

J.S.G. Boggs

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Sherry Frumkin / Christine Duval Gallery, Santa Monica) He draws money: francs when in Switzerland, dollars in the U.S., pound notes when in England. He doesn't sell his drawings. That's rule number one. Instead he "spends" them. That's rule number two. So far, he's spent about \$ 250,000 worth of Boggs' bills. Now, does that figure refer to the face value of those bills? Or does it refer to how much they're worth? Even the most elementary statement about Boggs' artwork launches an inquiry into the nature of money, monetary transactions, value, art, abstraction, representation and reproduction. Therein lies its seductive power: it's a simple idea with vast and complex implications. Yet, it's accesible. Everyone uses money; everyone talks about it.

It sounds deceptively simple: short on cash --draw a few bills. But there are challenges, including legal problems in both England and the U.S.. And, it's not easy to find someone willing accept a drawing of money rather than real money. Here we go again. What exactly is real money? The gold in Fort Knox? Bills may be "legal tender," but since before WWII they haven't been exchangeable for metal. So, is the paper stuff in our wallets real? What about the electronic blips that represent an account balance, transfers, debits and auto deposits?

It's a defensible position. Bags of precious-metal coins replaced herds of cattle due to convenience. Electronic pulses are handier than hauling bags of bills in armored vehicles, so why not? Then again, as long as we can get what we want, should we care about what counts as real money? Ultimately it comes down to a question of value: the value of moeny; exchange rates; the strength of the dollar; what a dollar's worth; what will it e worth ten years from now.



J.S.G. Boggs, "\$1 FUNback," 1999

Once Boggs has completed a transaction, he keeps mum about it for twenty-four hours, so the person who got the drawing has "time, unbothered, to think about what's just transpired." That's rule number three. After that -- rule number four -- Boggs will sell the receipt and change from the transaction to a collector. Via the receipt, the collector can track down the owner of the Boggs bill and negotiate a deal "so as to complete the work." What, then, is Boggs' artwork? The drawing itself? Boggs' encounters that either do or do not result in a transaction? The transaction? The evidence of the transaction which the collector buys? The collector's trek and negotiations?

Boggs' endeavors explore the dual nature of money. Since it's numeric, there's a level at which it appears absolute. A four dollar and fifty-seven cent purchase with a five dollar bill always results in forty-three cents in change. I always get four quarters for change from a dollar. In our everyday transactions, that's how we operate. Then gas goes up; I no longer get change for my twenty. What has altered, just the price of gas or the value of my twenty, too?

And what about the value of a Boggs bill? A bill that Boggs uses to make a five dollar purchase can be resold for, perhaps, a hundred times that much -- a figure that fluctuates over time. And, once a collector completes the artwork, the value of the whole exceeds the sum of the cost of the parts. So, where did that value come from? Boggs' labor? The effort of the collector? The vicissitudes of the art market?

For the time being, we still covet the thing -- the wad in the wallet, the Boggs bill over participation in the transaction. As computerized transactions push the monetary world further into the realm of abstractions, will Boggs follow suit? Will the Boggs bills of the twentieth century become the Boggs blips in the twenty-first?