

DEEP MAGAZINE

DEEP MAGAZINE
UNIVERSITY SQUARE BOX 123
2615 S. KING ST. SUITE 107
HONOLULU, HAWAII

Lecture, Wednesday, July 20, 7:30 pm, UH-Manoa Art Building Auditorium. Info: 956-SUMM.

HONOLULU, APRIL 1994- It's late at night. You're watching CNN Headline News, and noticing that you're watching the same story about brushfires in California for the third time. And then, it's time for a commercial. Oh, another lawyer hawking his services. No, wait, maybe it's one of those 1-900 Psychic Friends hotlines. Actually, it's a little of both: it's an ad for "Maqdananda, Psychic Attorney(?)"

"Why deal with the legal system without knowing the outcome before hand? Let me tell you whether to sue or settle, if you'll win or lose," the voice-over says. Using Tarot, Hypnosis, Channeling, Voodoo, Aura Readings, and the I Ching, and other new-age techniques, Maqdananda promises legal redress for psychic surgery malpractice and psychic injustice. "There is no statute of limitations in the psychic realm, call 1-808-UCA-DADA."

If you picked up the phone, looking to hire this new-age lawyer, you'd find that you were another victim of media satirist Joey Skaggs. Actually, you'd find yourself in good company. Over the past 28 years, hoaxes perpetrated by Skaggs have fooled media institutions like Good Morning America, Geraldo Rivera, and even major newspapers like the New York Times and the Washington Post. Absurd scenarios concocted by Skaggs such as a bordello for dogs, diet commandos for hire who would deter the overweight and weak of will from straying from their diets, and most recently, a Dog Soup company who sent letters to animal shelters offering to buy hapless hounds for a Korean version of Campbell's Soup, have found their ways into the pages and airwaves of America.

What's his point? Besides the good-natured absurdity of his schemes, Skaggs tries to inspire viewers to question the nature of truth in news reportage, as well as issues of morality, sensationalism, and the effects the media have on public opinion and taste.

In the 1990's, we are surrounded by a multitude of ways to absorb information. CNN, network TV news, tabloid news shows (A Current Affair, Hard Copy, etc.), one-name talk shows (Oprah, Donahue, Montel) newspapers, magazines, (and, I suppose you can count Deep too) are all vying for your attention, trying to get a fresh spin on this rapidly changing and crazy world. While news is now available to us in more ways than ever before in the history of human civilization, and from a dizzying array of angles, Skaggs' hoaxes illustrate the many ways that the truth can be stretched, pulled, and even made up and ask us to reconsider our reliance on the media to package and dispense the truth.

Skaggs' latest "story" involved his sending out a letter to over 1,500 animal shelters around the country announcing that his company, Kea So Joo Inc. (translated to "Dog Meat Soup Inc. in Korean) was looking to buy dogs at 10¢ a pound to be consumed by

Asian consumers. Not long after sending his letters out, Skaggs was bombarded by calls and letters. Some were calling to sell dogs (most likely attempts at entrapment, Skaggs theorized). Other calls were from people outraged that American Lassies and Fidos would be on Asian dinner tables, and death threats aimed at the proprietor of the business, and threats to kill other Asians indiscriminately were recorded.

Although many calls were received by Skaggs' answering machine (with an outgoing message spoken by a Korean woman in English and Korean), Skaggs did not speak with or respond to any callers throughout the course of the hoax. Nevertheless, many stories about this so-called company recounted verbatim conversations with a representative of Kea So Joo Inc.

The ASPCA has called Skaggs' Dog Soup prank "racist" and "cruel," but Skaggs responds that his intent was not to belittle Asians or animal rights organizations (though that angle was reported in many articles) but rather to "bring to light issues of cultural bias and intolerance that we as a society perpetuate." "I wanted to expose certain cultural values that we adhere to with a deadly vehemence, such as our biases against other people's customs when they conflict with our own," he says. "Eating dog is an accepted cultural practice for many people around the world....eating beef is abhorrent to certain religious sects who believe cows are sacred, but we don't see many Americans exhibiting sensitivity in this arena!" observed Skaggs.

"Unfortunately, we are all guilty of creating social barriers out of fear, mistrust, misinformation or ignorance. ...We not only force our beliefs on others, but we also attempt to destroy their beliefs and cultures, such as with Native Americans, African Americans, Hawaiians, Hispanics, and Asians. In some cases, we even commit genocide," he says. "We believe that we are right and can dictate the values of others. We try to be the cultural police of the world."

While Skaggs' "performance/conceptual art pieces" are meant to cast a satirical eye on the media, and to illustrate its role in perpetuating stereotypes, hatred bias, and the distortion of the truth, Skaggs also believes that the media can also be "a platform for ideas, a forum for creativity, and a means for fostering understanding and harmony—a means to educate and enlighten."

While you probably never will be able to seek the services of a psychic lawyer or pick up a can of Dog Soup at Foodland, you can see Skaggs lecture entitled "Cultural Jammings: the Fine Art of Media Hoaxing" at the University of Hawaii Art Auditorium on Wednesday, July 20, 7:30 pm as part of the UH-Manoa Summer Session Shunzo Sakamaki Extraordinary Lecture Series. (And that's the truth!)

For more information, call 956-SUMM.