

Money Man - a Film Review

by John Hawkinson

From: jhawk@Panix.Com (John Hawkinson)
Subject: REVIEW: MONEY MAN
Reply-To: jhawk@Panix.Com (John Hawkinson)
Organization: PANIX Public Access Unix, NYC
Copyright 1993 John Hawkinson

MONEY MAN (1992, 60 minutes). Directed by Philip Haas. Produced by Philip & Belinda Haas. Camera: Tony Wilson. Editor: Belinda Haas. Music by Philip Johnston. Performed by The Microscopic Scent and Friends. USA. Film released by Milestone Films.

Engagement: January 13 - 26, 1993 at Film Forum 1, 209 West Houston Street, New York, NY 10014. (212) 727-8110.

...MONEY MAN is a documentary film about an artist, J. S. G. Boggs, who draws money. Boggs draws his "notes" (as he calls them) with the same face as regular U.S. currency with his thumbprint on the back, though with a unique device of some sort (such as a different picture or three, and his own signature). He goes around trying to sell his notes to people in exchange for services/goods/whatever.

...Boggs believes that his notes aren't meaningful unless a transaction is completed (i.e., the note is spent). He attempts to convince people (store clerks, restaurant managers, etc.) that his notes are works of art, and that they should be accepted in lieu of real money. In one instance, he pays for a \$90 dinner with a \$100 Boggs note and receives his change back. A few days later, a collector of Boggs' notes attempts to buy it from the restaurant manager for \$200(unsuccessfully).

...Collectors of Boggs work try to obtain both the actual note he used to make a purchase, as well as the change and receipt Boggs received from the purchase, thus owning the complete transaction. Boggs himself saves the change and receipt from each transaction for later sale. In the previous example, the aforementioned collector pays Boggs \$200 for the receipt and change.

...Boggs has some rather unfortunate run-ins with the Secret Service, as they believe that his works of art are counterfeit. In

the movie, Boggs goes to Washington D.C. to attempt to retrieve twelve of his notes which had been confiscated by the Service. Boggs has been arrested in both England and Australia and was acquitted both times (in fact he won a substantial award in a wrongful arrest suit in Australia).

...The film, which is very entertaining, documents a selection of Boggs' escapades, and follows him in his attempts to utilize his notes, as well as in his attempts to fight the Secret Service.

...Perhaps the most fascinating part of this film is the fact that it's all true. Director Philip Haas has created a documentary which seems almost comic, yet paints a realistic and enjoyable picture of a fascinating artist and his own unique brand of art.

...This film deals with an interesting side of the intellectual property issue. After all, in the computer world we here all about whether software or algorithms should be considered intellectual property (and therefore copyrightable). Boggs addresses this issue from another side where he attempts to distinguish between his art form and real currency.

...Unfortunately, real life is not all fun and games. Last month Boggs' apartment in Pittsburgh was raided and about 1200 items were seized (reminds you of Operation SunDevil, doesn't it?). Boggs' next project is to place \$1 million worth of bills into circulation.

...This film was also apparently broadcast on the BBC last week. I urge you to see it as soon as possible, as it closes soon; when I went, there was a post-theater question and answer session with Mr. Haas, which was quite fascinating. MONEY MAN shows a refreshing outlook on the grim world and makes you take a closer look at every bill that passes through your fingers.

John Hawkinson jhawk@panix.com