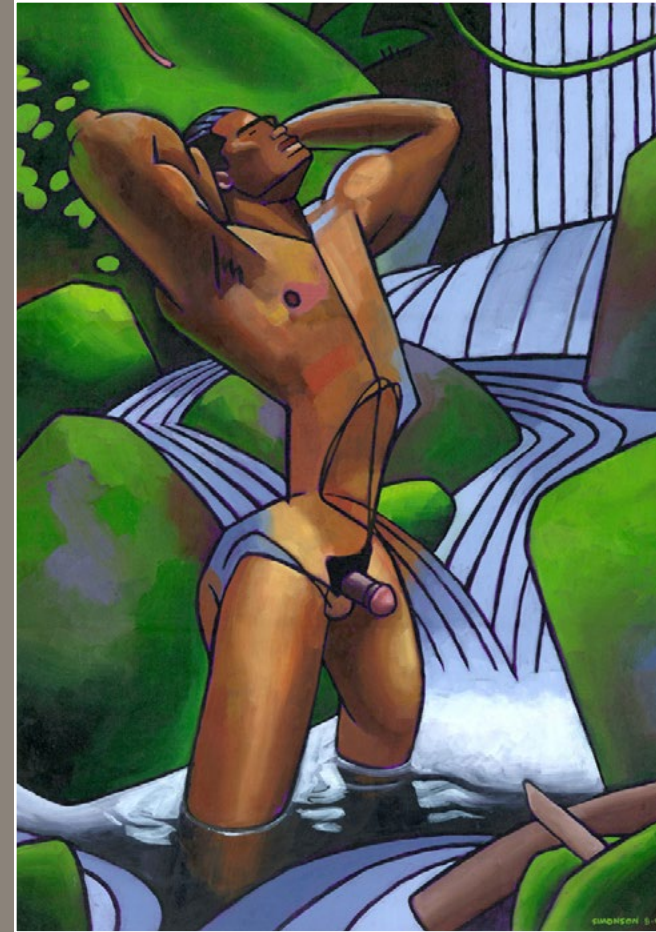
Please see SIMONSON inside

# 1990s

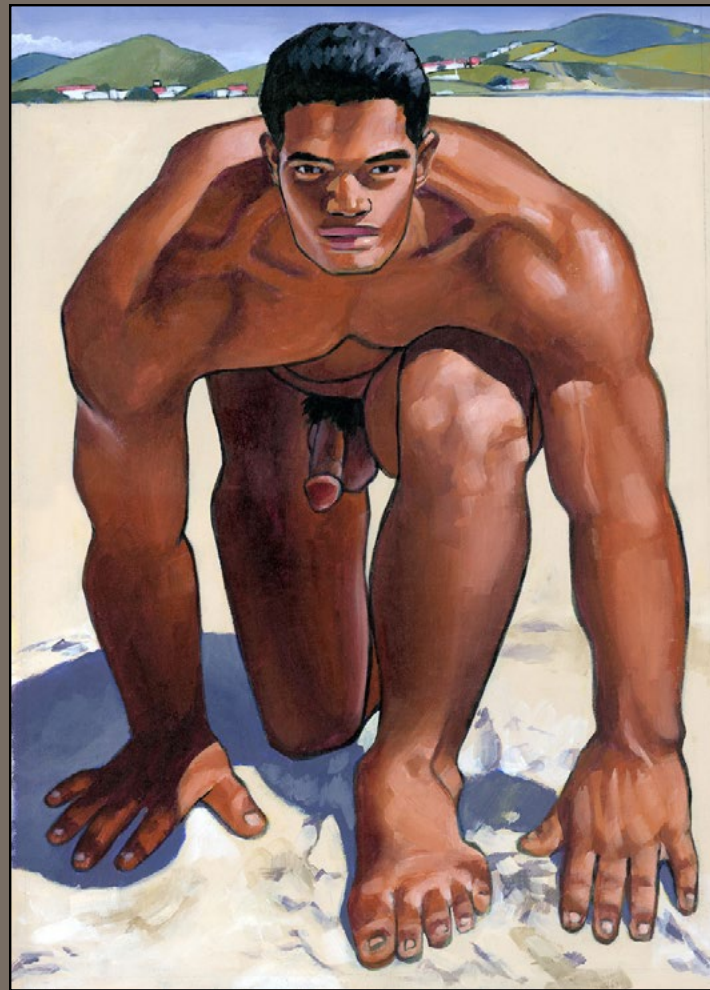


Simonson's art truly flowered in the 1990s. It was a period marked by great bursts of creative energy, resulting in iconic images like the acrylic paintings *Warrior with Flowers* (far left) and *White Cap* (near left).

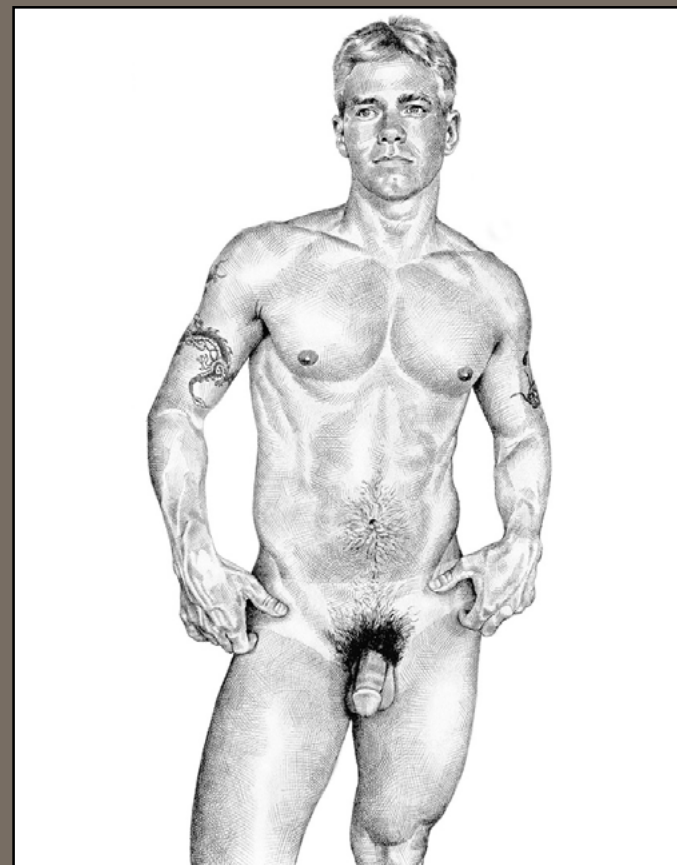
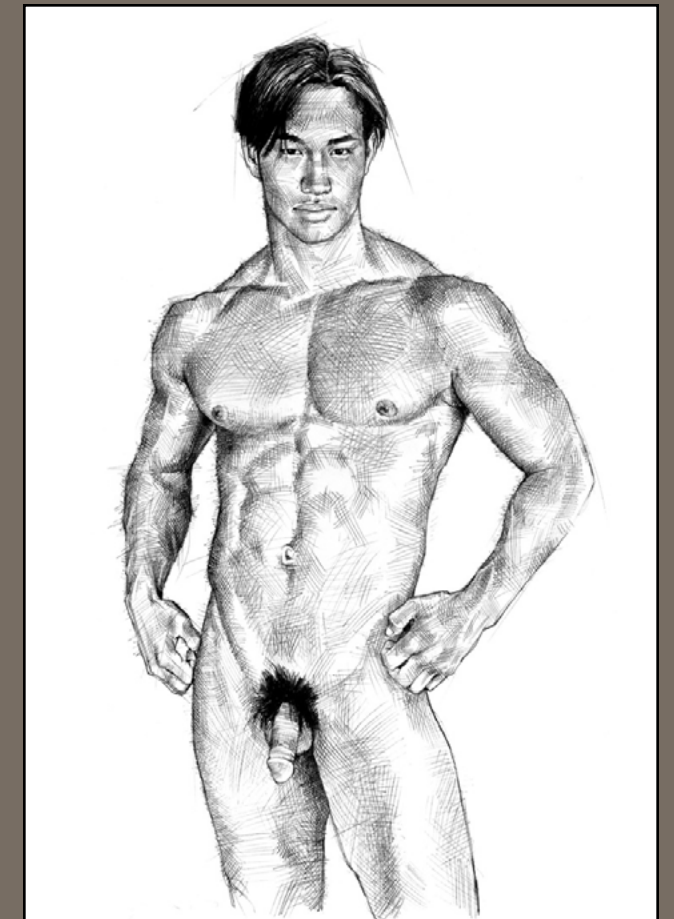
# 1990s



A keynote of Simonson's 1990s output is **boldness**. As his confidence grew, he became more daring in his use of color, his willingness to distort the figure, his brushwork, even his use of crosshatching, as in the masterful pencil drawing *Rocking Chair* (opposite).



1990s



One of Simonson's most popular models of the 1990s was a muscular Vietnamese boy called Dallas, who lived in Hawaii but grew up in Ohio. He's the one in *Apex* (top right) and *Sun-Kissed* (lower right).

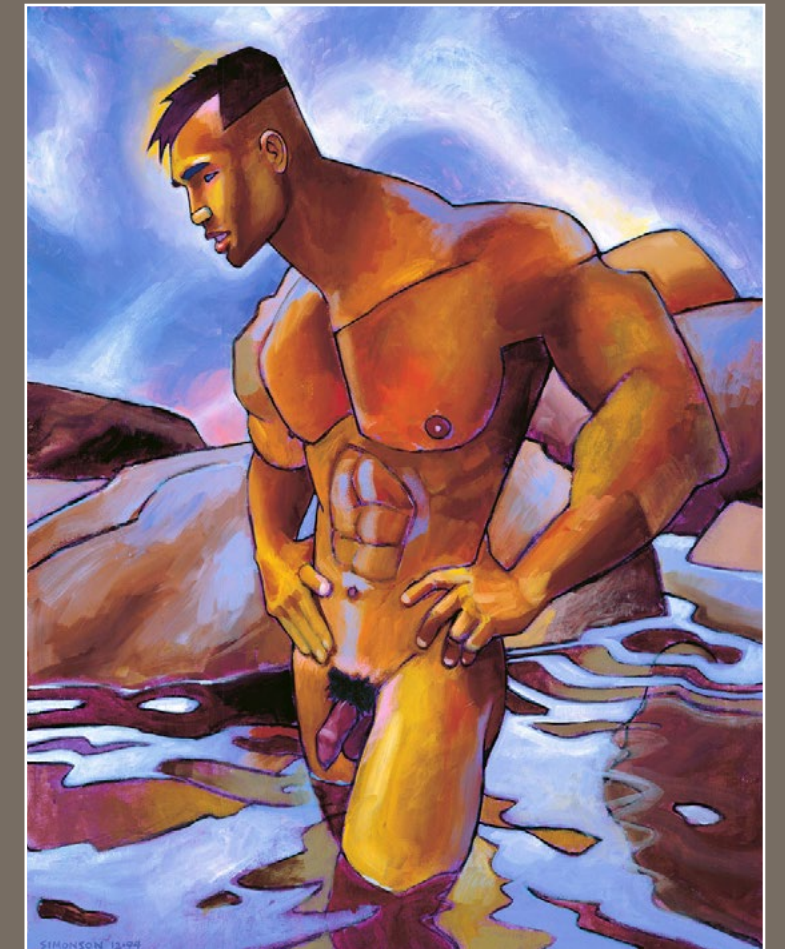




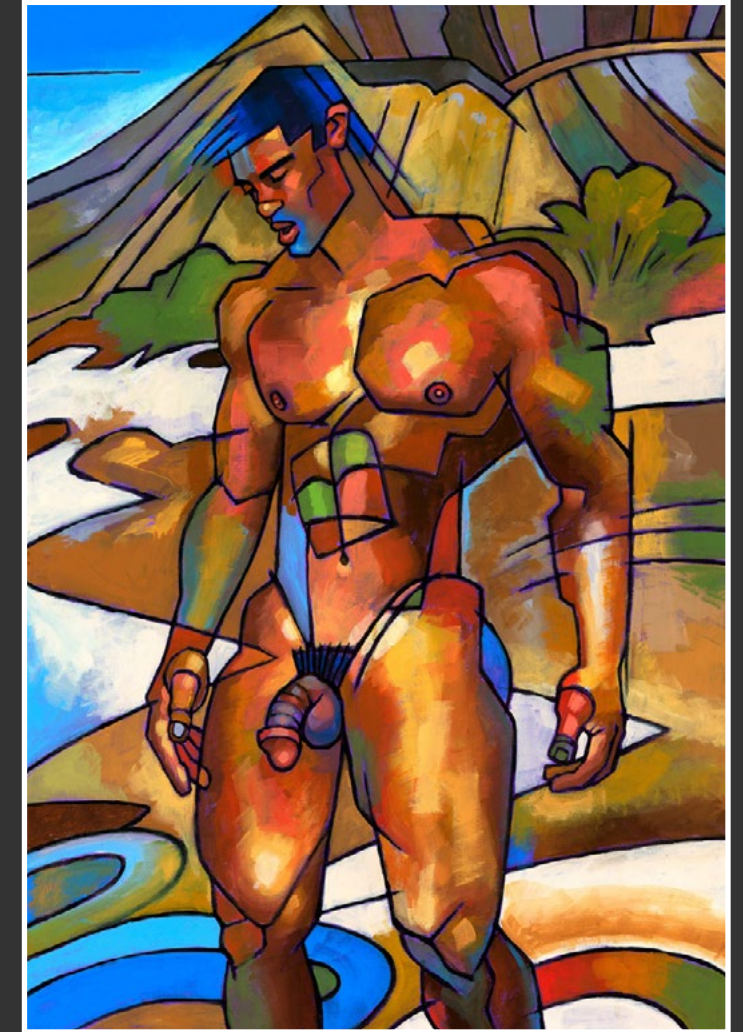
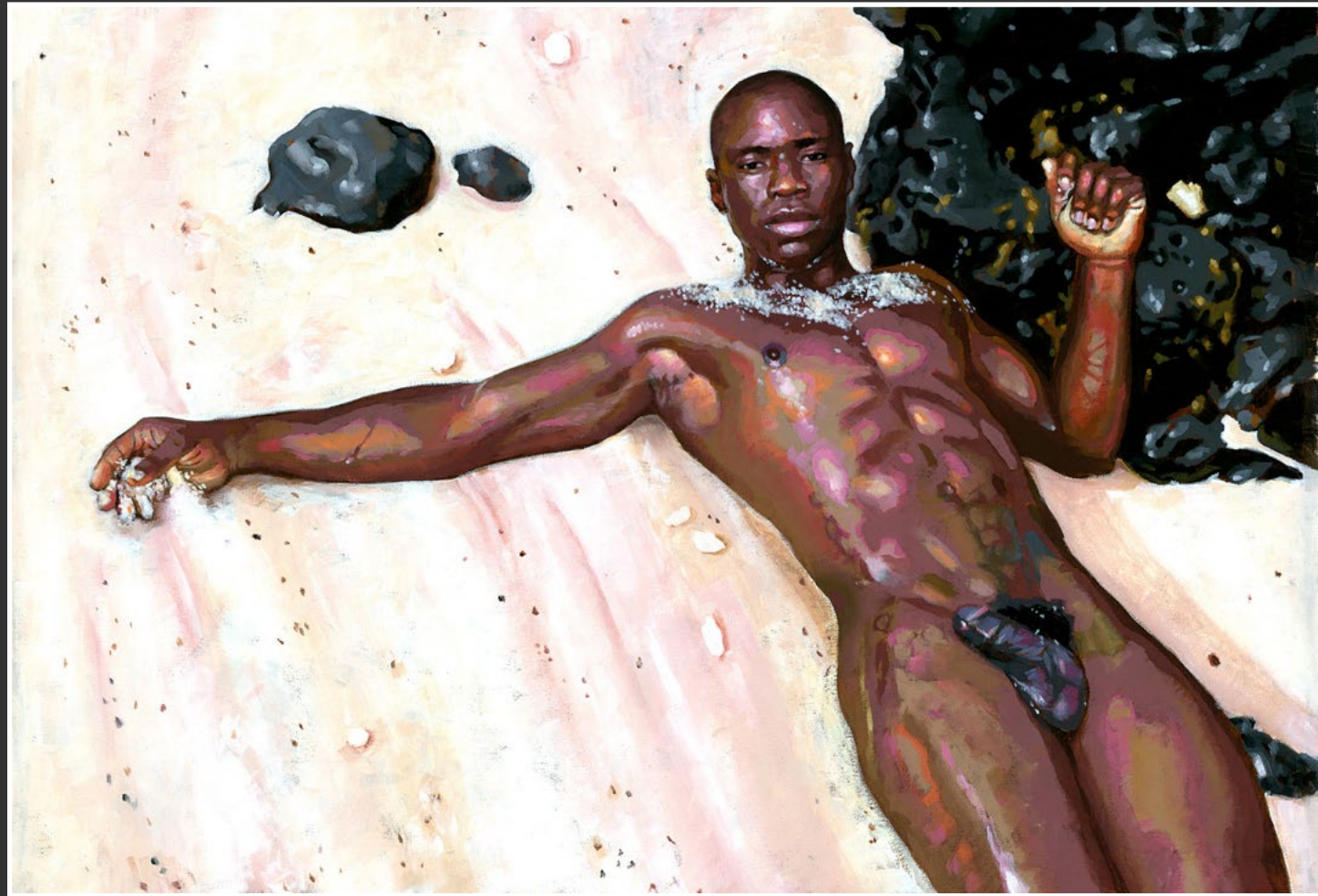
# 1990s cambodia



A trip to Cambodia in the early 90s gave Simonson plenty of inspiration, particularly in the person of a bodybuilder from Phnom Penh named Sothy (the model shown in all images on this page). That trip also resulted in one of Simonson's best-known paintings, *Banks of the Mekong* (opposite, lower).

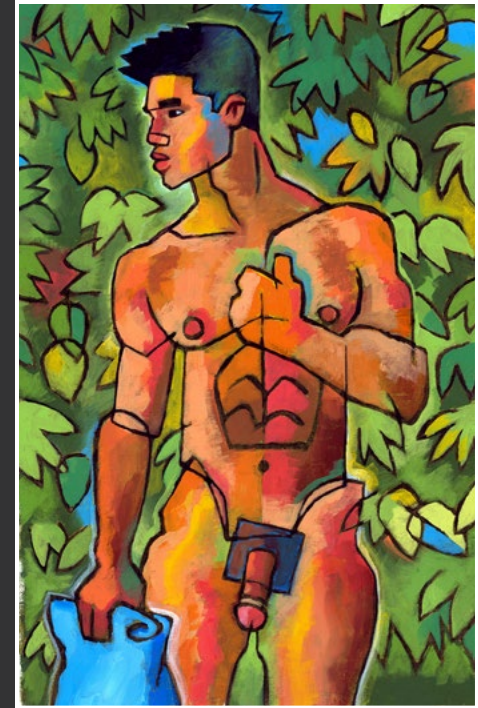
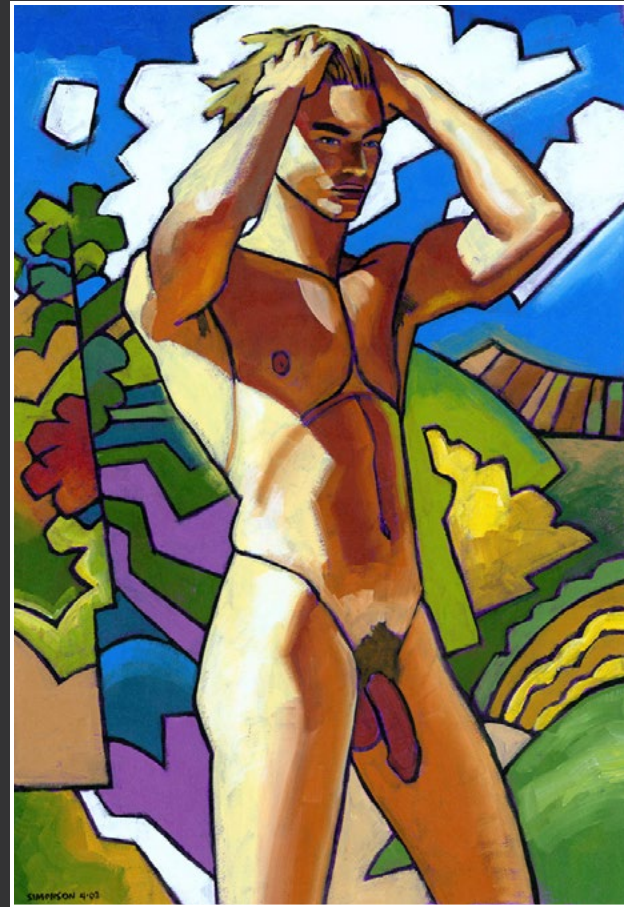
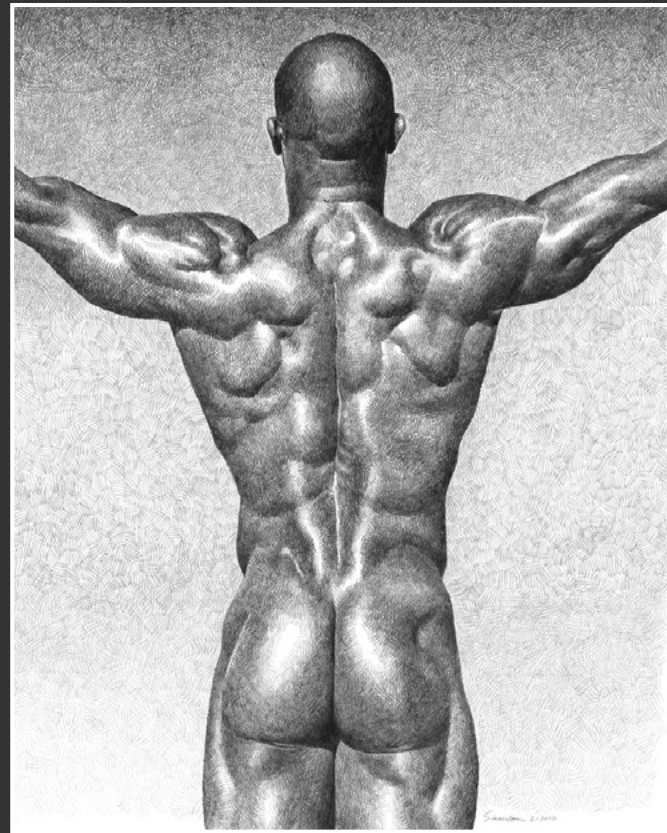
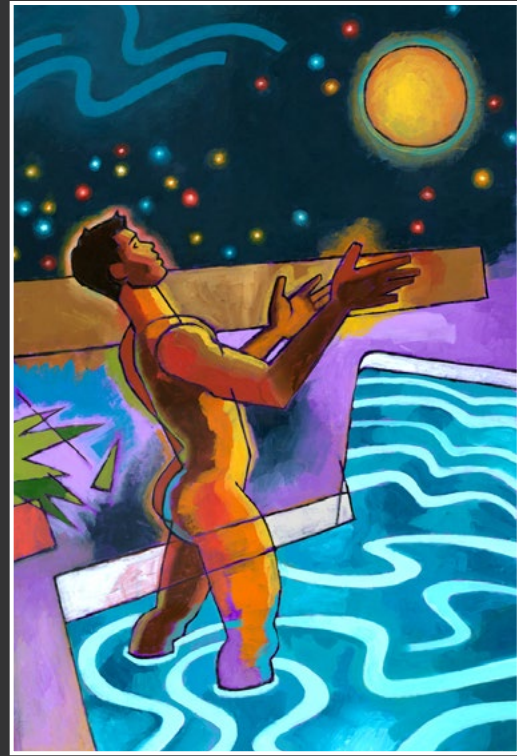


# 2000s

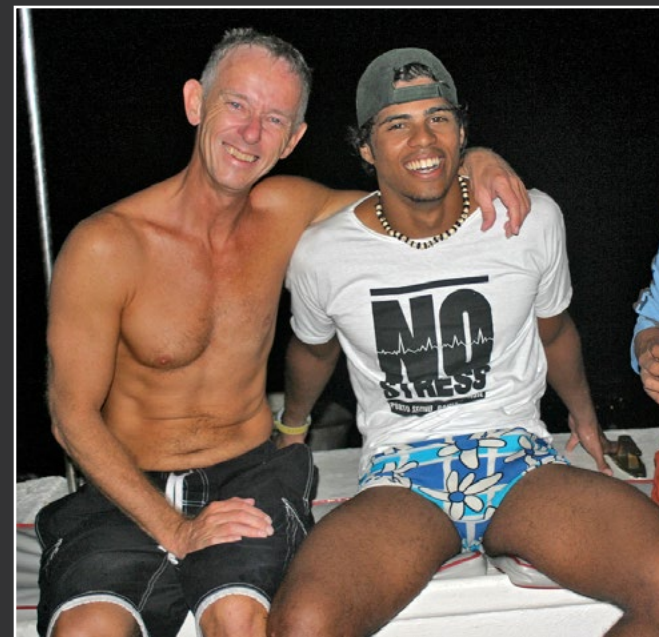


After the turn of the century, Simonson's work exhibited less frenetic energy, more refinement and confidence. Despite a continuing (and healthy) love of experimentation, a gradual coalescing of many styles into a few began as the artist grew calmer and more centered.

2000s



# 2000s brazil



Although he first visited Brazil in the late 1980s, it wasn't until 2004 that Simonson did his first male-nude photo shoot there. That was also the year he discovered a new muse named Marcus, who inspired him to produce dozens of drawings and paintings of this sexy, charismatic boy from Rio.



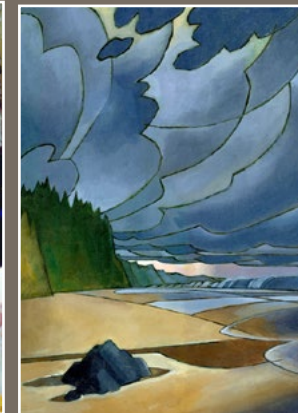
# 2000s **brazil**



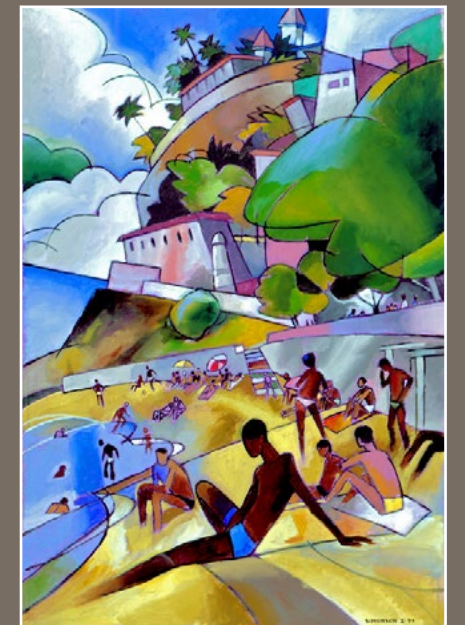
Simonson has made Brazil a regular stop in his travels, and each visit provides fresh inspiration.



# not **just** nudes



Although Douglas Simonson is primarily known for his art of the male nude, as a painter he's also accomplished in other areas, including landscapes, abstracts, and portraiture.





# HAWAII



PAINTINGS & DRAWINGS  
BY  
DOUGLAS SIMONSON

simonson**books**

# ISLANDERS



Paintings and Drawings by Douglas Simonson

Simonson's art has been appearing in published form for over 35 years. The first book of his art, entitled *Hawaii*, was published in London in 1986 by GMP (Gay Men's Press) in London. In 1989 Alyson Publications in Boston published a second book of Simonson art entitled *Islanders*.

*brush&camera*, published in Honolulu in 2006, showed Simonson's paintings side-by-side with his photographs of the same models.

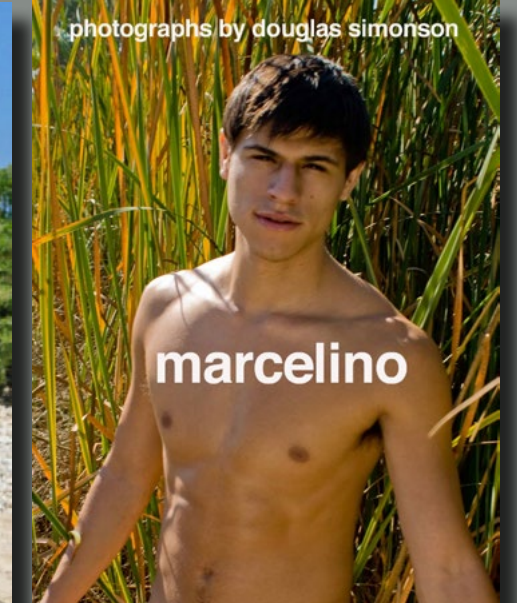
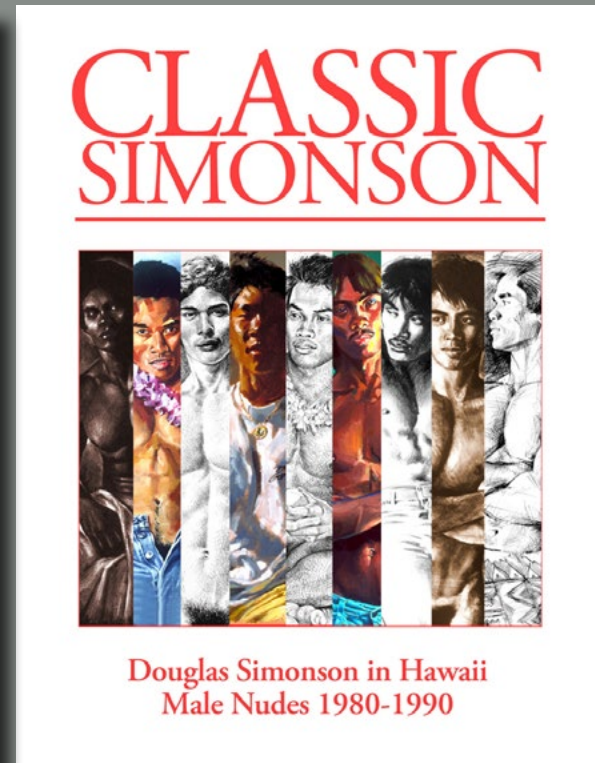
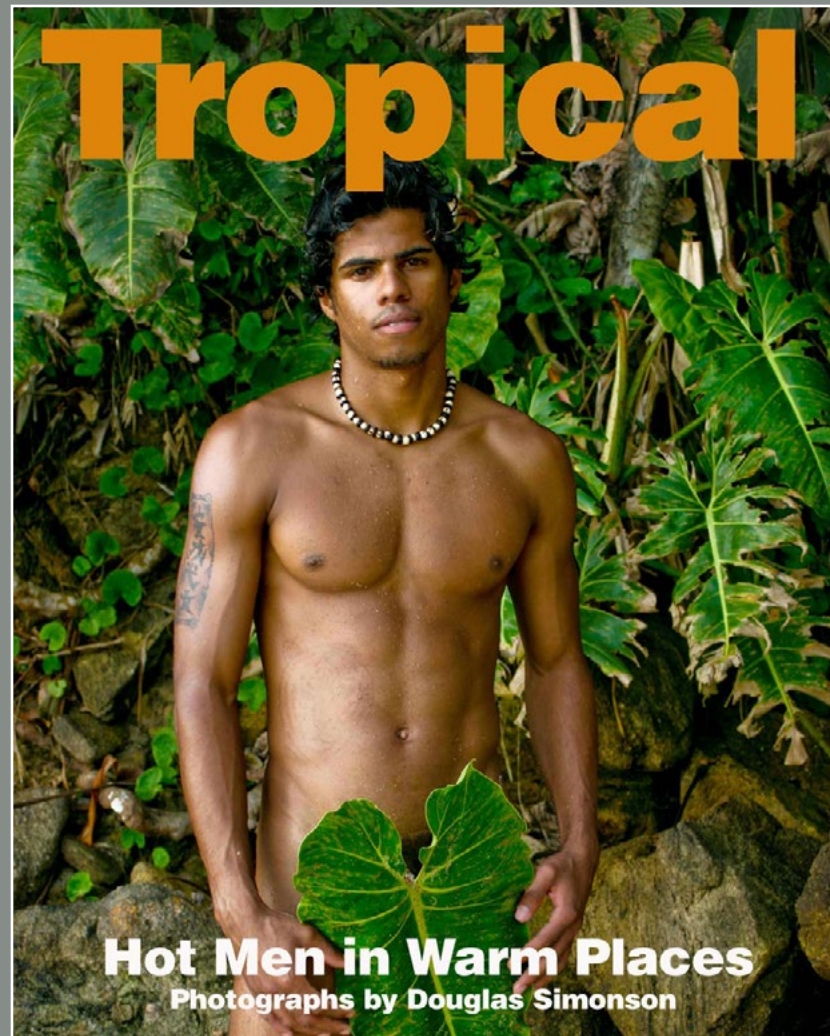
# brush & camera

*the photographic image as inspiration*

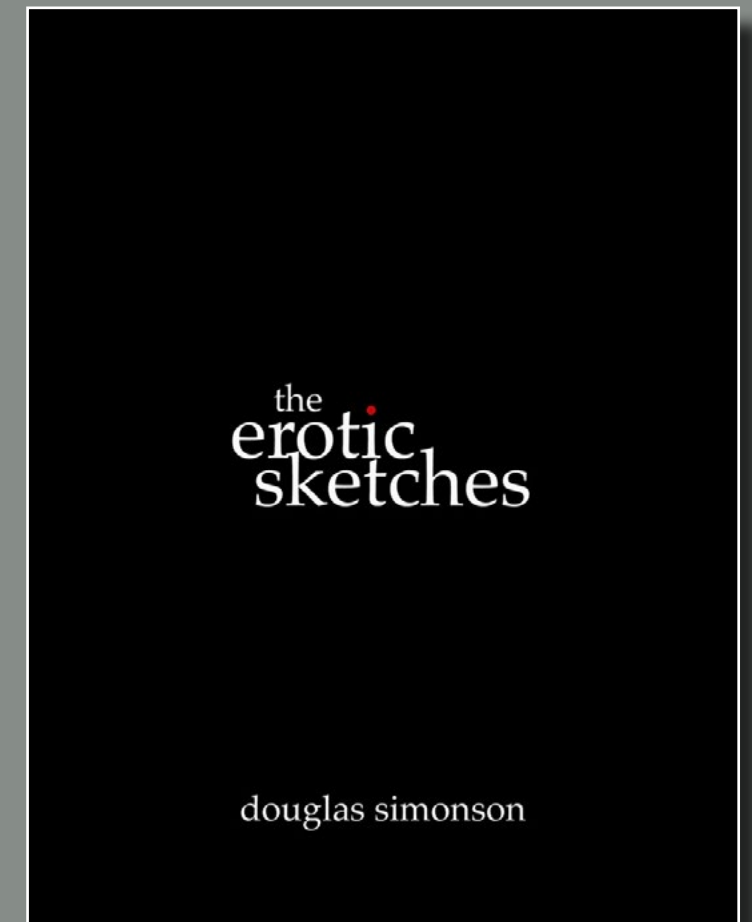


male nudes by douglas simonson

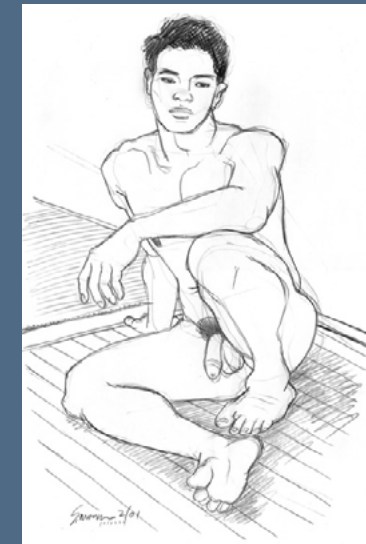
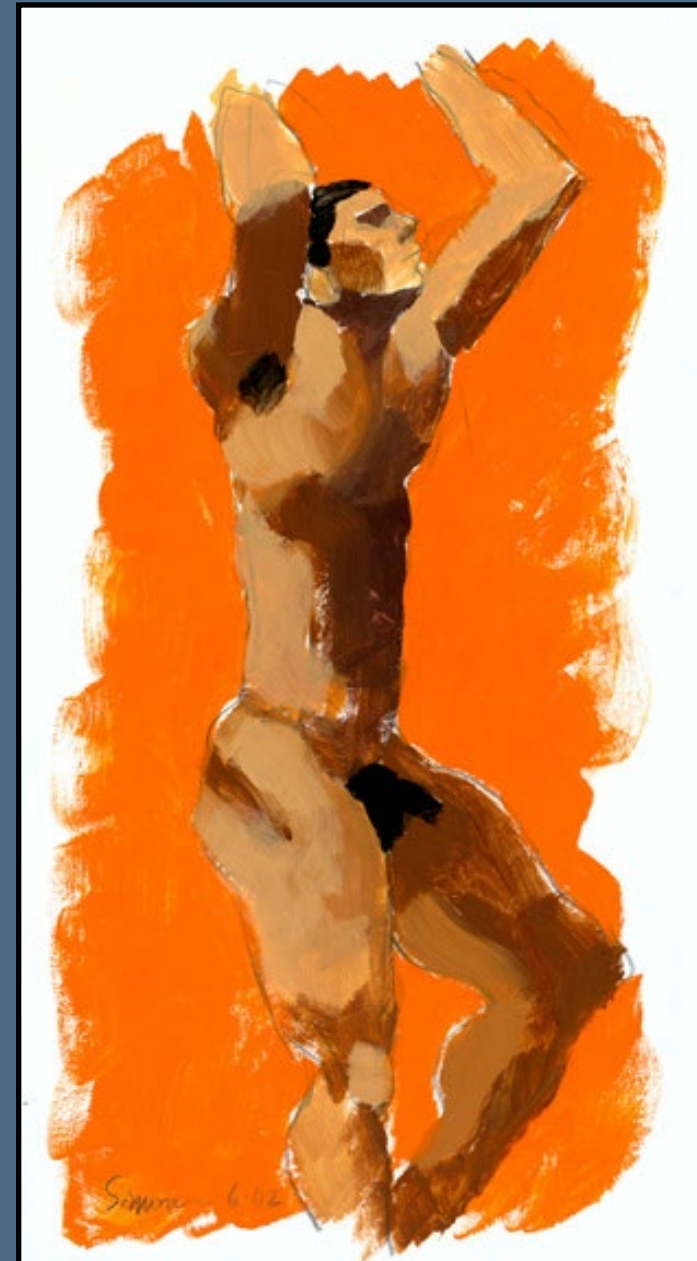
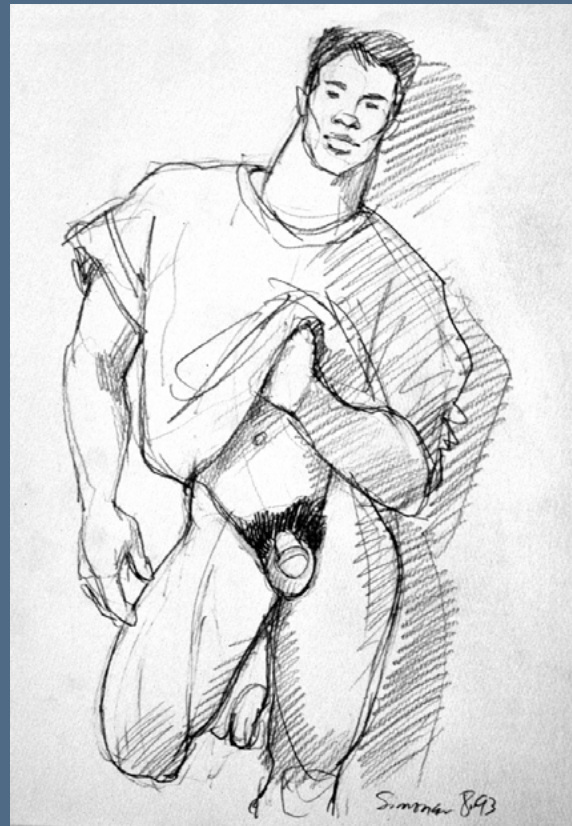
# simonson e-books



“The great thing about the e-book,” says Douglas Simonson, “is that it’s now possible to create and publish a book in the time it takes you to put it together on a computer. You don’t have to wait 8 or 10 months and spend several thousand dollars on a print run.” As someone who’s published many books the old-fashioned way, Simonson’s enthusiasm for the new paradigm is understandable. It’s also clearly demonstrable in the library of e-books he’s created so far--as of late 2022, there are now 50 Simonson e-books! See them [here](#).

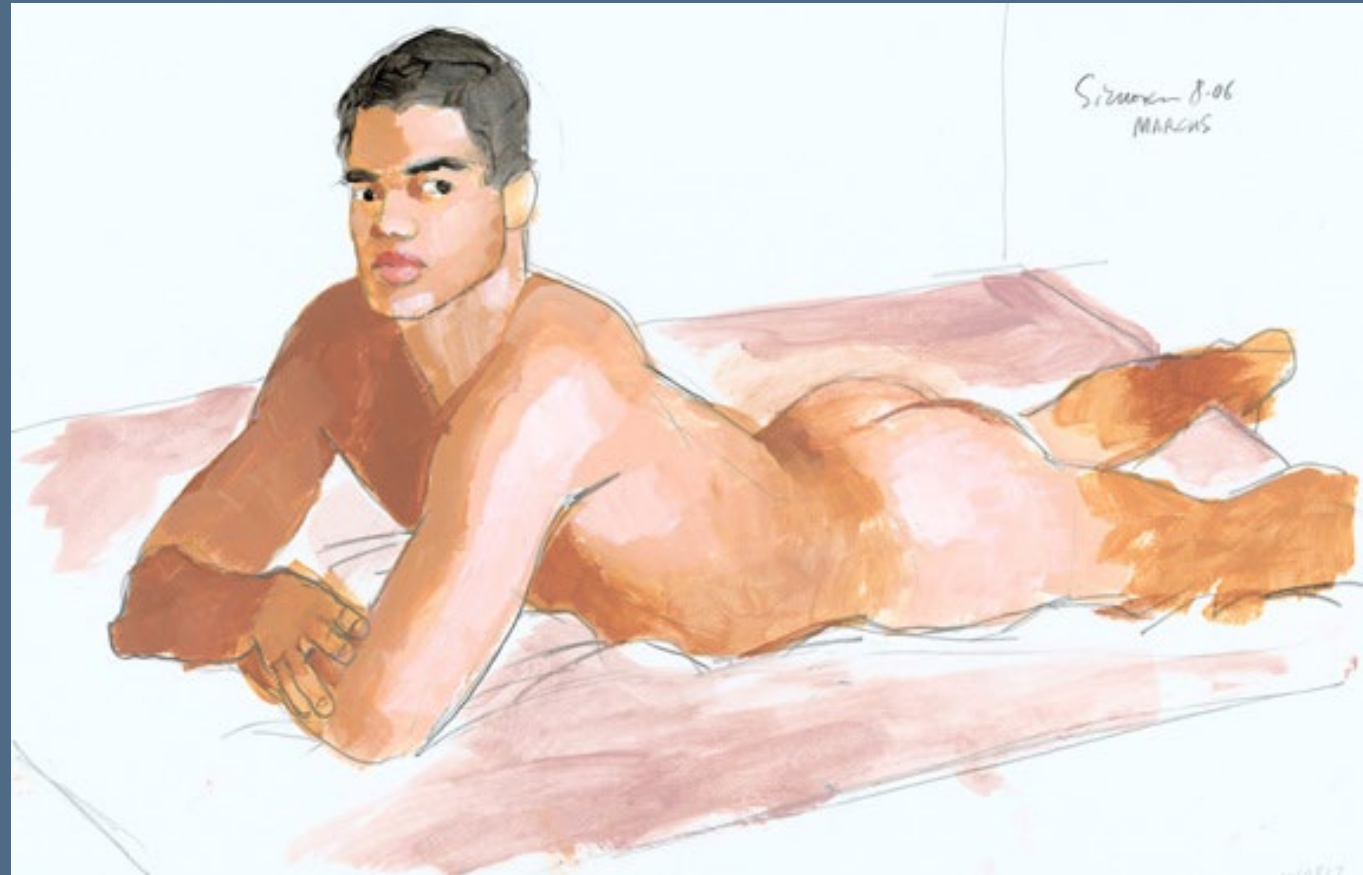


# roughsketches

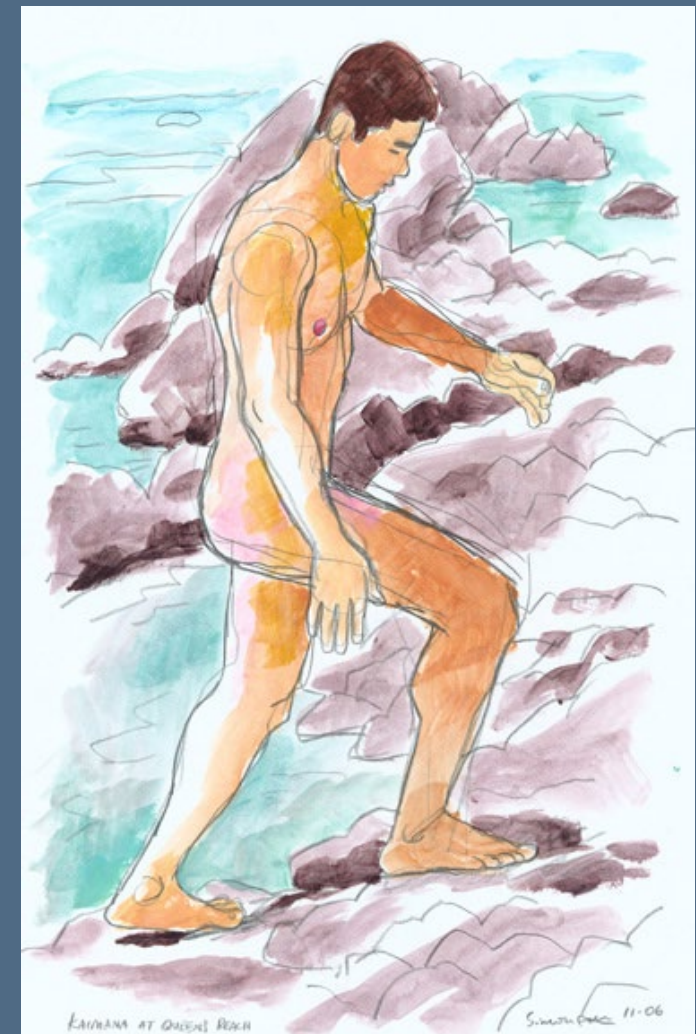


Simonson's regular exercise for many years has been to draw dozens of quick sketches, one after another, using his library of male-nude photographs as reference. In his early days he didn't show them or even keep them because of their lack of finish; he assumed his collectors wouldn't be interested. That changed one day when a collector happened to see some of Simonson's rough sketches and asked if he could buy them.

# roughsketches



The artist realized he could offer his “practice” drawings (both pencil and acrylic) at affordable prices so that any collector could own an original artwork. Today rough sketches are a significant aspect of Simonson’s online gallery.



# simonson**photography**



Simonson had always been a photographer, but had thought of it as simply a tool in his painting process. It wasn't until the mid-2010s that he realized his body of photographic work over the past 30-plus years represented a significant aspect of his artistic output, and deserved to be shared with his collectors.





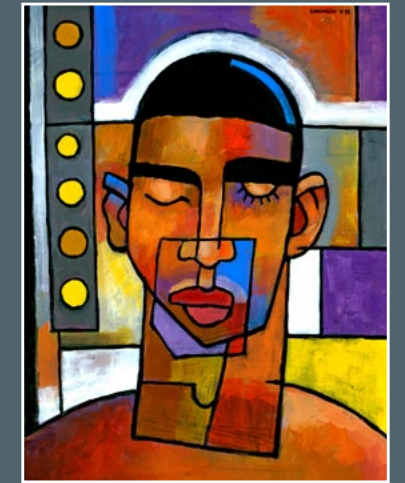
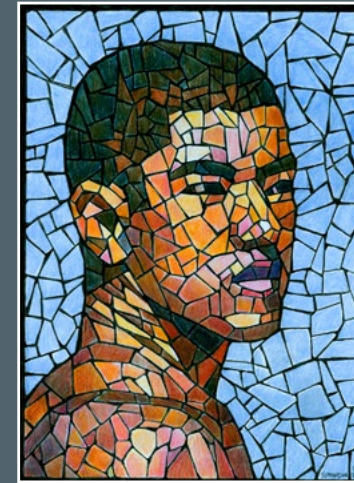
simonson  
**photography**



Simonson began offering his photographs as limited-edition prints in early 2008 and they quickly found a whole new audience of collectors.



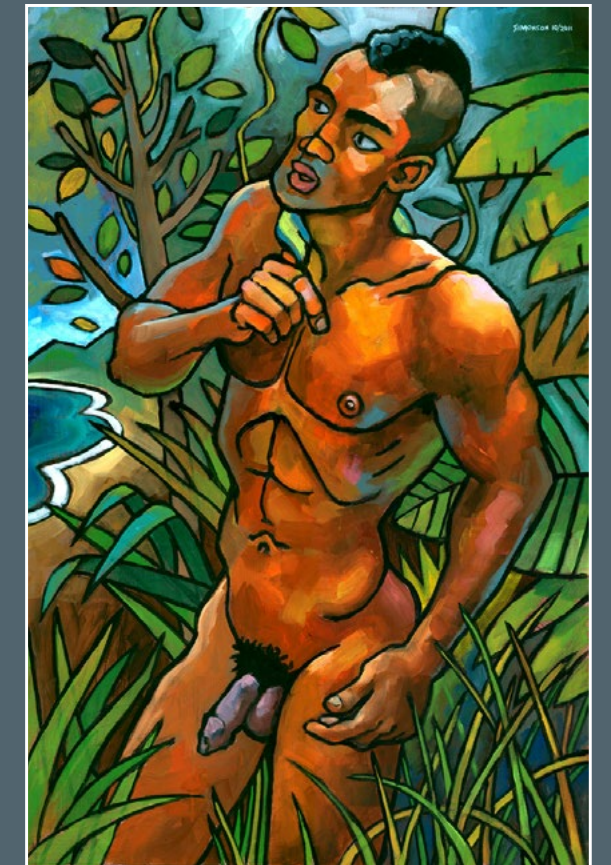
# simonson **on the road**



In 2011 an exciting new chapter in Simonson's life and career began when, after 40 years in Hawaii, the artist gave up his home base there to spend a year on the road. He ultimately spent nearly 3 years traveling, using Nebraska (and my spare bedroom) as his in-between-trips headquarters.

Then, in 2014, he made the decision to move to Puerto Vallarta. This beautiful tropical destination on Mexico's Pacific Coast seemed to offer everything he wanted: sun, sand, palm trees, and a super-gay-friendly ambience.

In a recent conversation, after nearly 8 years in PV, Simonson reports he's still loving his life there. Will he stay? "Maybe," he says, "but Brazil is still calling me..."



Stay tuned.



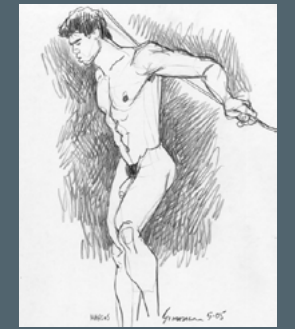
# simonson**links**



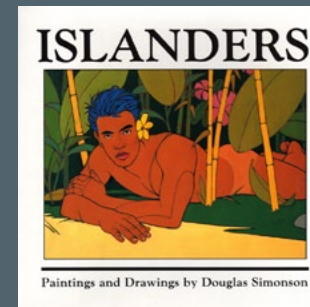
Douglas Simonson  
Online Gallery



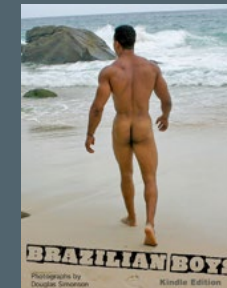
Photographic  
Prints



Rough Sketches



Simonson  
Books



Simonson  
E-Books



Simonson Blog -  
Artist's Diary

Use the links shown here to visit Douglas Simonson's online gallery and his blog.