

good folk, for gold or hire, but help me to the crier ...

The Crier Crie de Coeur Cryouts

THE CHELSEA CRIER

ARTISTS ACCORDING TO THE NEW YORK ARTS PROGRAM

Satire Bites / Brianna Scharfenberg

The Crier Caveh Zahedi / Kyle Roberts »

Some artists choose paint and canvas, some installations, some clay or metal—but for the electric, improvisational satirist, Joey Skaggs, he says, “The media is my medium.” For over forty years, Skaggs has manipulated the media using hoaxed TV networks, newspapers, magazines, and radio stations, duping the likes of CNN, Goodmorning America, Entertainment Tonight, The Washington Post, and The New York Times . From starting a fake dog brothel to posing in thirty-second infomercials as a Psychic Attorney to taking on the persona of entomologist, Josef Gregor, and proclaiming a new “miracle pill” extracted from cockroaches, Skaggs has bamboozled media outlets and viewers with the outlandish, applying satire to art in order to expose societal delusion and make political statements.



The sixty-eight-year-old rabble-rouser is the type who prefers a hug over a handshake, derives his cheery energy from always having a trick up his sleeve, and sports a black leather jacket beneath a large, Dumbledore-esque beard and wire-rimmed glasses. Born in 1945 to a WWII veteran father and a teenage, conservative mother, he was a stark contrast to his fundamentalist, Christian upbringing, and was kicked out of the house in his teens. He went on to attend a high school for art and design and earned a BFA in Visual Arts, but became frustrated with the lack of immediacy for success and the “hype and hypocrisy of the art world.” So he took his art to the streets.

In 1966, Skaggs made his media debut with “The Crucifixion Performance.”



“I dragged it [the crucifix] out to Thompson Square Park on the Lower East Side to protest man’s inhumanity to man, the War in Vietnam, and the hypocrisy of the church, and it was a confrontational, iconoclastic, in-your-face figure and a statement. I was harassed by the police, and the piece was smashed.” Ironically, or

perhaps fittingly, he received sanctuary from a local minister, but was eventually “busted” and sent to court. Despite the assault and legal ramifications, he succeeded in gaining publicity for his art and began his life-long relationship with the press.

However, it wasn’t until 1976 that he expanded his repertoire to pranks and hoaxes. The goal of his early work using “direct confrontational, theatrical, gorilla performances” was

The Chelsea Crier

Here at the New York Arts Program, we had the notion of putting together a journal that would feature some of the places, things and people we’re interested in ... and so, world, harken to the Crier!

NYAP

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to gain publicity in order to reach a wider audience. But he soon realized the interpretation of his messages was not as intended: “The media has the power to mold opinions, and I watched how they twisted, the content, meaning of the message that I was hoping to put out there, to suite their own agendas. I was reading the coverage of what I did, and it was so off-the-mark, it infuriated me.”

He began his hoaxer career with “Cathouse for Dogs,” a canine brothel where for fifty dollars an owner could take his or her dog to be “sexually gratified,” as he stated in a press release at the time. Sex sold, and “Cathouse for Dogs” was featured in the **Soho Weekly News**, **Oui Magazine**, and **Moneysworth Magazine**. He says in comment to the “Cathouse for Dogs” and launch of his trickster career that, “I use all of my artistic abilities and I incorporate them with public relations and advertising techniques, creating my performance art.” No longer did he wait for the media to come to him, instead he wanted to “attract the media, trap the media, and embarrass the media.”

Skaggs revels in the improvisational aspect of his work, the unpredictability of people and the media. He has seen his art reveal surprising layers of culture and human nature and take unexpected turns. “I can’t control what happens. It’s not like being in control in front of a canvas . . . with this you never know where it’s gonna go. And that’s exciting.” His art has been outrageous and orchidaceous, with pieces such as the “Fifty-Foot Brassiere,” but his work is guided by political argument and a pursuit for justice. He has been threatened, beaten, arrested, subpoenaed, trivialized, and praised, but whether an opinion is favorable or not on Skaggs, the success of his endeavors speaks for itself. And his art career and life has been rich to say the least.

A documentary called “**Art of the Prank**” about Joey’s life will be coming out soon.

For more information on his life visit JoeySkaggs.com

And as always, keep an eye out for Skaggs’s shenanigans, there’s one in the works now, but I won’t ruin the fun by spoiling it.

Sources:

Articles related to Joey Skaggs, [The New York Times](#)

[Joey Skaggs Archive](#)

Brianna Scharfenberg is TK

Dec 6, 2013 2:13 PM