

Show winks at us with 'Science' friction

There's a whole lot of science going on in art these days. Its frequency, in part, seems to have inspired "Popular Science" at the Mills Gallery at Boston Center for the Arts.

The science is primarily mechanically based, but the likes of optometry and astronomy also

poignant — sense of futility.

The leaf, obviously, is going nowhere. Likewise, the marvelous gearing and stunning structure of "Untitled Fragile Machine" propels nothing but itself. Similarly, the little girl spinning around the ice skating rink in Bruce Bemis' video is on a repetitive loop.

In both Ganson's and Bemis' work, however, what is most striking is their lightness of touch and modesty of concept. Together these aspects create a seductive and elegant simplicity — one that also wallops an engaging, psychological punch.

Then there's Janet Zweig's more overt emphasis on our ardent attempts to make sense of random events. For "Artificial Life," she has covered a computer printer with shaggy white fur. At regular intervals, it spits out fortunes. Yours is the one that it happens to churn out at the moment you're watching it. And, like a cash receipt, you're told that you can keep the white copy, while the yellow and pink carbon remain with the piece.

There's also an elusive quality to much of the work — as if science has made things more visible but not necessarily more understandable or less mysterious.

VISUAL ARTS Mary Sherman

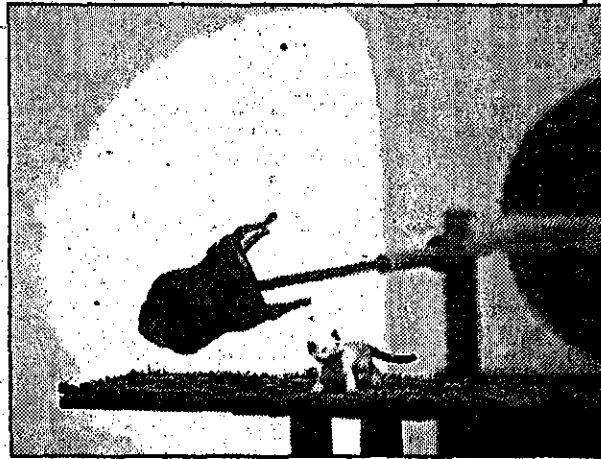
make appearances.

As the use of the word "Popular" in the title also suggests, the works' appeal is instantaneous. Everything moves. Much of it dances. And, there's a great deal of humor.

Arthur Ganson even takes an amusing stab at the mythic figure of Sisyphus in his "Machine With Artichoke Peel." Turning a dried artichoke leaf into the stoic fellow, the upright vegetable matter makes its slow and steady climb along a relatively large and continuously moving wheel.

Ingeniously propelled by a motor, which is linked to gears by a thin, knotted rope, the piece wrings charm out of decidedly low-tech means.

Like his delicate "Untitled Fragile Machine," there's a childlike appeal to the work; at the same time there's a touching — even



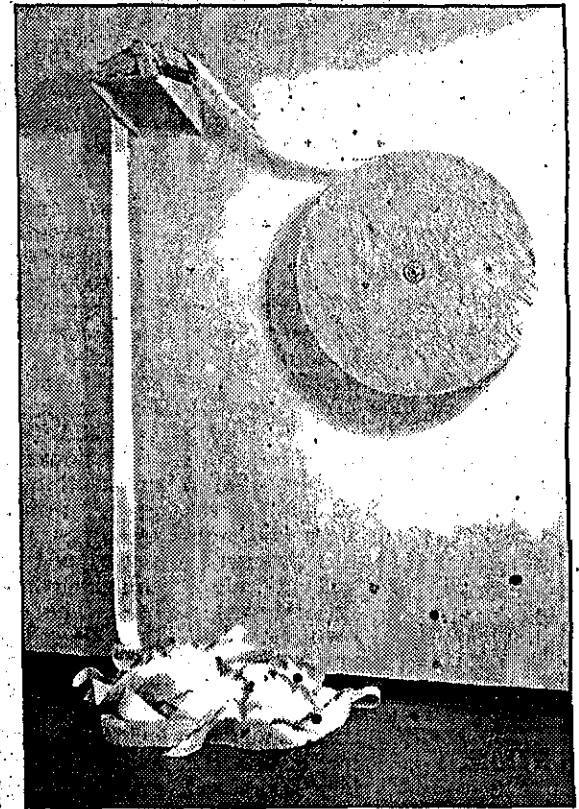
FUN IN STORE: 'Margot's Cat,' by Arthur Ganson, above, and 'How Much Wood Would a Woodchuck Chuck ...' are part of 'Popular Science' at the Mills Gallery.

Thus, for a video of television static, Paul Abbott focuses on a tangible example of nothingness. Then, by placing his video behind a window covered with a venetian blind, he interprets the tiresome transmission yet again. Meanwhile, Jane Marsching's small photos mounted on a larger one spin so fast that it's hard to make out what all the photographs depict.

Like the butterflies on a number of these small photos, the images flicker and are enlivened by their almost hypnotic speed, making the works' eye-catching appeal as much what is depicted as how it is presented.

Finally, there's Sara Sun's three-part installation, which epitomizes the pervasive problem with a lot of work that is heavily reliant on technology: It doesn't always work; or, it doesn't always work the way the artist had hoped or thought it would. For her piece, two gold fish, "Untitled 1" and "Untitled 2," are swimming in an elevated tank.

A video monitor sitting in a corner of the room projects what a hidden camera picks up inside the tank — basically, an endless parade of air bubbles. When the



fish swim in front of the camera, another video supposedly is triggered and an image of an astronaut appears on the wall. However, after nearly a week, the fish had yet to set off the second video.

In this case, a sense of futility does not seem to have been part of the artist's original goal.

"Popular Science" at the Mills Gallery, Boston Center for the Arts, through June 20.