

Film purloined paintings, artist's \$1 million suit says

BY MARC DAVIS
STAFF WRITER

NORFOLK — Like most moviegoers, artist Louis Jones was blown away by the grand, ornate scenes in Robin Williams' recent movie, "What Dreams May Come."

Unlike most moviegoers, Jones left the Columbus Movies theater in Virginia Beach aghast by what he saw — majestic visions of heaven that looked a lot like paintings Jones created a few years earlier.

"It was one of the biggest shocks of my life," Jones recalled.

This week, Jones, one of Hampton Roads' best-known artists, sued the film's producer and distributor for \$1 million, claiming copyright infringement.

Jones, 46, filed suit Monday in Norfolk's federal court against Polygram Filmed Entertainment Distribution Inc. and Interscope Communications Inc.

Jones believes that the movie's producers saw his paintings on a best-selling book dealing with some of the same themes as the film — love, marriage and the afterlife — then copied or used the paintings in the film.

"You'll see, if you look closely, in some shots it's an absolute replica," said Jones' attorney, Martin E. Silfen.

Publicists and a lawyer for Polydor and Interscope could not be reached for comment Tuesday. They did not return repeated phone calls.

At issue are two paintings that Jones created in 1994 and 1996 called *The Lake* and *The Lake II*.

The first painting depicts a remote country scene — a lake surrounded by green hills and snow-covered mountains. A waterfall flows in the background. A lone figure stands on a rocky ledge in the foreground, overlooking the lake.

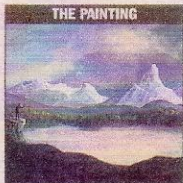
That painting appears on the cover of the best-selling nonfiction book "Conversations With God, An Uncommon Dialogue, Book 1." The book was first printed by Hampton Roads Publishing Co. in 1995, sold

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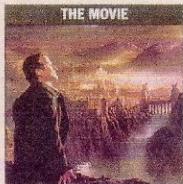


TING-LI WANG/TN Virginia Post

Hampton Roads artist Louis Jones has sued for \$1 million because he says his paintings were used or copied in the film "What Dreams May Come."



Jones' painting "The Lake" appeared on the cover of the best-selling nonfiction book "Conversations With God, An Uncommon Dialogue, Book 1."



In "What Dreams May Come," Robin Williams' wife is working on a painting similar to Jones' work. Jones says the book's author is a friend of the movie's producer.

500 1994 Year No. 5

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Painting: Movie makers deny using artist's work

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100,000 copies, then was sold to national publisher G.P. Putnam's Sons. It has since sold about 2 million copies in the United States. More than 8 million have been printed worldwide.

The second painting, darker than the first, depicts the shadowy figure of a man diving into the lake from the ledge. It appears on the cover of the book's sequel, "Conversations With God, Book 2," which has sold about 300,000 copies to date.

It is no coincidence, Jones believes, that the books' author, Neale Donald Walsch, is a friend of the movie's producer, Barnet Bain. In fact, Jones said, Walsch was invited to an advance screen-

ing of the movie, and Walsch's review of the film is included on the movie's Internet home page.

"I would like to get credit for my work, it's just that simple," Jones said.

The paintings are not just incidental to the movie. They are a key part of the story.

In the movie, Robin Williams plays a man who dies and goes to heaven. His wife is an artist working on a painting similar to Jones' — a lake surrounded by snow-capped mountains, a waterfall and a figure on a ledge.

Williams realizes that heaven is a scene from his wife's painting of the lake and the mountains. At one dramatic point in the movie, Williams dives from a high ledge on the mountain, just like the shad-

owy figure in Jones' second painting.

Jones is a big Robin Williams fan, so when the movie opened last month, Jones saw it on opening day. He was stunned. A few days later, he wrote to Polygram.

"I am writing in response to the hundreds of calls and letters I have received congratulating me on my images appearing in your movie 'What Dreams May Come,'" Jones wrote on Oct. 14. "I really need an answer for my fans and supporters as to why I have no credit in this movie."

Jones wrote that he admired the movie and "the purity of spirit" that created it.

"Please note that this letter is from me, not my lawyer," Jones wrote. "I am not contacting the

media about this copyright infringement, but look to you to do the right thing."

Jones said he simply wanted credit in the movie.

Instead, a lawyer for Interscope replied that there was no copyright infringement. He said the paintings in the movie were created by another artist and were inspired by Glacier National Park in Montana.

So Jones sued. He said he was reluctant to do so.

"The last thing I wanted to do was any kind of legal action," Jones said. "I just wanted to get credit for my work. The bottom line is, if they'd asked me, I would have given it to them, just to get a movie credit."