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At the College of New Rochelle, a Show Meant to Provoke Double Takes



By Susan Hodara

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Entering the Castle Gallery at the College of New Rochelle, visitors encounter an arrangement of cherry blossoms in a glass vase. At least that's what it appears to be. Closer observation reveals that the branch holding the flowers is actually a segment of plumbing pipe and that each delicate bud is a tiny pink toilet made of urethane foam.

The unexpected bouquet is "Flores Illicis," a sculpture by David Opdyke that is among the pieces included in the gallery's current exhibition, " 'Not Really': Fictive Narratives in Contemporary Art." The show addresses the proliferation of contrivance and manipulation

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in 21st-century society, asking gallerygoers to consider — and then reconsider — the 31 works on view. “ ‘Not Really’ ” was assembled by Susan Canning, an independent curator and a professor of art history at the college. “The show is a response to a contemporary experience that is completely mediated and augmented,” she said, citing reality television, Auto-Tuned music and images of models and celebrities that have been Photoshopped to perfection. “The artificial and the fake have become accepted as reality. I want viewers to question that reality and think twice about what they are seeing.”

What they will see are paintings, sculptures, photographs, videos and installations that explore subjects as diverse as family, gender, the environment, consumerism and police brutality. The 14 participating artists, who range in age from their 30s to their 70s, employ elements of illusion, incongruity, humor and surprise in works with a shared premise: All is not as it seems. “I want people to look at each piece,” Ms. Canning said, “and ask, ‘What is really going on here? What is this really about?’ ”