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Andrea Marini's "Art of the Prank" Pays Tribute to Artist and Media Hoaxster Joey Skaggs



The "Art of the Prank," about multimedia artist and ultimate media prankster Joey Skaggs, is slated to open the 2016 Lower East Side Film Festival on Thursday, June 9.

The Lower East Side Film Festival is kicking off their 2016 lineup Thursday night with *Art of the Prank*, an excellent documentary about the multimedia satirist Joey Skaggs. Skaggs, a former downtown NY artist who studied, and later taught, at SVA, is considered by many to be the godfather of the media hoax. His live antics are witty theatrical events that spring out of social activism and wry commentary, often involving a large team of co-conspirators that stay "in character" for months at a time.

Skaggs has pulled off a multitude of public pranks over the last few decades, such as the "Celebrity Sperm Bank," the "Cathouse for Dogs" (a fake warehouse for dogs), the "Fat Squad" (a team of people that block you from your refrigerator) and "Portofees" (a mobile confessional booth at political conventions) — all reported as fact by prestigious journalists, numerous publications and TV news shows.

The film won a special jury mention at the 2016 Slamdance Film Festival and has screened in festivals internationally since then, but this is its New York premiere. Both Skaggs and the director, Andrea Marini will be in attendance on Thursday evening.

Skaggs was introduced to Marini while giving a talk in Rome and says he appreciated the young Italian director's enthusiasm. "He seemed very dedicated and I wanted to give him a chance. I try to give young people a chance because no one gave me a chance when I was a young person," he said.

Skaggs handed over hundreds of hours of archival footage, press clippings and photos he had saved throughout his career. "So he knew I trusted him, but I didn't make it easy for him," he said. "[With that much material to sort through] you could have done a hundred different films, he couldn't possibly have used everything."

The tightly woven film combines archival footage with interviews of friends and admirers (including the comedy collective Improv Everywhere's founder Charlie Todd and the Lower East Side's very own Reverend Jen Miller) along with an inside look at Skaggs' most recent hoax. To the filmmakers' credit, the story keeps the audience in suspense and is highly entertaining throughout.

After devoting almost four years to the project, Marini said he's relieved and delighted to see *Art of the Prank* screening at so many festivals and on the brink of a distribution deal. "I had no idea where it would go, I always believed in it, but at some point you are so close to the project, you just don't know..." he said.

Asked if he's worried that his cover will finally be blown by this film, Skaggs laughs. "I've been asked that for 50 years — I've been on the same news shows multiple times for different hoaxes (and has used his own name) and they've never made the connection," he said. "I've seen over and over that the story is more important than the name or the person [or the facts] for these guys."

The important thing to note about this film, however is that it is a "real" documentary. "Just to do a hoax here would be a cheap shot," says Skaggs, "the fact that [this is] all real is the powerful thing."

And a fitting tribute as well.

The Lower East Side Film Festival opens Thursday, June 9th at the Sunshine Cinema and runs eight nights straight, through Thursday, June 16. Visit the website [here](#) for more details and the full schedule. TLD is the proud local media sponsor of the 2016 Lower East Side Film Festival.

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