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REEL PSYCHED

The Art of the Prank Unmasks Joey Skaggs, Father of Fake News



In *Art of the Prank*, set to release on October 9, longtime New Yorker and media hoaxer Joey Skaggs is gearing up to pull off the largest and most demanding hoax of his career.

Long before “fake news” or “alternative facts” had become a part of the public consciousness, Skaggs put together elaborate hoaxes to feed the media, like claiming to run a brothel for dogs or his portable confessional booth, to satirize the media’s gullibility and explore the media’s role in shaping and molding public opinion.



“I decided to have a relationship with the news media where they were not just reporting about me but I was reporting about them as well,” Skaggs says in the film. “Their irresponsibility, their gullibility, their prejudices.”

His brothel for dogs prank was so compelling that a local ABC News report about it **won an Emmy Award**. Good Morning America and The Washington Post are other major outlets have been fallen for Skaggs’ work.

Skaggs grew up in Brooklyn, dreaming of one day making it as an artist in Manhattan. After graduating from the High School of Art and Design and settling in the Washington Square Park area, Skaggs decided he had little patience for trying to get his work into galleries and shifted his focus toward conceptual art pieces that poked fun at the society and the media.

Notable pranks included The Solomon Project, where he pretended to be a fake computer scientist creating software that would try to sentence criminals. Fooling CNN, Skaggs appeared on national television to discuss the software, which he claimed determined OJ Simpson had been guilty of murder.

Like performance artist, Zardulu, who **staged the “Pizza Rat” hoax**, Skaggs utilizes journalists to unwittingly share his hoaxes as fact. But while Zardulu is hesitant to reveal what she calls her “myths” to the public, Skaggs considers the reveal to be a crucial part of each hoax he conducts.

“First stage is the hook, secondly is the line and thirdly is the sinker – when I feel it’s gone far enough and I reveal the truth,” Skaggs says. The hoax has to be revealed to make his point.

Director Andrea Marini first saw a short video of Skaggs in 2012 and immediately saw the potential for a documentary. Upon setting up a meeting with the artist, Marini was provided hours of archival footage, comprising a greatest hits of Skaggs’s career of pranking.

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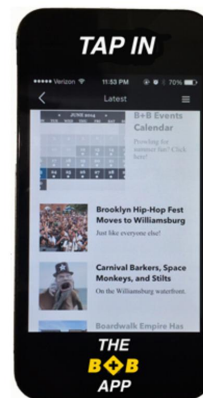
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Joey Skaggs in *Art of the Prank*, Relight Films

Art of the Prank came together following roughly two years of filming and a year and a half of editing and post-production, Marini said. During the filming, Skaggs begins work on his newest hoax: creating a fake short documentary about the use of genetically-modified organisms in Hawaii, titled "Pandora's Hope."

"It eventually became a meta-meta-film," Marini said. "His film is in my film and his film is revealed as a hoax in my film."

The underlying theme of Skaggs's work: be skeptical and don't believe everything you see. That become particularly timely in the aftermath of the 2016 US election, during which fake news sites and Twitter bots became vehicles for the spread of misinformation, Marini said.

"All of a sudden the film becomes very thematic and contemporary," he said. "Fake new has been constantly there. It has been happening for decades but now we have a name for it."

The film will be released to iTunes, Amazon, Google Play and other services on October 9.

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