

SEANKELLY

Pechman, Ali. "Critic's Picks: 'Pataphysics: A Theoretical Exhibition,'" *Artforum*, October 4, 2013.

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

"'Pataphysics: A Theoretical Exhibition'"

SEAN KELLY GALLERY

475 10th avenue

September 13–October 19



The nineteenth-century French poet and playwright [Alfred Jarry](#) defined 'pataphysics as the philosophy of the indefinable—he once called it "the science of imaginary solutions." One wonders what Jarry would have made of [Hennessy Youngman](#), whose at times annoyingly metasatiric "Art Thoughtz" YouTube videos define artmaking as "Make a question, not an answer. Don't say it's solvin' anything." Two of Youngman's videos appear as part of a reading shelf for this exhibition, which includes work by twenty-seven artists and collectives alongside first editions of Jarry's book as well as related biographies and criticism, hinting that this show doesn't intend to provide a serious inquiry into the 'pataphysical in contemporary art (a paradox in itself), so much as to give a 'pataphysical nod to the idea.

[Slavs and Tatars' A Monobrow Manifesto \(Hot/Not\)](#), 2010, a gigantic green balloon labeling a Jesus-like figure as "Hot" and *Sesame Street's* Bert as "Not," has been so absurdly installed that anyone more than six feet tall has to walk around it to enter the gallery. Pieces by [Joseph Beuys](#) and [Marcel Duchamp](#) quickly contextualize the more contemporary work; Duchamp's gilded drain stopper appears (Youngman defines his readymades as "not art"), and his *Rotoreliefs (Optical Disks)*, 1953, echo the

swirling belly of [Ubu Roi](#), the title character of Jarry's famed absurdist play. Drains, erasers, and other systems leading nowhere abound, best summed up downstairs by [Peter Fischli](#) and [David Weiss's](#) *The Way Things Go*, 1987, a thirty-one-minute film of an intricate and explosive Rube Goldberg machine unfaithfully stitched together in editing. But the overall effect is not completely cynical; more earnest magic exists in [Tavares Strachan's](#) *The Problem of One Thing Existing Simultaneously (Corona)*, 2007, an assemblage of tiny pieces of a broken beer bottle, impossibly twinned. Here, laughing seems an equally acceptable response as understanding. [Rodney Graham's](#) *Mini Psycho-Opticon*, 2008, a kinetic sculpture powered by a bicycle, invites the viewer to pedal and spin the dizzying wheels within wheels attached to its front. The harder you try, the more disorienting the experience—it may not get you anywhere, but that's the fun.