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Erector set

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MILLS GALLERY "POPULAR SCIENCE"

GROUP SHOW
(Through June 20)

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in newsweekly staff

BOSTON— "Popular Science," the new show of artistic gadgetry at the Mills Gallery in Boston features an assortment of whirling dervishes that spin and sputter and volley and list. These creations don't rely on the viewers' eyes to connect the dots, because these inventions entertain themselves. They happily start and stop, click and hum in a language of their own. Like so many pieces on display, the insides of the projects are left to dangle about or remain open for inspection. Interactive and full of fantasy, this show reveals six different takes on the cold world of the cog and the mutable possibilities of making some thing out of nothing.

Splendid craftsmanship is the norm for Arthur Ganson. His clever machines are built in varying weights and thickness of metal, some whisker thin, most fragile and intricate. (Often sitting on a table top that allows a walk around experience.) In "Fragile

Machine," slender fly wheels grip and tug an orchestra of inertia reminiscent of a whimsical city or a physics experiment. Another piece called "Margo's Cat" puts a derelict chair and a stationary feline in a exercise of cartoon humor. This domesticated miniature has an oscillating floor and an independent bouncing arm that holds the chair aloft allowing it to crash and drag up and over the tiny porcelain cat sitting on an oriental rug. Ganson's staging is allowed to show in "Machine with Artichoke." This hilarious sculpture depicts a pathetic petal laboriously marching on a slowly turning wheel — its plight is ripe for viewing — like a spectator sport.

Stretching out in furious repose is Janet Zweig's "Artificial Life." This comfortable sculpture issues a ticker tape tongue emoting like a troubadour of data. Lying close to the ground and resembling a pet, its cute exterior spits out advice like an Ann Landers crony: "Don't listen to robots" and "You are asking to much." "Woodchuck" hangs on the wall spinning more tales and calculations. Painted in faux-wood grain, this sculpture adapts to its surroundings lowering fears of its high tech claims.

The front room is laid out with

plenty of space and the individual works seem to keep in time with each other. Most are powered by electricity, but one by Jane Marsching relies on battery and solar power. At a recent show at the Green Street Gallery, she had more than enough room to emphasize her optical purpose, unfortunately in this show she contains her vision and suffocates the impact. Her choice photos spin like meteorological instruments, more Sharper Image than artful sculpture.

The rest of the show lies behind a black curtain. Paul Abbot's window treatments and sound exorcism reflect Sara Su Ying's fish bowl and spinning astronauts while in the corner a projector totem sits in darkness then comes alive with a loop of Shirley Temple doing a pirouette projected through a glass goblet filled with water. Bruce Bemis and the others create a unique space that allows the eyes and ears to become enlivened when the three visions merge.

"Popular Science" is a smart show that doesn't talk down to the viewer. At times I felt as if I were in a Herbie Hancock video — all gizmo-rific — but the best of this show redefines Erector set art as an adventure.