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# Enjoy complex, crazy and absurd machines? Check out ‘The Art of Rube Goldberg.’

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When you think of Rube Goldberg, you probably imagine complex, whimsical machines. The wacky devices had a dizzying array of working parts and a prosaic end goal such as, say, affixing a postage stamp to an envelope or wiping one’s mouth at breakfast. Though Goldberg’s crazy inventions often had detailed schematics, he didn’t build them in real life.

That didn’t dampen the public’s enthusiasm for Rube Goldberg machines. Decades after his death, the cartoonist’s name is still synonymous with invention. Now, he’s the subject of an exhibition at the National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia.

“[The Art of Rube Goldberg](#),” on view from Friday through Jan. 21, is the first comprehensive Goldberg retrospective in decades. It’s a chance to learn more about the life of the groundbreaking artist, who resigned his engineering job to become a political cartoonist and writer.

Goldberg is perhaps most famous for cartoons involving Professor Lucifer Gorgonzola Butts, inventor of ridiculous contraptions to tackle all of life’s littlest tasks. The cartoons captured the imagination of would-be scientists, inventors and engineers, and the exhibition shows how they fed into what is now known as STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics).

To celebrate that influence, the museum is hosting a Rube Goldberg Machine Contest for high school students. Similar contests have been held for 30 years.

The show features lots of Goldberg’s drawings and illustrates his influence on popular culture, from his collaboration with the Three Stooges on the 1930 film “Soup to Nuts” to the toys and board games his work inspired. Visitors can also play mad scientist themselves, tinkering with Rube Goldberg machines and creating their own wildly inefficient mechanisms.

Want to experience Goldberg’s signature silliness without leaving your chair? [Rubegoldberg.com](#) has lots of information on the cartoonist; teens can also sign up for the contest there.