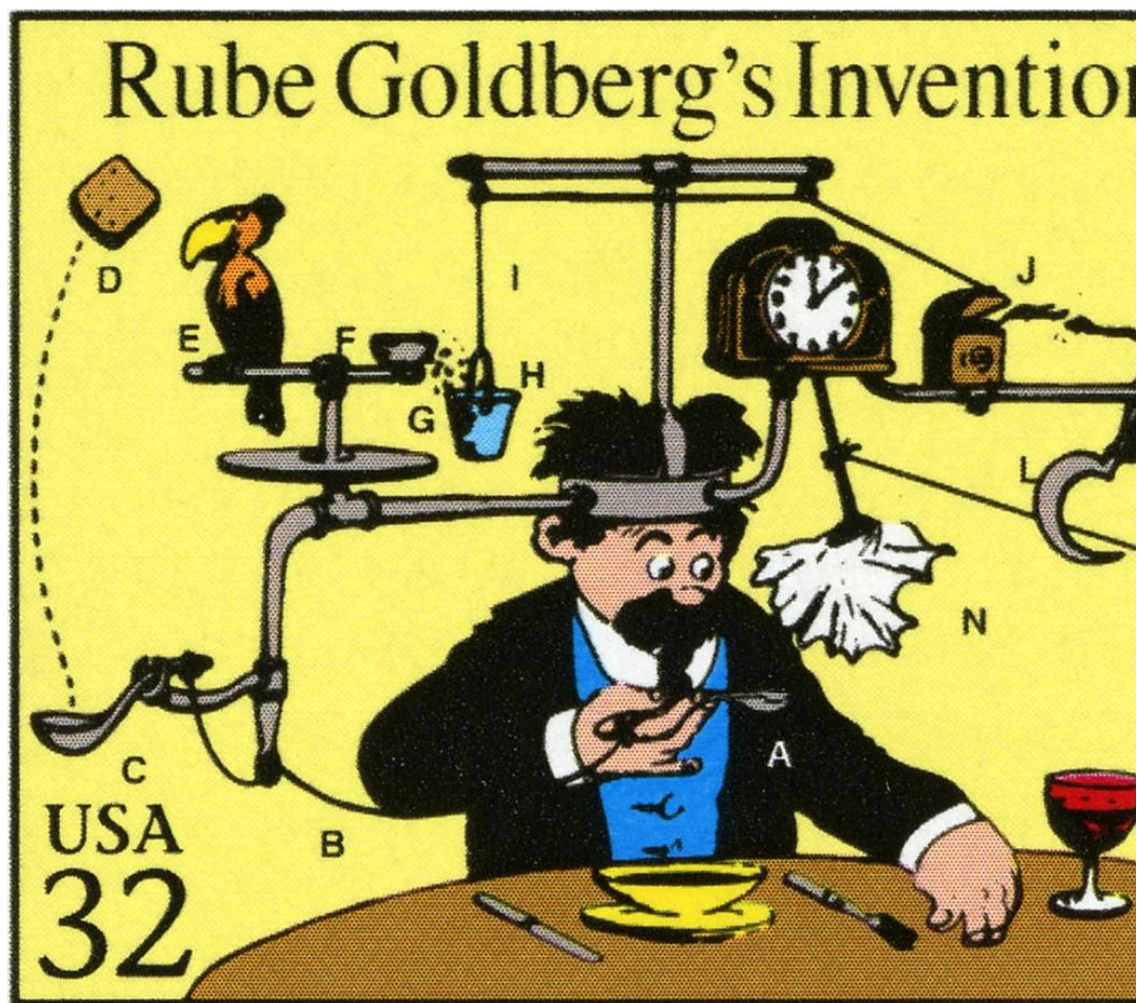


https://lancasteronline.com/features/entertainment/more-than-machines-this-exhibit-in-philadelphia-shows-rube-goldberg/article_4afbbd80-102b-11e9-8df6-bb79ccc90ab0.html

More than machines: This exhibit in Philadelphia shows Rube Goldberg's art, comics and politics



ERIN NEGLEY | Staff Writer Jan 6, 2019



Rube Goldberg's machines make simple tasks ridiculously complicated. An exhibit at the National Museum of American History puts a face to the man behind these contraptions. His famous invention drawings are goofy but also have a subtext that's not too out-of-place today.

Rube Goldberg Inc. via National Museum of American Jewish History

PHILADELPHIA — This artist is famous enough for his name to become an adjective recognizable over a century. His namesake Rube Goldberg machines make simple tasks ridiculously complicated.

But did you know Goldberg also is a Pulitzer Prize-winning political cartoonist? He created a portfolio of pieces taking a sobering look at a post-World War II world on the brink of destruction.

Both types of comics are the centerpiece of an exhibit at the National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia. “The Art of Rube Goldberg,” which runs through Jan. 21, is only the second comprehensive retrospective exhibition of his work.

The exhibit puts a face to the man behind these complicated contraptions. His famous invention drawings are goofy but also have a subtext about modern life and technology that’s not too out-of-place today.

The museum, which traces the story of Jews in America, wanted to share this exhibit to add some STEM lessons from the Rube machines. Staff also are fascinated with Goldberg and his story.

“The combination between his training as an engineer and his identity as a member of an American minority population,” says chief curator Josh Perelman, “both of those link to an individual who’s a very keen observer of our world.”

An engineer, then an artist

Goldberg grew up in San Francisco in the late 1800s. His father was an appraiser, a cowboy and a successful businessman, eventually becoming police commissioner and fire chief. Many of the drawings, videos and artifacts on view are part of a traveling exhibit. The Jewish museum’s exhibition has additional items from the collection of Goldberg’s granddaughter, including a cigar box filled with those appraisal tools and his father’s police badge.

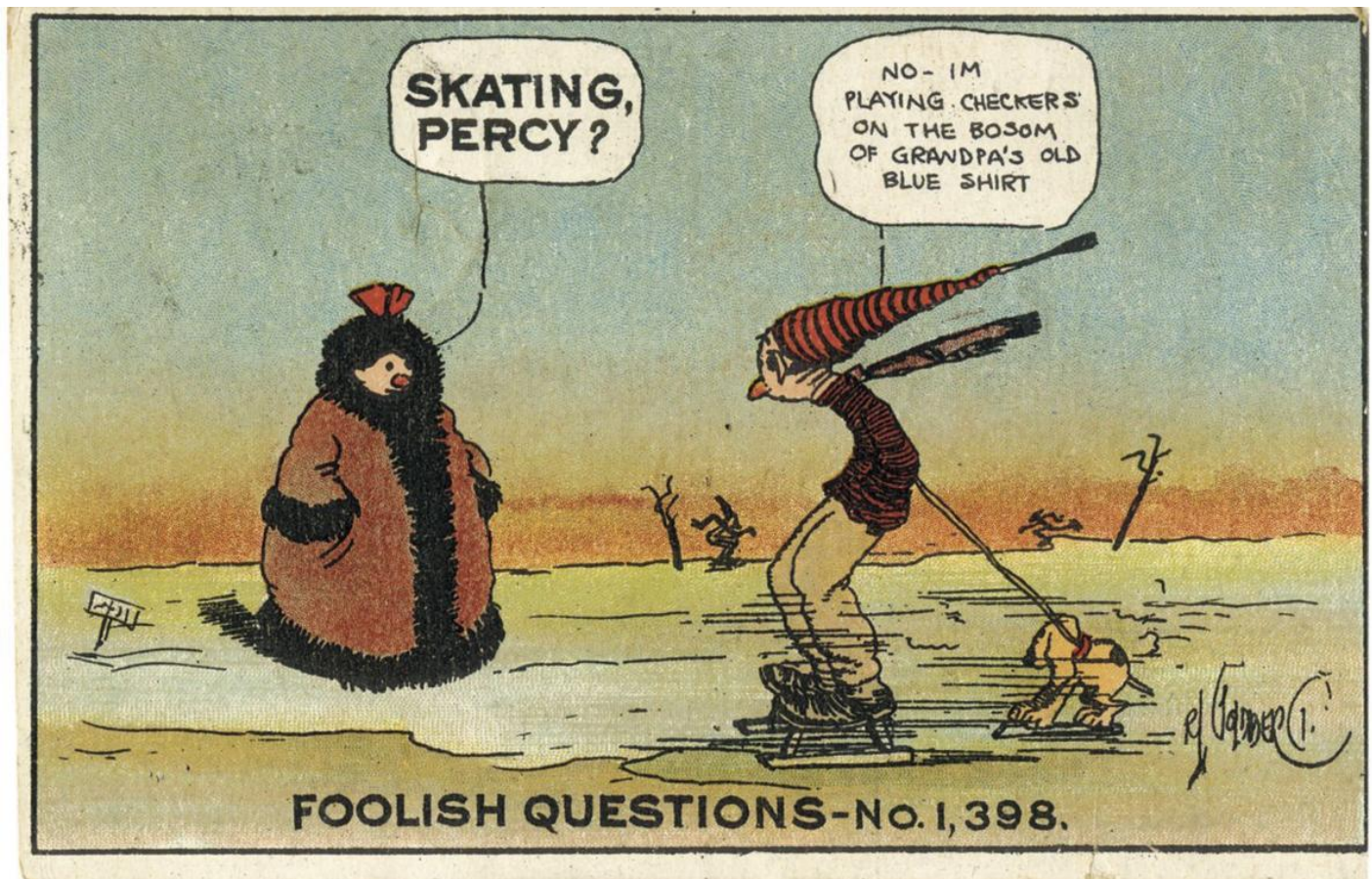
Goldberg was a talented artist, but his father insisted he go to college, where he studied engineering. After a miserable year mapping sewer pipes for the city, Goldberg made a switch. In 1904, he took



a big pay cut to become a sports cartoonist for the San Francisco Chronicle.

Rube Goldberg's father (left) didn't like that his son wanted to become an artist. After studying engineering and working in a municipal sewer department for a year, Goldberg received his father's blessing to become a cartoonist. He found his first job as a sports cartoonist at the "San Francisco Chronicle."

Rube Goldberg Inc. via National Museum of American Jewish History



Rube Goldberg drew many Foolish Questions comics, including this one from 1910. A Foolish Questions book was published 1909, making it one of the first cartoon collections published in the U.S.

Rube Goldberg Inc. via National Museum of American Jewish History

His work resonated with readers, and a few years later he moved to New York City. There, he found success with his “Foolish Questions” series —“Ask a stupid question get an even stupider answer” — “I’m the Guy” cartoons and his first invention comics. Goldberg may have been a cartoonist at a broadsheet newspaper, but he was a celebrity. With a lucrative syndication contract, his cartoons reached readers nationwide.

Invention drawings

The invention contraptions he drew were satirical looks at modern life and its new technology. One that shows an 18-step machine to catch porch milk thieves involves a cat, a jumping onion, a brick falling on a bee and a lot more. A century ago, society drastically changed how things are made and sold, changing the nature of work and American life, Perelman says. However, do all of these automations really make our lives better?

“I don’t think he’s against technology at all,” Perelman says. “What he was noticing was the impact of what in his time was rapid technological change on the lives of Americans.”

The drawings made Goldberg even more famous and his name was added to the dictionary.

OK Go - This Too Shall Pass - Rube Goldberg Machine - Official Video



These inventions live on 39 years after Goldberg’s death, from the one used to open the gate in “The Goonies” to OK Go’s video of “This Too Shall Pass” (60 million YouTube views and counting). There are Rube Goldberg competitions from elementary to college level. Online videos demonstrate hundreds of thousands of hand-made complicated machines.

One invention drawing in the exhibit stands out for its vibrant color and its subject. It’s a cover from Forbes, circa 1967, wondering about the future of home entertainment, post-color TV. Goldberg draws a family sitting together, each watching their own screen. Even an antenna-belted baby and cat have their own devices. Sound familiar?

Perhaps most surprising in the exhibit are the political cartoons Goldberg drew in the 1940s and 1950s. They’re satirical looks at atomic war, Jewish-Arab politics and Joseph Stalin’s lies. They’re decades old, but they still have relevance today.

Just like the contraptions, life is complicated.