

**Los Angeles Filmforum presents
American Fabulous, by Reno Dakota
Saturday, June 29, 2024, 1:00 pm
At 2220 Arts + Archives**

Los Angeles Filmforum is the city's longest running organization dedicated to weekly screenings of experimental film, documentaries, video art, and experimental animation. 2024 is our 49th year. www.lafilmforum.org

Remote Conversation with director Reno Dakota!

Community partner: Dirty Looks

New HD transfer of the original DigiBeta Tape will be screened.
Digital presentation courtesy of the UCLA Film & Television Archive.

“Nobody could make this up, and even if they could...why would they want to?”

Driven around Columbus, Ohio, in the back of a 1957 Cadillac, Jeffrey Strauth 'spontaneously' recounts his wild, hilarious, tumultuous, homosexual life story for one hundred and five minutes, and that is the entirety of Reno Dakota's rarely screened cult documentary, *American Fabulous* (1992). Although Jeffrey's experiences are undoubtedly unique, his run-ins with the police, alienation from his family, and experiences of housing insecurity in relation to sex work and drugs also feel familiar with the conditions of fringe working-class queer folk trying to find beauty while coming up with survival tactics through an unforgiving world. Dakota's minimal approach to filming his friend Jeffrey—who died of AIDS shortly before the film's release—was a way to contain his outlandish energy, but it also gives the stories space to be illustrated like an American epic, wonderfully vulgar, loving, and unsentimental, insulated in a car and inaudible to his hometown they are speeding by.

The film will be followed by a remote discussion with director Reno Dakota!

Reno Dakota, Director, Producer

Reno Dakota has said he wasn't really aware that he was making a feature film when he shot his now-classic docuportrait, *American Fabulous* (1992). His only aim at the time was to capture the personality of his friend, Jeffrey Strouth. The film's release to a gush of nationwide critical praise generated a faithful, if scattered, cult following and has even spawned an off-off Broadway play based on it in 2002. Dakota, an Ohio native, has lived in New York since 1982. He himself is the subject of The Magnetic Fields' song that bears his name.

Thank you to the Todd Wiener and the UCLA Film & Television Archive.

Screening:

***American Fabulous* by Reno Dakota
1992, SD, Color, 105 min.**

“Perched like a queen on her throne -- here, the back seat of a 1957 Cadillac -- Jeffrey Strough gives a royal performance in *American Fabulous*. Blessed with the gift of gab, the twentysomething Jeffrey prattles on about his life as a gay man with white trash roots as if the whole world were listening to his monologues. It's not an ego thing. Indeed, Jeffrey is not so much in love with his own voice as he is with the thought of entertaining others with it, something he does without fail in this funny little movie. Some of his tales try the limits of credulity, particularly one involving a punk rock lesbian, a Tupperware party, some potato salad, and oral sex. But these stories are so unbelievable that you have to believe they're true; nobody could make this stuff up. Although *American Fabulous* is unquestionably a testament to Jeffrey's picaresque life, there's little sentiment here. Whether he is recounting episodes from his dysfunctional family life during childhood or talking about the promiscuity and drug use of later years, his attitude is *je ne regrette rien*. The highlights of *American Fabulous* are those moments in which Jeffrey reminisces about the cast of demimonde characters he's known: the toothless “Mith Earl” who loved to watch Roller Derby, eating pizza with one hand and wiping her mouth with a roll of toilet paper in the other; the 400-pound drag queen Angie Marie, who had mismatched nostrils and a passion for polyester leisure suits; the tiny, wrinkled Marie, the waitress at the Golden Kettle restaurant “attached to a giant red hairdo”; and his dear ex-friend Nita Peters, a female illusionist who hasn't spoken to him since he accidentally burned her house down, “along with all her wigs.” Since the filming of *American Fabulous*, which was released in 1991, Jeffrey -- like so many others like him -- has succumbed to complications from AIDS. Consequently, *American Fabulous* is his legacy to the world, a world that didn't always treat him well but one that never ceased to amuse him.” - Steve Davis, *Austin Chronicle*, March 26, 1993, <https://www.austinchronicle.com/events/film/1993-03-26/139244/>

This program is supported by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors through the Los Angeles County Arts Commission and the Department of Cultural Affairs, City of Los Angeles. We also depend on our members, ticket buyers, and individual donors.

Coming Soon to Los Angeles Filmforum
July 28 – *Richland*, by Irene Lustzig

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