

RAW! UNCUT! VIDEO!: a love story about fetish porn

Directed & produced by Ryan A. White & Alex Clausen

Wohler Films LLC

Reviewed by Hank Trout



RAW! UNCUT! VIDEO!
*a love story about
fetish porn*, an in-
your-face documentary by Ryan
A. White and Alex Clausen, is
not a documentary about AIDS.
And yet, the specter of AIDS
hovers over every frame of it.
White and Clausen chronicle
the rise and fall of gay porn
studio Palm Drive Video and
contextualize gay fetish porn's
historical significance during
the height of the AIDS crisis in

the U.S. This story of how a devoted leather couple helped fight a devastating health crisis by promoting safe kinky sex is just as rowdy and boisterous, as eye-opening and wild—and just as important—as the original Palm Drive videos themselves.

As the AIDS pandemic decimated the gay community in San Francisco, writer/editor/filmmaker Jack Fritscher [A&U, March 2020] and his husband Mark Hemry moved north to a ranch in Sonoma County. They worked to create “a safe-sex porn studio that offered viewers new sexual possibilities in an age of plague.” They birthed Palm Drive Video, as Fritscher put it, “to entertain the troops with safe sex scenes and techniques during the 1980s war on AIDS. Palm Drive Video films were instructional. At the height of the AIDS dying, Palm Drive Video, via mail-order, taught thousands of men socially distanced in the hinterlands how to make their solo safe-sex



Summer Has Left the Building

hot with a safe-sex partner on the screen.”

“We wanted to bring sex back into people’s lives at a time when everyone was scared of sex,” Mark Hemry says in the film. They sought out ruggedly muscled, hairy, bearded non-professional models of all sizes and ages among San Francisco’s men with HIV, most of whom have now passed, who wanted to be memorialized on screen in a safe-sex format. Models enacted/verbalized their unique erotic fantasies, directly addressing the viewer, enabling him to participate in that kink. The one straight model they filmed, Steve Thrasher, wanted to perform to honor his brother Billy, once Co-Chair of San Francisco Pride, who had died of AIDS-related causes. One model, Steve Parker, said of his debut in *Lightning Rodz*, “I was thirty-six or thirty-seven years old, I had just lost my husband to AIDS, and I was ready to explore my kinky side.” *Palm Drive* celebrated a wide range of gay fetish figures such as cops, firemen, cowboys, wrestlers, bodybuilders, and more.



Still from a Palm Drive video

White and Clausen have compiled a lively, thoughtful history of a short-lived labor of love, a thank-you bouquet of leather roses to Jack and Mark, and their models, for giving horny gay

men an alternative to the typical air-brushed muscle-mag gay porn then available, in scenes that will intrigue anyone interested in the intersection of art, sex, and kink. Palm Drive Video made art that freed their models to explore and engage the viewer in their darkest, most NSFW sexual fantasies—and freed the viewer to “share” that fantasy in private, in safety. As Mark put it, “at a time when everyone was scared of sex,” they made kink safe so the troops could fight on. This documentary pays deserved honor to their art.

RAW! UNCUT! VIDEO! had its international premiere at the 50th Kyiv International Film Festival (Molodist), and its West Coast premiere at Frameline45, the San Francisco International LGBTQ+ Film Festival, running June 17 to 27 online.

For more information about the documentary, please log on to: www.rawuncutvideo.com.

Hank Trout, Senior Editor, edited *Drummer*, *Malebox*, and *Folsom* magazines in the early 1980s. A long-term survivor of HIV/AIDS (diagnosed in 1989), he is a forty-year resident of San Francisco, where he lives with his husband Rick.

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