

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**The Museum of Modern Art****EXHIBITION EXPLORES PSEUDOSCIENCE IN ART*****Useless Science*****March 30–September 19, 2000****Fourth Floor**

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In the atomic age following World War II, interest in the absurd as a philosophical, literary, and artistic concept dovetailed with the birth of the space program and the popularization of science fiction to create a critical mass of visual art that speculated on the implications of scientific achievement. A case in point was the College of 'Pataphysics, a pseudoacademic institution founded in Paris in 1948 that included artists, writers, and intellectuals such as Jean Dubuffet, Marcel Duchamp,

Max Ernst, Eugene Ionesco, Groucho, Harpo, and Chico Marx, and Joan Miró. A term devised by the French author and playwright Alfred Jarry (1873–1907), 'Pataphysics was neither a scientific nor artistic theory, neither a school of thought nor a political position; but in Jarry's concept, it represented the science of imaginary solutions based on arbitrary choice. Over the past 50 years, the College has held symposia and banquets and has published periodicals and limited-edition pamphlets featuring an abundance of research on Jarry and other underappreciated artistic and literary figures. The Museum of Modern Art's Library is a repository of objects related to the College. A section in the exhibition displays these holdings, including art, records, and books created by the College members, as well as works by Jarry and others influential to the group's formation.

Marcel Duchamp's *Rotary Demisphere (Precision Optics)* (1925) is an early example of pure research—research for its own sake and toward no

discernible result—and it set a precedent for kinetic artists. Jean Tinguely's automatons, such as *Hatching Egg* (1958), and the undulating and twitching surfaces of Pol Bury's *1,914 White Points* (1964) and Gianni Colombo's *Pulsating Structuralization* (1959) are examples of a free experimentation with the phenomenon of movement that, like Duchamp's work, emulate scientific inquiry with a sense of the absurd. The scientific phenomenon of movement through space is the starting point for Panamarenko's *Flying Object (Rocket)* (1969). Made of paper and balsa wood, but built, nonetheless, to function, *Flying Object* stands as both a parody of and a paean to the ability of science to perform seemingly impossible feats.

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hearkens back to works by Duchamp, Tinguely, and other masters of useless engineering, while Matthew Barney's project to map the build-up of his own muscle mass, *Hypertrophy (Incline)* (1991), replicates the methods of biological investigation toward absurdly solipsistic ends. Carrying on the tradition of the pseudoscience, these and other contemporary artists adopt the rigorous discipline of the objective recorder, the patience of the specimen collector, or the logic of the master engineer, not for the sake of finding an answer to a particular biological or technological question, but, certain in the notion that there are an infinite number of solutions to every problem, to test the very methods of scientific inquiry itself.

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