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Art in Review

By THE NEW YORK TIMES

Fight or Flight'

Whitney Museum of American Art at Altria
120 Park Avenue, at 42nd Street
Through Feb. 18

For "Fight or Flight," the Whitney invited six artists, all between 30 and 40, to make works about fear and anxiety. Only Rico Gatson directly addresses terrorism or war, with his kaleidoscopic videos punctuated by images of exploding bombs. The rest have produced nonspecific metaphors or narratives. That all the works are more amusing than profound is not necessarily bad, but we are left to wonder what a deeper, more adult expression of fear might look like.

Marc Swanson has constructed a near life-size mast of an antique sailing ship with a square sail of stitched-together old white T-shirts. Tilted as though by waves or the wind, it suggests that we take the scary turbulence of our times with a spirit of adventure. Ivan Witenstein's equally fanciful, all white fiberglass and resin sculpture represents a life-size satyr howling on a tall pedestal while miniature horses eat the flesh of a fallen dragon - a symbol of fear? - on the floor below.

Spoofing popular self-help movements, Amy Gartrell's colorful felt banners mimic the look of psychedelic posters of the 1960's and have mock self-affirming texts like, "I am fairly certain it will be okay" and "I'll be your mirror." Kristin Baker careens between Abstract Expressionism and Pop with large, glossy, semi-abstract collages representing violent car crashes. Wangechi Mutu's multimedia theater of hysteria includes suspended wine bottles slowly dripping red, bloodlike liquid and simulated bullet holes in the wall surrounding surrealistically collaged, gunshot humanoid figures. KEN JOHNSON