EXHIBITION EXPLORES PSEUDOSCIENCE IN ART

Useless Science

March 30–September 19, 2000

Fourth Floor

The rapid development of science and technology is one of the defining factors of the past century. Since World War I, which prompted the rise of new, destructive technology, artists have been inspired to mimic the language and imagery of science in order to create works of art that reveal the irrationality inherent in this most rational of disciplines. Useless Science, on view from March 30 to September 19, 2000, examines this notion of pseudoscience in art, from the first experiments in "precision" optics by Marcel Duchamp, to the pseudoacademic institution of the College of 'Pataphysics, to recent inquiries into endurance and libido by the contemporary artist Matthew Barney. Organized by Laura Hoptman, Assistant Curator, Department of Drawings, and Michael Carter, Senior Library Assistant, Library, Useless Science is part of Making Choices, the second cycle of MoMA2000, which focuses on the years 1920 to 1960.

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.

The spirit of useless science continues to flame in the work of artists who have come of age in the 1990s. Steven Pippin’s anti-record player *Wow & Flutter* (1992),

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.

* * *

SPONSORSHIP

*Making Choices*

is part of *MoMA2000*, which is made possible by The Starr Foundation. Generous support is provided by Agnes Gund and Daniel Shapiro in memory of Louise Reinhardt Smith. The Museum gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the Contemporary Exhibition Fund of The Museum of Modern Art, established with gifts from Lily Auchincloss, Agnes Gund and Daniel Shapiro, and Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder. Additional funding is provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, Jerry I. Speyer and Katherine G. Farley, and by The Contemporary Arts Council and The Junior Associates of The Museum of Modern Art. Education programs accompanying *MoMA2000* are made possible by Paribas. The publication *Making Choices: 1929, 1939, 1948, 1955* is made possible by The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art. The interactive environment of *Making Choices* is supported by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. Web/kiosk content management software is provided by SohoNet.

No. 38

Useless Science

March 30–September 19, 2000

Fourth Floor

The rapid development of science and technology is one of the defining factors of the past century. Since World War I, which prompted the rise of new, destructive technology, artists have been inspired to mimic the language and imagery of science in order to create works of art that reveal the irrationality inherent in this most rational of disciplines. Useless Science, on view from March 30 to September 19, 2000, examines this notion of pseudoscience in art, from the first experiments in "precision" optics by Marcel Duchamp, to the pseudoacademic institution of the College of 'Pataphysics, to recent inquiries into endurance and libido by the contemporary artist Matthew Barney. Organized by Laura Hoptman, Assistant Curator, Department of Drawings, and Michael Carter, Senior Library Assistant, Library, Useless Science is part of Making Choices, the second cycle of MoMA2000, which focuses on the years 1920 to 1960.

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.

The spirit of useless science continues to flame in the work of artists who have come of age in the 1990s. Steven Pippin’s anti-record player Wow & Flutter (1992),

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.

* * *

SPONSORSHIP

* * *

Making Choices

is part of MoMA2000, which is made possible by The Starr Foundation. Generous support is provided by Agnes Gund and Daniel Shapiro in memory of Louise Reinhardt Smith. The Museum gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the Contemporary Exhibition Fund of The Museum of Modern Art, established with gifts from Lily Auchincloss, Agnes Gund and Daniel Shapiro, and Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder. Additional funding is provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, Jerry I. Speyer and Katherine G. Farley, and by The Contemporary Arts Council and The Junior Associates of The Museum of Modern Art. Education programs accompanying MoMA2000 are made possible by Paribas. The publication Making Choices: 1929, 1939, 1948, 1955 is made possible by The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art. The interactive environment of Making Choices is supported by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. Web/kiosk content management software is provided by SohoNet.

No. 38

Useless Science

March 30–September 19, 2000

Fourth Floor

The rapid development of science and technology is one of the defining factors of the past century. Since World War I, which prompted the rise of new, destructive technology, artists have been inspired to mimic the language and imagery of science in order to create works of art that reveal the irrationality inherent in this most rational of disciplines. Useless Science, on view from March 30 to September 19, 2000, examines this notion of pseudoscience in art, from the first experiments in "precision" optics by Marcel Duchamp, to the pseudoacademic institution of the College of ’Pataphysics, to recent inquires into endurance and libido by the contemporary artist Matthew Barney. Organized by Laura Hoptman, Assistant Curator, Department of Drawings, and Michael Carter, Senior Library Assistant, Library, Useless Science is part of Making Choices, the second cycle of MoMA2000, which focuses on the years 1920 to 1960.

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.

The spirit of useless science continues to flame in the work of artists who have come of age in the 1990s. Steven Pippin’s anti-record player *Wow & Flutter* (1992),

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.

* * *

**SPONSORSHIP**

*Making Choices*

is part of **MoMA2000**, which is made possible by The Starr Foundation. Generous support is provided by Agnes Gund and Daniel Shapiro in memory of Louise Reinhardt Smith. The Museum gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the Contemporary Exhibition Fund of The Museum of Modern Art, established with gifts from Lily Auchincloss, Agnes Gund and Daniel Shapiro, and Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder. Additional funding is provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, Jerry I. Speyer and Katherine G. Farley, and by The Contemporary Arts Council and The Junior Associates of The Museum of Modern Art. Education programs accompanying **MoMA2000** are made possible by Paribas. The publication **Making Choices: 1929, 1939, 1948, 1955** is made possible by The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art. The interactive environment of **Making Choices** is supported by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. Web/kiosk content management software is provided by
The rapid development of science and technology is one of the defining factors of the past century. Since World War I, which prompted the rise of new, destructive technology, artists have been inspired to mimic the language and imagery of science in order to create works of art that reveal the irrationality inherent in this most rational of disciplines. *Useless Science*, on view from March 30 to September 19, 2000, examines this notion of pseudoscience in art, from the first experiments in "precision" optics by Marcel Duchamp, to the pseudoacademic institution of the College of ‘Pataphysics, to recent inquires into endurance and libido by the contemporary artist Matthew Barney. Organized by Laura Hoptman, Assistant Curator, Department of Drawings, and Michael Carter, Senior Library Assistant, Library, *Useless Science* is part of *Making Choices*, the second cycle of *MoMA2000*, which focuses on the years 1920 to 1960.

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.

The spirit of useless science continues to flame in the work of artists who have come of age in the
1990s. Steven Pippin’s anti-record player *Wow & Flutter* (1992),

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.

* * *

SPONSORSHIP

*Making Choices*

is part of MoMA2000, which is made possible by The Starr Foundation. Generous support is provided
by Agnes Gund and Daniel Shapiro in memory of Louise Reinhardt Smith. The Museum gratefully
acknowledges the assistance of the Contemporary Exhibition Fund of The Museum of Modern Art,
established with gifts from Lily Auchincloss, Agnes Gund and Daniel Shapiro, and Jo Carole and
Ronald S. Lauder. Additional funding is provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, Jerry I.
Speyer and Katherine G. Farley, and by The Contemporary Arts Council and The Junior Associates of
The Museum of Modern Art. Education programs accompanying MoMA2000 are made possible by
Paribas. The publication *Making Choices: 1929, 1939, 1948, 1955* is made possible by The
International Council of The Museum of Modern Art. The interactive environment of *Making Choices*
is supported by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. Web/kiosk content management software is provided by
SohoNet.

No. 38