

THE PRIDE '25! *Hollywood* REUNION

June 11, 2025

ROUNDTABLE
THR
COMEDY ACTOR

WHAT'S SO FUNNY?

RIGHT NOW, NOT MUCH.

But somehow Adam Brody, Ted Danson, John Mulaney,
Seth Rogen, Jason Segel and Julio Torres keep us laughing anywe

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Follow the Pink Brick Road

James Bidgood's candy-colored cult classic *Pink Narcissus* is back in full splendor, courtesy of John Waters

By Seth Abramovitch

John Waters declared it “as beautiful and timeless as *The Wizard of Oz*,” and the filmmaker is hosting a screening of it June 15 at the Provincetown Film Festival.

What is it? The 1971 gay art film *Pink Narcissus* — an erotic fantasia whose eye-candy aesthetics have influenced generations of queer artists, from David LaChapelle and Pierre et Gilles to more recently Charli XCX (she says she’s “obsessed”), Lil Nas X and the stars of *RuPaul’s Drag Race*.

Shot on Super-8, the hourlong, mostly silent flick follows the sexual fantasies of a curly haired male prostitute (Bobby Kendall, a real escort at the time) who envisions himself as a matador, a Roman slave and the master of an exotic harem.

“He is very handsome. He had an untrimmed bush, pillow lips and Luigi Mangione eyebrows,” jokes Waters from his home in Provincetown.

For nearly 30 years after its original release, no one knew who made it, as *Pink Narcissus* was credited to “Anonymous.” Andy Warhol was a longtime suspect. In 1999, it was confirmed that a Wisconsin transplant named James Bidgood was the mysterious figure behind the camp-tastic vision.

Bidgood moved to New York in 1951, a starry-eyed 18-year-old raised on MGM musicals and Ziegfeld Follies. He was a performer at Club 52, a 1950s East Village drag bar. He later found work taking beefcake photos. The work proved uninteresting to him, so he added fantastical sets and costumes to the shoots.



The Man Behind the Curtain
James Bidgood, the long-anonymous director of *Pink Narcissus*, died from COVID-19 complications in 2022.



Pink Narcissus was Bidgood's leap into filmmaking and would be his masterwork. He spent seven years making it, crafting the sets out of papier-mâché, sewing costumes, casting young men he found on New York streets, and meticulously lighting and filming it in his tiny Hell's Kitchen railroad apartment.

“Models were not that easy to find — especially for the kind of work I was doing, which called for more of the subject’s time than a pose or two,” Bidgood told *Butt* magazine in 2010. “In the time I needed to do one shot, they could turn 10 tricks.”

Making *Pink Narcissus* was itself an act of defiance on the part of Bidgood, who died in 2022 from COVID-19 complications. He was 88.

“When it was originally made, it would have been highly illegal,” Waters explains. “People went to jail for going to see *Flaming Creatures* — a 1963 art drag film — “because it had limp frontal male nudity. But *Pink Narcissus* is

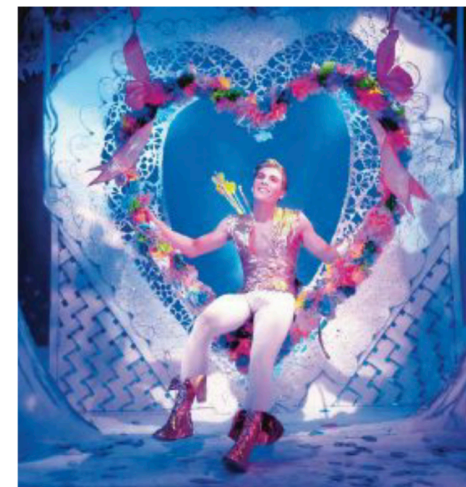
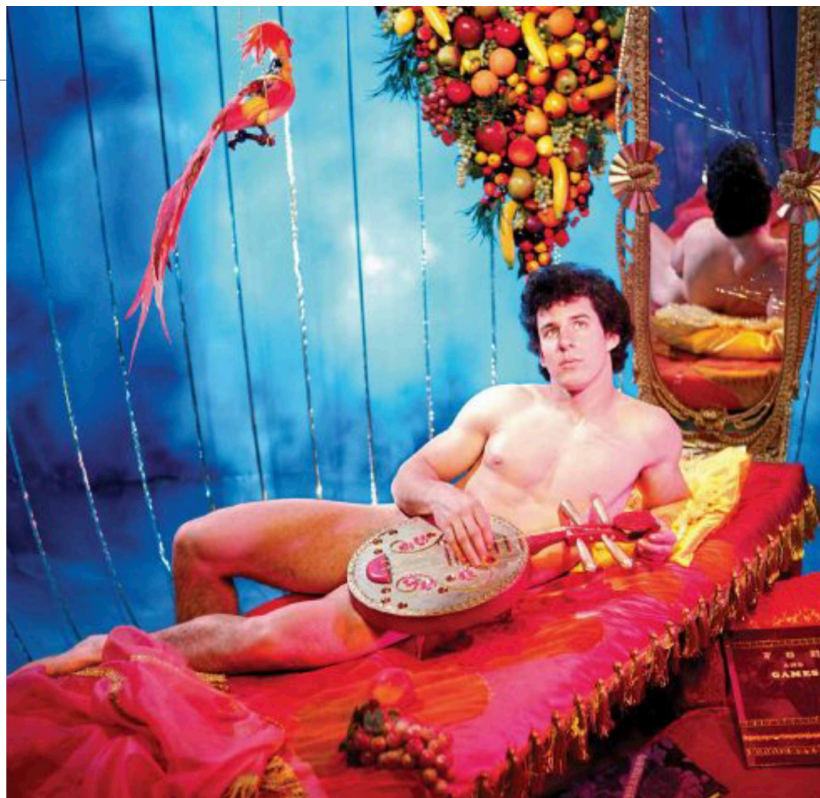
filled with half hard-ons and there’s one cum shot. That would have been so illegal!

“At the same time,” he continues, “it is outsider art — which is very confusing to censors. It’s an amazingly beautiful movie.”

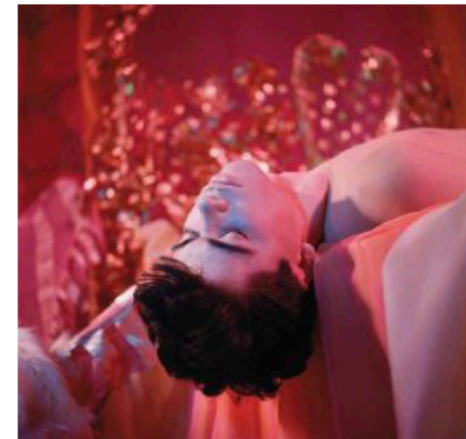
Bidgood disowned the film after being denied final cut (after seven years of filming, investors grew impatient at his equally protracted editing process). It got a chilly reception upon its release, with *The New York Times* calling it “a passive, tackily decorated surreal fantasy.”

But time has been good to *Pink Narcissus*, which has developed a fervent cult following and earned a cultural reappraisal. A restoration by UCLA Film & Television Archive has returned *Pink Narcissus* to its candy-colored glory (that’s the one Waters is screening — with others cities scheduled, including L.A. on June 27), while a coffee table book celebrating Bidgood’s groundbreaking work — *James Bidgood: Dreamlands* — came out in March.

“You are in James’ *Wizard of Oz*,” Waters says. “And his *Wizard of Oz* just happens to be Bobby Kendall’s ass.” **THR**



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Dream Lovers The recently released coffee table book *James Bidgood: Dreamlands* features a selection of Bidgood’s film and photography work from the 1960s. Clockwise from top left: *Larry With Mandolin*, *Gilded Cage*, *Valentine* (model: Tommy Coombs); *Hanging Off Bed* (portrayed by Bobby Kendall, a male escort at the time); *Apache* (Coombs); bullfighter from *Pink Narcissus* (Kendall).