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## Making magic with technology

POPULAR SCIENCE: PAUL ABBOTT, BRUCE BEMIS, ARTHUR GANSON, JANE MARSCHING, and SARA SUN, JANET ZWEIG  
At: Boston Center for the Arts Mills Gallery, 539 Tremont St., through June 20

By Cate McQuaid  
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Technology, in the hands of an artist, can add up to smoke and mirrors — the creation of an image that has more razzmatazz than the sum of its parts. “Popular Science,” a group show at the Boston Center for the Arts’ Mills Gallery, offers work that feels magical, thanks to the nuts-and-bolts technology behind the scenes.

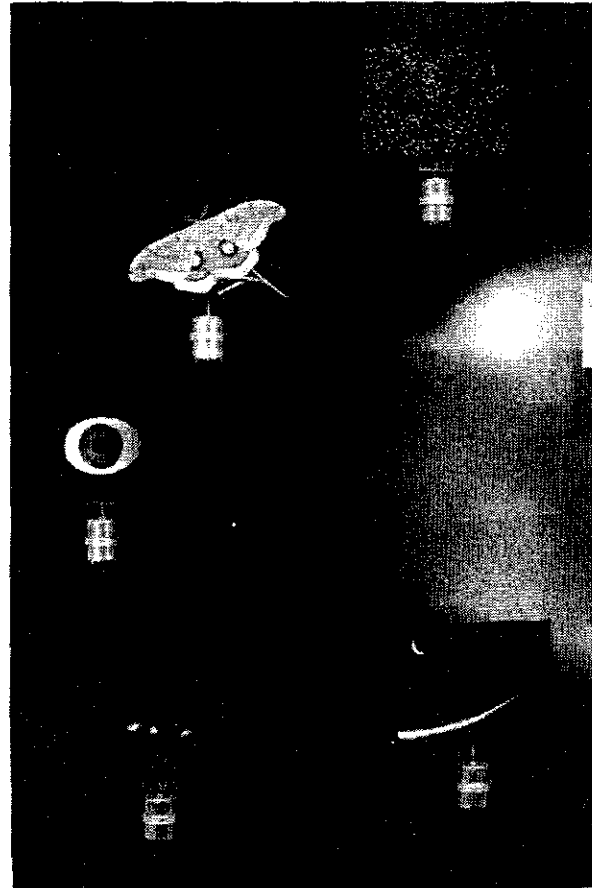
Three installations lurk in a darkened gallery at the back of the space. Sara Sun’s “Untitled I, Untitled II and Astronaut” draws attention immediately, with its brightly lit aquarium perched in the darkness. Two plump orange goldfish swim about inside. Their movement, tracked by a security camera, is broadcast in grainy black-and-white on a small video monitor on the floor. More importantly, it triggers a video projection on the wall behind them. In the flick of an eye, we see a yellow-suited astronaut floating in blackness, not unlike the fish. The contrast of light and dark makes this piece magical, as do the live fish and the unpredictable appearance of the astronaut.

Nearby, the viewer’s motion sets off Bruce Bemis’s “Antipodean Twi-

light,” a loop of film projected through a water-filled goblet. The goblet bends the projection and sets the image, of a young girl skating, on the blue edge of an arc like the rim of the earth. It also diffuses the colors of the film, sending the blue down and sprinkling orange about like splattered paint. Paul Abbott’s “Guttering Candle” re-creates a deserted office space at nighttime. Look through a window shrouded with miniblinds at a static-filled monitor laid flat. White noise and visual static fill the space, alternately soothing and numbing.

In the sunlit part of the gallery, Jane Marsching’s “Pareidolia, or making something out of nothing” installations are solar-powered. Images on small cards spin in front of a larger black-and-white picture, testing the viewer’s tendency to make shapes and patterns where perhaps none exist. Arthur Ganson constructs little whimsical motorized contraptions. “Machine with Artichoke Petal” has a dried petal laboriously climbing up a slowly spinning wheel, never getting anywhere.

Janet Zweig pokes at our desire for answers and the impossibility of ever getting them in her two constructions. “How Much Wood Would A Woodchuck Chuck . . .” sets a computer calculating pi, the ratio of a circumference of a circle to its diameter. The computer paper spins slowly on a giant wooden spool, appropriately, to reach the final decimal of a number that never ends. “Artificial Life” cloaks a computer in fake fur and spits out fortunes like “Don’t listen to robots,” chiding us fallible humans for our need for reassurance and pat answers.



Jane Marsching's solar-powered “Pareidolia, or making something out of nothing.”