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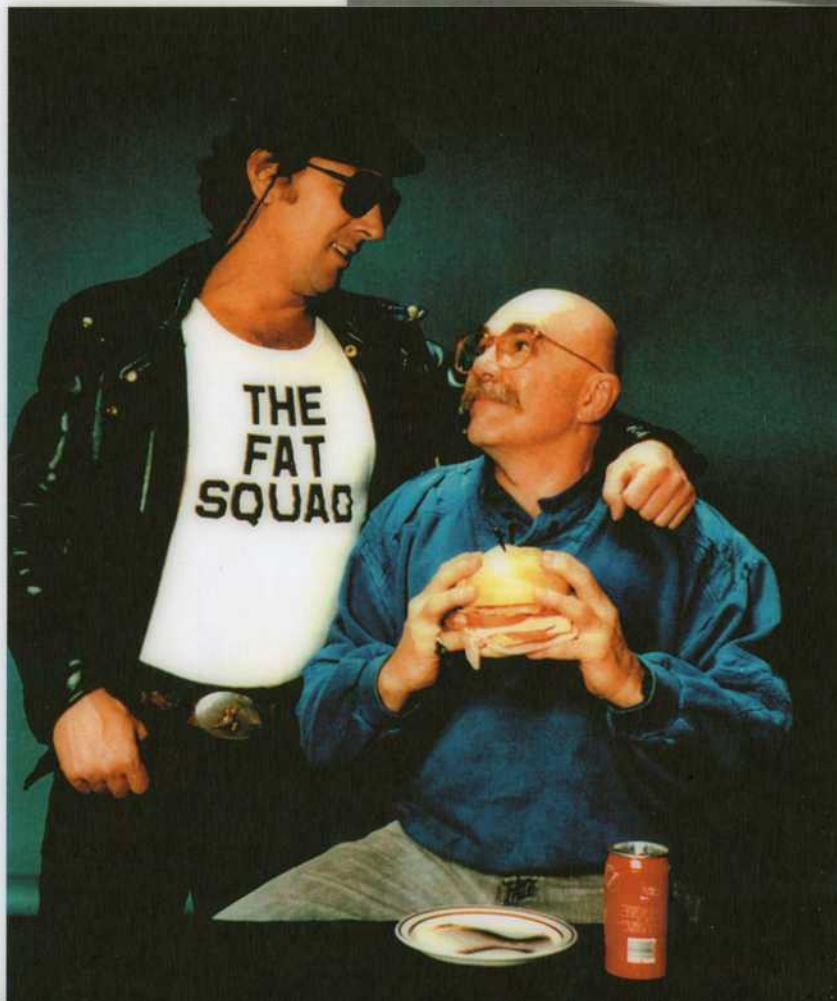
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# Joey Skaggs is THE HOAXER

words DAVID PIPER

What better medium for your art than the media? Fancy creating reality for millions of people? Let's make up the news! It's being done, and awesomely: Joey Skaggs (aka Joe Bones, Prof. Joseph Scagliozi, Kim Yung Soo, and many more) has been wildly fooling the world's press and broadcast news for more than 30 years, leaving nothing but an incandescent trail of ridiculous inventions and red-faced reporters.

How do you measure the impact you make? By how many people have appreciated your paintings, danced to your music, come in their hundreds or thousands to your nightclub or your rally, or been the beneficiary of your charitable acts or Dadaist interventions? Yes, you go-getters! I find it easy, or convenient, to imagine most Flux readers make an interesting difference, or at least aspire towards it - but for the moment, it's all *me* changing reality. Oh, don't stop reading - I can feel the power already...

After a certain point, however, a limit is reached. Personal contact, or word of mouth, except in the most outstanding circumstances, will only go so far, and the only step up - a huge one - is the self-appointed arbiter and chronicler of the world - the news media. The news is not only the truth, but reality itself: if it's not on the news, then it didn't happen. The small things that happen every day are on a completely different scale. If an event is set in print or on screen, it may not touch us directly, and it'll be one step removed from us - *mediated* - but it will also have a weight, an undeniable authority, and a recorded permanence: it will affect the world of millions. The reported world is its own reality, and we believe it.

So, what better medium for your art than the media? Fancy creating reality for millions of people? Let's make up the news! It's being done, and awesomely: Joey Skaggs (aka Joe Bones, Prof. Joseph Scagliozi, Kim Yung Soo, and many more) has been wildly fooling the world's press and broadcast news for more than 30 years, leaving nothing but an incandescent trail of ridiculous inventions and red-faced reporters. The last hoax he did in England, as Baba Wa Simba ('The Lion King'), a well-travelled spiritual healer who promised to care for "the wounded animal inside all of us," had several journalists and television presenters crawling on all fours and roaring like pathetic lions for the cameras.

A tricycle-mounted confessional booth? A psychic lawyer? A canine brothel ('Cathouse for Dogs')? A cemetery that's also a theme park, with mausoleums as rides themed around death? Not only does he have a superb imagination, and clinical execution (not to mention, as they say in New York, a whole load of chutzpah), but also, without any contrivance, a lot of the trickster figure about him. He appears in almost all the stunts, but is rarely,

if ever, recognised. The Entertainment Tonight show, proud of never having been pulled a swift one, asked him to appear, so he sent a friend of his to impersonate him. At one point, the presenter asked 'Skaggs' why he was wearing dark glasses. "Oh well," he said, taking them off, "nobody's going to recognise me anyway." They still thought he was the real one. None of the pranks has ever failed; only when the befuddled news service refuses to acknowledge its failure (he soon reveals the true nature of every story) is there anything less than maximum impact. One magazine has considered making it compulsory to ask every news source if he is Joey Skaggs.

The media, he says, have been more than eager to swallow his stupid lies, because he makes them so tempting - and brilliantly obvious: "To catch flies you got to have honey or shit." He often says in interviews, with a glint in his eye, that he doesn't actually want them to change, both because it suits him so much, and, one would like to think, he'd be lost without the opportunity to exercise his irrepressible urge to satirise and create large-scale, harmless havoc: "If we live in a world without satire and irony I'd rather be dead." He's found the perfect formula of stories they want to cover - the point between silliness and incredulity, with a heap of outrage thrown in. He provides the industry with some of the most entertaining stories ever - fishtank replica condos for upwardly mobile guppies, anyone - and then bites them, hard.

He has fun, shows up some fairly dodgy practices, and gets to lie to millions. "The media is just the vehicle... I use my imagination to embarrass the bullies." And he very successfully challenges the media, so self-righteous as bringers of truth, as lazy, or worse, liars (and they often have to admit it). What is the worth of this reality - such a large part of our world - if just anybody can tinker with it? "We either fool ourselves or we're being fooled - there's only a change of consciousness when we realise we're being fooled." So, let's play - never has the potential of lying been so great. ENDS  
[www.joeyskaggs.com](http://www.joeyskaggs.com)