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ED REITER

'Squared Quarter' Satirizes the U.S. Economy

Bad economic conditions tend to inspire satirical numismatic issues — as when the Hard Times tokens appeared in this country in the late 1830's and early 1840's. Now, the downbeat state of the current United States economy has helped provide the impetus for a new satirical piece: A pseudo-coin described by its creator, New York artist Andor Orand, as the "Squared Quarter."

In simplest terms, Mr. Orand has indeed squared a quarter. His "coin" is a square silver piece which incorporates the basic design of the Washington quarter — although in distorted form. In this respect it suggests that the nation's economy is in sorry shape. However, there is much more symbolism to this piece than meets the eye.

"Squaring the circle is the image used to describe the predicament of Reaganomics by liberal and conservative commentators alike," Mr. Orand observes. "The Squared Quarter is a coined representation of this dilemma: supply-side policy which stimulates growth, wedded to monetarist policy which stifles it."

The pseudo-coin is dated 1984 — and this, too, has significance. In fact, it is meaningful on three different levels, according to Mr. Orand. First, it is the year of the next presidential election. Second, it's the year in which President Ronald Reagan once pledged he would balance the federal budget. And third, of course, it's the title of the famed satirical novel by George Orwell.

The notion of producing such a piece first occurred to Mr. Orand in 1972 when he put together a 10-minute art film dealing with the relationship between time and money. It struck him that time and money are analogous to the circle and the square — the abstract and the concrete — in human events. Accordingly, he designed a rather rudimentary "squared quarter" by copying the features of the Washington quarter on a piece of rubber, stretching the rubber into a square, then gluing this onto a piece of plastic.

Later, he got the further idea of using this type of "money" as a means of making a statement on eco-



Distorted version of quarter was made by squaring the normal circular design.

nomie policy. And two years ago, he decided that the time was ripe to transform this concept into reality.

"The inherent contradictions in our fiscal policy indicated to me that an item of this sort would be meaningful," he explains.

Considerable care went into the production of the piece. Mr. Orand has had an extensive background not only in art but also in technology. He drew upon this knowledge to have his Squared Quarter "designed" by computer.

Two methods were used, he explains.

For the obverse, artist Manfred Mohr devised a computer program which approximated the circle to the square by equalizing the surface area of both. This caused distortions in the shape of George Washington's head and the symmetry of the inscriptions, but these were precisely the sort of effects that Mr. Orand was seeking.

For the reverse, Bill Kinsinger, a New York-based architect and industrial designer, used a different approach. He drew a square around a circle with the circle touching the midpoint of each side. Then he projected the points of the circle's image onto the square, thus pulling the circle toward the corners of the square. This, too, distorted the elements, but in a more uniform manner.

The drawings for both sides were given to sculptor Harvey Citron, who then constructed 8 x 8-inch plaster models. Finally, Medallion Art Company of Danbury, Conn., produced

dies and struck the finished pieces.

Unique tooling had to be developed, Mr. Orand points out, because of the special problems involved in the production of square tokens or medals — especially when, as in this case, their edges are reeded. Normally, he notes, square numismatic items have been stamped, rather than struck, but these are die-struck pieces of obvious quality.

The Squared Quarter is available in two versions, both of them pure silver. A 1/4-ounce variety is priced at \$37, and a 1/2-ounce variety at \$47. For further information, write to Square Deal Productions, Inc., P.O. Box 462, New York, N.Y. 10013. Postage and insurance are included in these prices.

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