

MORE OFTEN THAN ALWAYS/ LESS OFTEN THAN NEVER

There are moments when the world cannot be understood in ways that make sense. For such moments it is sometimes necessary to think of alternate solutions—impossible and impractical and irrational versions of the world in which we live. This is not an attempt to explain the nonsense away, but instead to embrace it as part of what makes us human—what makes the world around us so charged with creative and imaginary possibilities, and indeed what makes the world in many ways so familiar.

More Often Than Always, Less Often Than Never is an attempt to think irrationally about the possibilities of the artistic world. The exhibition is based on selections from an international call to artists to respond to issues of absurdity and impossibility. The question was phrased in two ways—first as a reference to the French playwright Alfred Jarry, the founder of ‘pataphysics—the “science of imaginary solutions”—and second, as a response to the challenges of quantum physics in which uncertainty is increasingly the only thing we know for certain about the physical world.

(1) ALFRED JARRY – Alfred Jarry (1873-1907) was a French playwright and philosopher and the founder of ‘pataphysics—described as “the science of imaginary solutions” and as an examination of “the laws governing exceptions.” Jarry was well known for his eccentricities, living in an apartment with a 5 foot ceiling inside which he rode his bicycle around, and a particular affinity for toothpicks and owls. One of his famous works—*Exploits*

and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, pataphysician—is an absurdist story of a philosopher who sails around the streets of Paris in a sieve, accompanied by a baboon named Bosse-de-Nage. Among Jarry's other written works is another that is particularly special—a manual for how to build a time machine—a text that was written so convincingly that the scientists of Jarry's time took the time to make sure that the instructions in fact were not accurate in their propositions.

(2) QUANTUM PHYSICS – A century later, science has evolved and the artistic imaginary has too. The world of science is no longer a world of the firmly understood and reliable—no more is science subject to the simple parameters of truth and falsity. Instead, now uncertainty is the name of the game: paradoxes and probabilities; multi-dimensional theories of resonance patterns; strings and branes and virtual anti-partner particles. Science is forced to imagine solutions to these problems because none of the questions have immediately or obvious answers—in fact the answers that would seem to make sense, exactly don't. Yet, in an interesting twist, our time is also a time when science and art meet on these imaginary grounds—in both instances seeking imaginary solutions to their respective queries of an uncertain world.

Mathematically, there are ways to understand this state of affairs, despite the fact that it may seem like nonsense. It all has to do with the parameters of probability. Normally everything happens within a general parameter of always and never—rendered mathematically as 1 (always) and 0 (never)—representing the statistical version of that which we know as possible. When we attempt to represent the impossible however, we enter into the world of numbers with probabilities greater than 1 or less than 0—that which happens MORE OFTEN THAN ALWAYS, LESS OFTEN THAN NEVER. These statistical impossibilities are invoked here to represent versions of this story of our world as it can be imaginatively rendered—in whatever ways the artists themselves have created.

The artist **hannah_g**, for instance, proposed to be a story-teller in residence—arriving in Richmond only for the very end of the exhibition, to tell the story of an exhibition she hasn't seen, that includes artists she's never met. **Julie Gendron** and **Emma Hendrix** proposed a simple absurdist gesture

with unpredictable experiential impact—the act of placing a rocking chair next to a clothes dryer—here rendered as a sound installation and a musical score that combines the rocking body with the spinning sounds of the dryer. Fusing the impossible with the futile but ostensibly fertile, **Tetsushi Higashino** grows his own nose hair in a hydroponic dish, feeding and measuring the hair each day while the environment around the transplant itself grows and decays in response. **Gordon Lebrecht**, in a conceptual twist, asks for a pink stripe to be painted around the gallery walls—**Sherman Williams 6583** (*In the Pink*)—disrupting the works of others while strangely unifying the exhibition in philosophical and cosmetic ways. **François Mathieu** builds containers for the capture and sustenance of clouds, and boots that extend and transform the human foot—poetic gestures of impossible rendering given imagined and plausible form in his sculptural works. Bringing an ongoing collaborative project to the mix, **Chikako Maria Mori** and **Boris Nieslony** present a survey of their pataphysical research, framed as an exchange between the secretaries of two professors who may or may not actually exist. More directly, **Arjuna Neuman** builds an escape pod for plants, an attempt to facilitate the upward direction to which all plants seem to aspire by affixing them to a hot air balloon that will lift them to the heavens. And, in similar poetic spirit, **Anne-Marie Proulx** writes letters to women with the same name as her grandmother, now deceased—seeking possible moments of resonance with people who share at least this bit of named history with her own family sentiments.

Our method of selection is also implicated in one such solution. Rather than curate this exhibition from an external or objective position, we wanted to implicate ourselves in the same act we were asking of artists—the process that we also think has something to say about the general state of the world we live in. To this end, we asked Alfred Jarry for input—conducting a series of seances that contributed to the selection of the works, and to the display you witness here. We think of this seance as itself a time machine of sorts—an attempt to invoke Jarry on his own terms of engagement—brought back to the contemporary world in a curatorial gesture of plausible impossibility.

Ted Hiebert and Doug Jarvis
Curators