

INTERVIEW

# SLIFF 2016 Interview: Joey Skaggs – Subject of ART OF THE PRANK

By Tom Stockman | November 2, 2016



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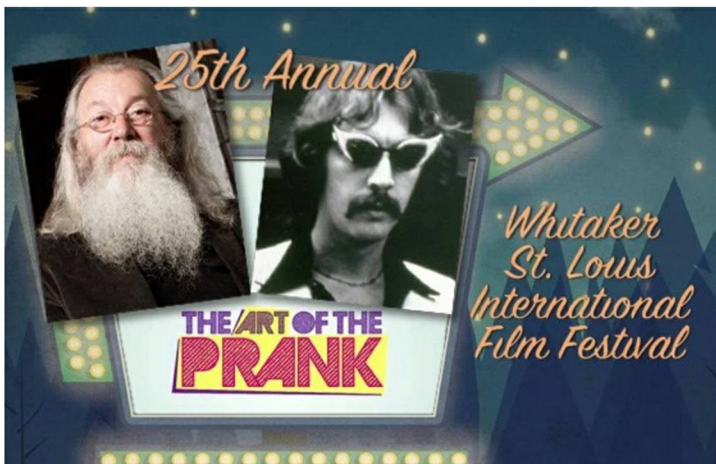


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**ART OF THE PRANK** screens Saturday, Nov. 5 at 5:30pm at .ZACK (3224 Locust Ave.) as part of this year's St. Louis International Film Festival. Director Andrea Marini, producer Judy Drosd, and Joey Skaggs, the subject of the documentary, will be in attendance. Ticket information can be found [HERE](#).



ART OF THE PRANK offers a hilarious and provocative profile of New York artist Joey Skaggs, the godfather of the media hoax. Famed for such media fictions as the Celebrity Sperm Bank, the Cathouse for Dogs, the Fat Squad, and the Portofess (a mobile confessional booth) — all reported as fact by reputable journalists — the prankster qualifies as one of America's greatest living satirists. Chronicling the most demanding hoax of Skaggs' career, filmmaker Andrea Marini provides privileged access to the thoughts and actions of this most unconventional man, following the evolution of an artist who has dedicated his life to seeking social change by relentlessly challenging the status quo. With unprecedented access to Skaggs and his archives, the documentary reveals the man behind the curtain, interweaving his current unfolding hoax with a look behind the scenes at some of his classic performance pieces. The New York Observer calls the film "an upbeat summary of decades of mischief" and "an intimate portrait of an earnest man earnestly engaged in the business of tomfoolery."

**Joey Skaggs took the time to talk to We Are Movie Geeks about ART OF THE PRANK.**

*Interview conducted by Tom Stockman October 26th, 2016*



**Tom Stockman: Hello Joey, Where are you calling from?**

**Joey Skaggs:** I'm currently in Italy. We've been traveling all around. We been to Transylvania in Romania and Spain. We've had fun traveling all over showing the film.

**TS: The director of the film, Andrea Marini, is from Italy.**

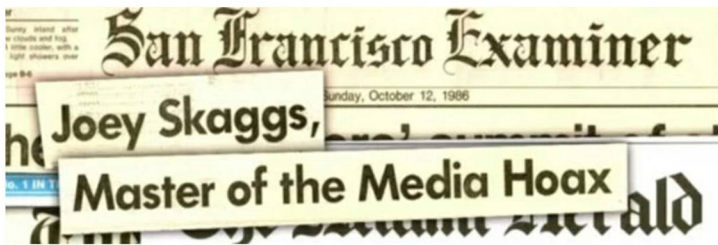
**JS:** Yes, he's not here right now with but will be seeing him soon.

**TS: But he'll be with you November 5th for the St. Louis International film Festival. Have you been to St. Louis before.**

**JS:** I have.

**TS: How did an Italian, Andrea Marini, come to direct this film about you?**

**JS:** I had been invited to speak at a couple of universities. One in Rome and one in Milan. When I was in Rome, there was somebody in the audience laughing a lot. As usual, we went out for dinner and drinks afterwards, about 18 people came along, and he was a producer. He said he wanted to do this documentary. He brought Andrea to New York where I was working on something and that's how it began.



**TS: Is this the first documentary that has been made about you?**

**JS:** I've been featured in other shows, but this is the first real documentary, yes.

**TS: What do you think of the documentary? Are you pleased with the way you are portrayed in it?**

**JS:** Well (laughs) it is a documentary., But you know what, I am pleased .

**TS: Are you still taking care of your mother?**

**JS:** Yes, I am. Not much has changed.

**TS: You've made a career out of pranking the news media. How have you used the Internet in your pranks?**

**JS:** I have used the Internet. I did the first sexual virtual reality hoax on the Internet back in 1993. Back when the Internet was pure. If you go to Joey Skaggs.com and type in *Sexonix*, you'll see the whole history of the first Internet hoax. I use the Internet just as everybody else does, as a voyeur. When I put something up there, I see where it goes. I use it to plant seeds of thought, and I use it to coordinate my actions with people from around the world. Skype is great too, with being in different time zones and working with people that I have never physically met. Of course, the Internet has made doing pranks ubiquitous and in my estimation lowered the bar considerably.

**TS: Yes, and there are so many different TV shows now. There's even a prank TV show on Tru-TV.**

**JS:** Yes, I have been approached numerous times to do a show, So I understand how it is.

**TS: Would you be interested in doing a TV show?**

**JS:** On my terms, sure.



**TS: What do you think are the ingredients needed to pull off an effective prank?**

**JS:** A good story, the promise of good visuals, something that has plausibility, something that has a universal truism attached to it. I actually wrote a recipe, which is on JoeySkaggs.com, about catching and cooking journalists. You might enjoy looking at that.

**TS: I did see a couple of articles on your site where you were interviewed, but you've had someone else posing as you.**

**JS:** Yes, I've done that a number of times.

**TS: Have any of your pranks ever landed you in jail?**

**JS:** I've been knocking the status quo and offending people since my Crucifix hoax in 1966. It was a visually provocative statement, and I was attacking an icon. If you were a religious person with a closed mind, you might get offended. And a number of people were. I got busted on that. Then there was the Vietnamese Nativity. I built a life-size Nativity scene that portrayed a Vietnamese village. I constructed it in Central Park. That was provocative as well, so I think it just comes with doing this. I try not to break the law. I don't falsify police reports. I don't exploit people for money. But I do have a criterion for my work; Intent, content, technique and magic that makes the piece live. But I'm very careful because I know there are consequences to actions and I don't want to harm anyone.

**TS: Do you consult with an attorney before you start a prank?**

**JS:** No because if I did that, I would be warned not to do anything (laughs) but no, I'm not dependent upon legal advice, I follow common sense.



**TS: You say in the film “epiphanies come in weird places at weird times”. What’s the weirdest place and the time you have had an epiphany or idea?**

**JS:** Commonly when I'm taking a shower or a shit (laughs). But it's just circumstantial, if you're in a situation where you're exposed to a certain aspect of our culture or society that's ridiculous or hypocritical. So, inspiration comes in weird places at weird times.

**TS: Do you have a favorite of your pranks?**

**JS:** I don't. I just move onto the next one. Fortunately, a lot of them have a life of their own, which keeps them living. My work is done in three stages; the *hook* when I come up with an idea, the *line* when I follow where it goes and who does what with it, then the *sinker* where I do the exposé and see what happens with the media when they become aware that I have hooked them. My work is not about "Ha ha, I got you" it's about "A ha, what did you believe?". It's not Ha ha, it's A ha.

**TS: Have any of your hoaxes just sort of fallen flat, nobody really got it?**

**JS:** Unfortunately, or fortunately maybe, whatever side of the hoax you're on. I've succeeded in accessing the media in everything that I've done. And sometimes repeatedly. I've been on CNN a half dozen times.

**TS: I know, that's amazing. It's in the documentary. Have you ever been on CNN or a show, and they recognize you about halfway through the segment, and say "Hey, you're that prankster guy!" ?**

**JS:** Not really, but once on *Good Morning America* I was on there with a hoax about Joe Bones and the Fat Squad. I had commandos around a refrigerator on a kitchen set they had built. I had a fat client who supposedly had lost all of this weight. My alias was Joe Bones. I like to give myself ridiculous aliases because it ends up being more embarrassing for them. So, I succeeded in doing the show, Then I started getting phone calls from the producers of *Good Morning America* saying that they had been flooded with phone calls saying "that's not Joe Bones, that's Joey Skaggs!" They asked me whether or not it was true. I said "unfortunately for you, it is true!". They said some expletive, then hung up.

**TS: What about all of these props that you have built such as your portable confessional and the crucifix, etc. Have you hung onto all of that stuff?**

**JS:** Most of it yes. Including the White House. I built a White House and put it on the back of a tricycle. It was actually an outhouse. And inside it was a mannequin with a George Bush mask wiping his butt with \$100 bills.

**TS: Why do you find media pranks to be the most effective way for you to make a social commentary?**

**JS:** They say "the madman communicates with himself, the poet with a loved one, and the artist with the world". I'm an artist, and the biggest medium for me to communicate is the media, so I use the media the way other artists would use a canvas. I'm able to reach a whole lot of people about issues that I think are relevant and important and I can do it rather inexpensively and of course very quickly. If I were to make a film, it would take a long time. I would have to raise the money. If I were to write a book, I would have to take the time to write the book and find a publisher. To do a theatrical, satirical performance, relatively speaking, is immediate.





**TS: The name of the film is the ART OF THE PRANK, so you really do look at your pranks as works of art then don't you?**

**JS:** I do and I believe that there is artistry to it. It's like doing a film or a theater piece. You have to conceive, write, produce, direct. So it has artistic merit and encompasses many forms of art from creative writing to photography to acting and more. I combine advertising and public relations techniques with my art to produce my work.

**TS: Have you enjoyed traveling around with this documentary and attending film festivals?**

**JS:** I have. I enjoy seeing lights go on and I love hearing people's comments. I enjoy the fact that I can teach people about media literacy and possibly get them to look at things in a different way, and to realize that they were all sold a service, a product, or a philosophy and the media is a conduit for that. People who have an agenda to take your money, or make you go to war and die for something foolish, or whatever it is. I think that my basic premise is exposing people to how the media works and having them question authority in all shapes and forms. Ultimately, my work is "who are you, and what do you believe in, and how did you come to your beliefs? Do you ever question the source of your beliefs"

**TS: What's next for Joey Skaggs?**

**JS:** I wish I could tell you! (Laughs).

**TS: I guess not with the nature of your business. Good luck at the St. Louis film Festival. I'm sure you'll have a good time and I'm sure ART OF THE PRANK will be well-received.**

**JS:** Thanks a lot, I'm looking forward to coming to St. Louis

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