

Milestone presents:

# Money Man

A Film by Philip Haas



“J. S. G. Boggs is a young artist with a certain flair, a certain panache, a certain *je ne paye pas*.” — Lawrence Weschler, *The New Yorker*

# Money Man

A Methodact Ltd. Production with the participation of Delegation aux Arts Plastiques /Ministère de la Culture, Paris. A film by Philip Haas. Camera: Tony Wilson, A.S.C. Editor: Belinda Haas. Music by Philip Johnston. Performed by The Microscopic Septet and Friends. Produced by Philip Haas and Belinda Haas. Executive producer: Heinz-Peter Schwerfel. Director: Philip Haas. USA. 60 minutes. Color. 1992. 16mm.

*In a darkened room, a man photocopies money — greenbacks, cash. He stamps each bill with the green “Department of Treasury” seal. He adds serial numbers. He signs and then carefully cuts out each note and stacks it in a briefcase — a silver briefcase filled with bills — thousands of them. The man takes his currency to a motorcycle dealership where he selects a Harley. With five \$1,000 bills he pays the cashier ...*

J.S.G. Boggs is an artist whose medium is money. Boggs’ “dollars” have been confiscated as counterfeit by the U.S. Treasury Department. He has been arrested by the Bank of England. The Australian government has expressed that his company is unwanted. Because, for Boggs, his art is not just *making* money. No piece is complete until it is *spent*. *Money Man*, the latest film by filmmaker Philip Haas, is an exploration of the curious and controversial artwork of Boggs, who was profiled in a two-part article by writer Lawrence Weschler in *The New Yorker* in 1987. Boggs explores that most American and yet universal subject — money.

In *Money Man*, Haas films Boggs in the process of making his art — both creating the bills *and* spending them. At a trendy Pittsburgh restaurant, Boggs waits until the check arrives to offer the waiter his home-made version of a \$100 bill. And the restaurateur accepts Boggs’ art-bill because it’s probably worth more than the real thing. The next day, the artist visits a collector and sells him the receipt from the dinner (along with the change) for \$200. Boggs then gives the collector the address of the restaurant. The final stage of the three-part transaction is the very funny meeting between the collector, who would like to buy the Boggs bill to complete the piece, and the wary owner, who now doesn’t want to part with this curious work of art.

In a voice-over, Boggs explains that he doesn’t mind that the final transaction between the collector and the restaurateur never was completed — his goal is to get people thinking and talking about what makes money valuable. With each note that he tries to spend, Boggs asks us to question why one piece of paper (like that “officially recognized” limited-edition engraving, the dollar) has intrinsic value, while a similar piece of art, like a Boggs bill, may or may not. “In God we trust,” indeed?

On another occasion, Boggs’ attempt to spend his “money” is met with incredulity and a hilarious effort to explain to the artist why the store can’t accept a \$500 bill that says “Willy” instead of William McKinley. But Boggs takes on the most humorless foe of all when he travels to Washington to convince the U. S. Treasury to release his confiscated bills. It’s a David and Goliath story for the ages. In the nation’s capitol, Boggs begins the quixotic quest for his bills. He tries to call, and then visit, and then call again the elusive bureaucrats at the Treasury Department who, Boggs believes, are holding his artwork.

While he is waiting to hear back from the government, the artist visits the Treasury Department's gallery of paintings of currency (and wonders aloud why *these* money artworks are enshrined in a gallery while *his* are impounded) and tries, in vain, to buy stamps with one of his creations. At the post office, Boggs goes head to head with a clerk who tries to explain the concept of U. S. Currency to him and finally, exasperated, asks "where are you from?" Boggs explains that he never wants people to feel stupid or excluded by his art. Everyone understands money and everyone can be invited to join him in questioning its meaning and value.

Boggs also pays a visit the Bureau of Engraving where he talks with a master engraver completing work on a ten-dollar bill. Does the engraver think he is making art? Does he consider himself a fine artist? Boggs asks. He replies that he does consider his work art. Boggs suggests that these engravings (U. S. Currency) can be considered numbered limited-edition prints. The engraver agrees — the largest limited edition ever made. When Boggs asks if *he* would be able to make such an engraving, the other man hands him an engraving tool and suggests that he practice. When next we see Boggs, he is hard at work on an original ten-dollar bill and he is using the tool to incise the fine lines of his artwork.

At last, Boggs is able to schedule a meeting with a representative of the Treasury Department. He arrives for the meeting with Roxanne Roberts, a reporter for the *Washington Post* and the entire film crew. He is greeted warmly by a member of the public relations department who agrees to speak to Boggs and Roberts... *off camera*. A hidden microphone records their conversation. The PR rep equivocates, offers sympathy and asks Boggs if Campbell Soup ever sued Andy Warhol for using their can in his work. After a while, Boggs gets fed up and angrily demands an explanation for the impounding of his notes and their speedy return to him. He has to settle for the department's promise that they'll get back to him. As they walk into the sunset, reporter Roberts explains to Boggs that to the Treasury Department, he is nothing more than a publicity glitch, a mere gnat.

Eventually, Boggs learns that his artworks are en route from the branch office where they were seized, to the main Treasury Department in Washington. He checks out of his hotel — paying with original artworks — and heads back to Pittsburgh, where he hopes, in vain, his bills will be awaiting him. Eventually Boggs learns that the Treasury Department has decided not to press charges but to keep the impounded art. While he failed to get the government to return his work or acknowledge his right to make his art, Boggs ends on a philosophical note. He did get a number of people to consider his work and its subversive implications and he did complete one major art piece . . .

Framed on the wall of the lobby of the Washington hotel where Boggs stayed is a white terry cloth bathrobe, a hotel receipt, several Boggs bills and, of course, the change.

#### **Director: Philip Haas**

Philip Haas has made films with some of the most acclaimed artists working today including David Hockney, Boyd Webb, Richard Long and Gilbert & George. In 1989, with his new series, "Magicians of the Earth," Haas turned his attention to native artists working in traditional forms. These four films were photographed entirely on location in Australia, Madagascar, Papua New Guinea, Senegal and Benin and feature scores composed by David Byrne and Gambian musician Foday Musa Suso. The films use spare narration, letting the audience discover for itself the magical transformation of the raw materials into wondrous art. By finding the "theatricality" in each artist, Haas constantly surprises and delights the viewer — his films are always fresh, unexpected and visually thrilling.

Philip Haas was educated at the Overseas School of Rome and Harvard University. His films have played in major international film festivals including Montreal, San Francisco, Sydney, Toronto and Vancouver and New Directors/New Films at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. His films have also played theatrically and non-theatrically throughout much of the world. In addition, Haas has been honored with retrospectives of his films at Lincoln Center's Walter Reade Theater; the Tate Gallery, London; the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; the Seattle Art Museum; the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC; the Boston Museum of Fine Arts; and the Center of Contemporary Arts in St. Louis. In 1992 Haas was awarded a fellowship by the Guggenheim Foundation. Since then he has gone on to fame as the director of *The Music of Chance*, *Angels and Insects*, *Up at the Villa* and *The Lathe of Heaven*.

### PHILIP HAAS FILMOGRAPHY

1981 *The World of Gilbert & George*  
1984 *Scenes and Songs from Boyd Webb*  
1988 *A Day on the Grand Canal with the Emperor of China*  
1988 *Stones and Flies: Richard Long in the Sahara*  
1989 *The Giant Woman and the Lightning Man*  
1990 *A Young Man's Dream and a Woman's Secret*  
1990 *Seni's Children*  
1990 *Kings of the Water*  
1992 *The Singing Sculpture*  
1992 *Money Man*  
1993 *The Music of Chance*  
1995 *Angels and Insects*  
1997 *Blood Oranges*  
2000 *Up at the Villa*  
2002 *The Lathe of Heaven*

### Milestone Film & Video

With more than 14 years experience in art-house film distribution, Milestone has earned an unparalleled reputation for releasing classic cinema masterpieces, new foreign films, groundbreaking documentaries and American independent features. Thanks to the company's rediscovery, restoration and release of such important films as Mikhail Kalatozov's award-winning *I am Cuba*, Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Mamma Roma*, and Alfred Hitchcock's *Bon Voyage* and *Aventure Malgache*, the company now occupies an honored position as one of the most influential independent distributors in the industry. In 1999, the *L.A. Weekly* chose Milestone as "Indie Distributor of the Year."

Amy Heller and Dennis Doros started Milestone in 1990 to bring out the best films of yesterday and today. The company has released such remarkable new films as Manoel de Oliveira's *I'm Going Home*, Bae Yong-kyun's *Why Has Bodhi-Dharma Left for the East?*, Hirokazu Kore-eda's *Maborosi*, and Takeshi Kitano's *Fireworks (Hana-Bi)*, and now, Tareque and Catherine Masud's *The Clay Bird*.

Milestone's re-releases have included restored versions of Luchino Visconti's *Rocco and His Brothers*, F.W. Murnau's *Tabu*, Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack's *Grass* and *Chang*, Henri-Georges Clouzot's *The Mystery of Picasso*, and Marcel Ophuls's *The Sorrow and the Pity*. Milestone is also working with the Mary Pickford Foundation on a long-term project to preserve, re-score and release the best films of the legendary silent screen star. In recent years, Milestone has re-released

beautifully restored versions of Frank Hurley's *South: Ernest Shackleton and the Endurance Expedition*, Kevin Brownlow's *It Happened Here* and *Winstanley*, Lotte Reiniger's animation masterpiece, *The Adventures of Prince Achmed*, Michael Powell's *The Edge of the World* (a Martin Scorsese presentation), Jane Campion's *Two Friends*, Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Wide Blue Road* (a Jonathan Demme and Dustin Hoffman presentation), Conrad Rooks' *Siddhartha* and Rolando Klein's *Chac*. Milestone's newest classic film, E.A. Dupont's *Piccadilly* — starring the bewitching Anna May Wong in one of her finest roles — played at the 2003 New York Film Festival and is opening theatrically nationwide in 2004.

For 2004, Milestone will also be releasing *The Big Animal*, Jerzy Stuhr's wonderful film parable (based on a story by Krzysztof Kieslowski).

Milestone has fruitful collaborations with some of the world's major archives, including the British Film Institute, UCLA Film & Television Archive, George Eastman House, Museum of Modern Art, Library of Congress, Nederlands Filmmuseum and the Norsk Filminstitut. In 2000 Milestone's 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Retrospective was shown in venues nationwide and Milestone donated revenues from these screenings to four major archives in the United States and England to help restore films that might otherwise be lost.

In 2003, Milestone released an important series of great silent restorations including the horror classic *The Phantom of the Opera*; an early neorealist adaptation of Emile Zola's *La Terre*; and an historical epic of Polish independence, *The Chess Player*. Other video highlights for the year included Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle and Buster Keaton's *The Cook & Other Treasures*, and three incredible animation releases: *Cut-Up: The Films of Grant Munro*, *Norman McLaren: The Collector's Edition*; and *Winsor McCay: The Master Edition*.

In 1995 Milestone received a Special Archival Award from the National Society of Film Critics for its restoration and release of *I am Cuba*. Eight of the company's films — Charles Burnett's *Killer of Sheep* (to be released in 2004), F.W. Murnau's *Tabu*, Edward S. Curtis's *In the Land of the War Canoes*, Mary Pickford's *Poor Little Rich Girl*, Lon Chaney's *The Phantom of the Opera*, Clara Bow's *It*, Winsor McCay's *Gertie the Dinosaur*, and Merian C. Cooper, Ernest B. Schoedsack and Marguerite Harrison's *Grass* — are listed on the Library of Congress's National Film Registry. On January 2, 2004, the National Society of Film Critics awarded Milestone Film & Video their prestigious Film Heritage award for "its theatrical and DVD presentations of Michael Powell's *The Edge of the World*, E.A. Dupont's *Piccadilly*, André Antoine's *La Terre*, Rupert Julian's *Phantom of the Opera*, and *Mad Love: The Films of Evgeni Bauer*."

Cindi Rowell, director of acquisitions, has been with Milestone since 1999. In 2003 Nadja Tennstedt joined the company as director of international sales.

*"Since its birth the Milestone Film & Video Co. has steadily become the industry's foremost boutique distributor of classic and art films — and probably the only distributor in America whose name is actually a guarantee of some quality."*

— William Arnold, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*