

EXHIBITION REVIEW

Jack Dollhausen's Responsive Machines

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Esu is a West African demon who engages in annoying but not dangerous activities, such as breaking your shoelaces. Jack Dollhausen has named one of his electronic sculptures Esu and appropriately so. From Silicon Valley perspective, Dollhausen is an Esu of electronics, serendipitously disrupting the rational functioning of electronic circuitry to celebrate the irrational world of sensory experience.

Dollhausen's sculptures look at first glance like cantankerous light fixtures. Tapestry has six light bulbs on long arms that reach out like tentacles from an irregularly shaped board on which a network of wires and integrated circuits create a lyrical drawing. That's what you see, but that's only the beginning of the sculpture. Without a viewer, Tapestry shuts down; even though the circuitry is on, there is no sound and no light. It is like a tense, immobile animal alive to its prey. When a person approaches the piece (most dramatically in the dark), the movement activates the lights and Tapestry begins to bark in many voices, make a machinelike whirring noise and light up in a flashing pattern. Each new movement causes the lights to flash at different speeds or sequences. Even though movement appears to control Tapestry by activating and altering it, the piece's light and sound have a life of their own. Our actions cannot be directly correlated to a particular event in the piece.