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Art in Review; Reality Unchecked

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Reality is not a given. It is a complicated, unstable mental construction cobbled together from empirical experience, fantasy and abstraction. Or so it would seem, judging by "Reality Unchecked," an interesting show of artists who combine realistic, imaginary and abstract styles.

Colleen Asper has painted a funny, deadpan spoof of an official presidential portrait with herself in a business suit and pearls sitting at her Oval Office desk. And Angela Fraleigh creates Abstract Expressionist-style paintings with oversize images of herself seeming to sink into the Dionysian flux like a heroine in a Gothic romance novel.

Eric White's paintings are more conventionally illustrative. One depicting a giant, many-eyed surveillance device descending into a sports stadium occupied by a shadowy crowd would make a good cover for an Orwellian sci-fi novel.

The show's one sculptor, Nathan Skiles, used rigid foam, felt, cardboard and other materials to construct an ingenious trap for zombies. Were one of the undead to try to take the bait -- a hanging severed arm -- it would trigger a remote shutter release and the zombie would be captured on film by the realistically made camera set up on a tripod.

An absorbing video by Adam Stennett shows two real male mice fighting over a group of females in a miniature parklike environment while the artist tells a story of witnessing a violent crime and later reporting it to the police. It is debatable whether this piece belongs in a show of traditionally handmade works, but in its own way, it conveys a vivid sense of social reality. KEN JOHNSON

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