

CONTRIBUTOR

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Artist, Activist, Media Critic

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Dr. Josef Gregor (a.k.a. Joey Skaggs), entomologist, in Skaggs' 'Metamorphosis Roach Cure' hoax

JOEY SKAGGS ARCHIVE

As an artist, I discovered in the 1960s that I could use the mass media as a vehicle to make social and political commentary on a broad scale. So, for the last 50+ years, I've used the media as my medium as a painter uses a canvas. From my earliest performance pieces (a.k.a. media hoaxes), the [Hippie Bus Tour to Queens](#), followed by the [Cathouse for Dogs](#) and the [Celebrity Sperm Bank](#), I found that by creating plausible, but totally fictitious stories, played out in real life, I could hook the media into reporting them as fact.

The key to success has always been a salacious, sensational or ironic hook with a great visual that is just irresistible to reporters on tight deadlines. There was [Portofess](#), a portable confessional booth I put on the back of a tricycle and pedaled to the Democratic National Convention to hear the confessions of politicians; and [Comacocoon](#), an anesthesia-induced virtual vacation that would let you avoid airports and lost luggage; and, of course, [Hair Today, Ltd.](#), an organization that was offering full scalp transplants to balding men.

These and many of my other satirical hoaxes have been reported as fact around the world. But, to me, the most important part has always been the exposé, revealing the truth so I could explain my intent. I want the world to see, first hand, that they are constantly, either by carelessness or by design, being lied to by the very media they trust to bring them the truth.

This is why I'm pleased that [Art of the Prank](#), Andrea Marini's feature documentary about my work, is now [available on Video on Demand](#) and for [community screenings](#). In case you missed the exposés about the [Solomon Project](#), which purportedly provided equal justice to all through a series of super computers; or [Maqdananda](#), the psychic attorney who could tell you whether to sue or settle, whether you'd win or lose; or the [Fat Squad](#), an organization created to help wipe out fat, which was featured on David Hartman's *Good Morning America*, now's your chance to find out the truth! The message I believe is relevant and timely: Don't believe everything you see, read and hear!

Watch the movie trailer here:



The below exclusive clip from *Art of the Prank* is about my [Metamorphosis Roach Cure](#) hoax. It starts with me on WNBC's *Live at Five* with Jack Cafferty and Sue Simmons. I was sporting a Fu Manchu mustache, dressed preposterously in a white suit with a Panama hat and mirrored sunglasses. I had petri dishes with live cockroaches in my pockets and a portable cassette player with a taped version of *La Cucaracha*.

I was invited to be on WNBC's *Live at Five* because I, as Dr. Josef Gregor, an entomologist with a degree from a South American university, had just announced an extraordinary discovery. I claimed I had created a super strain of cockroaches, and that by extracting their hormones I had created a cockroach vitamin pill that could cure everything from acne to anemia to menstrual cramps and could even make one invulnerable to nuclear radiation.



In fact, I had pulled off this hoax with the participation of a real entomologist from the Museum of Natural History as my "assistant," some friends, and my students at the School of Visual Arts, where I was teaching Media Communications and where I had the full blessing of the administration. I thought it was far more effective to show my students how the media really works rather than talk about it in a classroom.

When I, as Dr. Gregor, called a press conference, numerous reporters showed up including one from the UPI wire service. His article went out to hundreds of newspapers across the country and led to my appearance on *Live at Five*. *People Magazine* then did the exposé; *The Wall Street Journal* weighed in; and Phil Donahue invited me onto the *Today Show* to talk about media irresponsibility.



When a journalist reached out to UPI to ask how they could have fallen for this obvious hoax, Donald Reed, UPI's managing editor defended the story saying, "It was true at the time." That quote really stayed with me. It exemplifies the mind-set of some of the media then and even now, who just take what's presented to them at face value and fail to dig a little deeper even if the clues are obvious.

This is why I do what I do. I want to show how willing we are to suspend critical analysis for wishful thinking and how we believe things because they support our biased assumptions. That's how fake news gets proliferated. We just perpetuate what we choose to believe in.



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