

BEDFORD + BOWERY

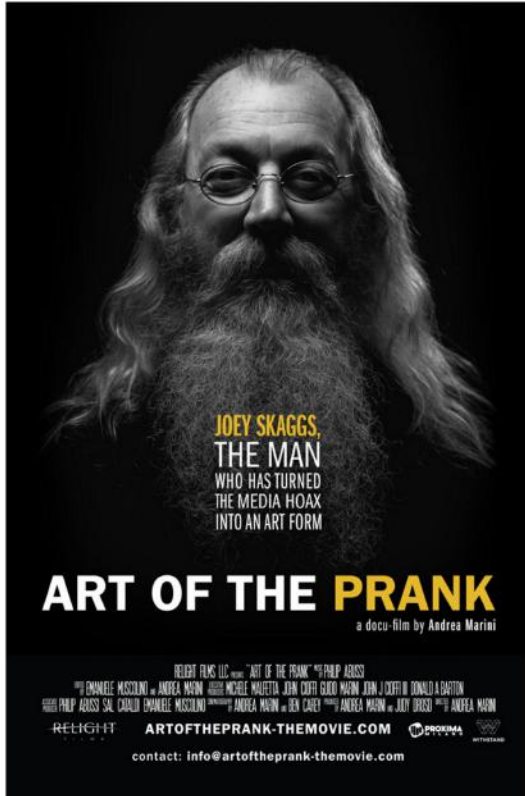
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 BY KAVITHA SURANA

REEL PSYCHED Meet the King of All Media Hoaxes at the LES Film Festival



'Tis the season for festivals, apparently, and the Lower East Side is not one to be left in the dust. Along with an [art festival](#) in Bushwick, [music festivals](#) in Brooklyn, and more coming up in the next weeks, the Lower East Side Film Festival is coming to the nabe from June 9-16. It'll hit the Sunshine Cinema, natch, as well as Hotel Indigo, the new Ludlow House and The Standard, East Village.

The headliner for opening night is the premier of *The Art of the Prank*, about a mischievous LES artist who loves nothing more than exposing the media's hunger for sensational story with outrageous tall tales that sound *just* (barely) plausible enough to swallow. Lambasting the media has certainly been in fashion this election season, but no one has been doing it longer and in better style than Joey Skaggs (sorry, "[Settle for Hillary](#)" guys).



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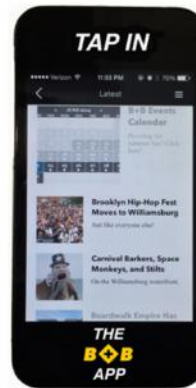
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Bedford + Bowery is where downtown Manhattan and north Brooklyn intersect. Produced by [NYU's Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute](#) in collaboration with *New York* magazine, B + B covers the East Village, Lower East Side, Williamsburg, Greenpoint, Bushwick, and beyond. Want to contribute? Send a tip? [E-mail the editor.](#)

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"I can connect with Joey's art because at the end of the day, it's the essence of storytelling to me," said director Andrea Marini, who co-produced the film with Judy Drosd. "Keep it simple, keep it meaningful, keep it strong, immediate, and you'll get people."

Indeed, Skaggs "got" many people over a remarkable history, repeatedly

pranking major news networks with weird fake stories, such as cockroach vitamin pills, fat squad “commandos,” and a brothel for dogs. (Marini said he was first inspired to create hoaxes after a newspaper completely misinterpreted one of his early performances against the Vietnam War.) As Skaggs says in the trailer, “People want an easy answer, they want a pill, the magic pill.”

But the documentary doesn't just rely on interviews and archival footage, 150 hours of which Marini had to sift through in order to find the best examples to fit his story. It also follows the prank master crafting a new hoax, going into the thought process behind his tricks. Marini would not reveal the hoax, except to say the new prank is about GMOs and transgenic research and about 99 percent of the hoax is true.

Remember: Skaggs is not exactly in retirement. Marini said he thinks the media con artist is up to another big hoax (could it be Donald Trump??) so next time you see some viral news overtaking your feed, you might want to look out for some telltale signs. “That’s the good thing about Joey,” said Marini. “He likes to red-flag everything. He cannot be too perfect, he gives hints—he always gives hints.” With the cockroach pills he called the product “Metamorphosis” and his own fake name “Joseph Gregor.” Apparently journalists are so gullible he’s never been caught in his pranks—but a big part of the .

“We are talking about irresponsible media and journalists who are not doing their job and researching enough—or just a little bit—to understand that it’s fake,” said Marini. “When they fall for it, it’s even funnier and meaningful [...] An important stage of his art is the revelation of the truth, you always have to reveal the truth. That’s when you go, ‘Wow, I believed for that—I believe that story for two weeks!’”



There are also plenty of other great picks to check out at the LES Film Fest, as well as a huge dose of nostalgia with a special 25th anniversary midnight showing of the beloved '90s flick *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles II: Secret of the Ooze* with miles of pizza, free beer and wine, and special appearances.

For more new stuff, there'll be *Gay Night Pool Party* and “Dive-In” on the rooftop pool deck of the Sixty LES hotel; a

touching *film* about a teenager with Down syndrome obsessed with rainbows; and shorts showcases about *revenge* and *family dysfunction* (respectively). To close up the whole shebang, check out the premier of *The Babymooners*, a sweetly neurotic story about one woman’s journey to motherhood. And if you didn’t yet catch the documentary ode to Streit’s Matzo before it closed, it’ll also play again as part of the festival. Festival judges include Ethan Hawke (*Boyhood*), Cindy Tolan (*Straight Outta Compton*), Steve Farneth (Cinetic Media) and Raúl Castillo (HBO series *Looking*, member LABrynth Theatre)

The Lower East Side Film Festival, June 9-16 at various venues. Tickets are \$15.50



TAGS: ANDREA MARINI, BABYMOONERS, DOCUMENTARY, JOEY SKAGGS, LOWER EAST SIDE, LOWER EAST SIDE FILM FESTIVAL, SHORT FILMS, SUNSHINE CINEMA, TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES