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Room to show what they can do

Two young painters inspired by folk art are given a spacious showcase.

By Edith Newhall
For The Inquirer

Joy Feasley, a Philadelphia painter, and Clare Rojas, a San Francisco (and former Philadelphia) painter, have much in common. They're inspired by folk art, they often depict nature and animals in their work, and both were included six years ago in the ICA's "East Meets West: Folk and Fantasy From the Coasts," an exhibition organized by Alex Baker that revealed the influence of folk art on young Philadelphia and San Francisco artists. Now, the two have the second floor of Locks Gallery all to themselves.

Feasley's half of the show reminds me of Stephen Shore's color photographs from the 1970s, in that many of her 26 paintings are a little like casual snapshots from a trip out West. In one, a bear in a forest rears on its hind legs; in another, a hiker is seen at sunset sitting on a blanket with her dog curled up beside her, facing a panorama of geranium-colored mountains.

Actually, Feasley's paintings are more personal than any of Shore's almost puzzlingly mundane images - the reflective mood and isolation she evokes are more reminiscent of such painters as Sarah McEneaney, Horace Pippin and Andrew Wyeth - but they do recall the wandering spirit of early Shore.

Feasley seems intent on keeping a diaristic flow and open-endedness to her paintings that defies style. And if you try to pin her down, she's arguably not just a painter, but an installation artist. She created the black lacquer wainscoting around her side of the gallery; she's the sculptor behind that large, felt-covered armature of a Moravian star.

Feasley's style is to stay impromptu.

Rojas, on the other hand, borrows freely from folk art - Amish, Indian and Central American iconography, for starters - and mixes it all up to create quiet, mysterious amalgams of imagery. Some of her works are mural-scaled and painted on linen, such as Green Mountain II; others are painted on small wood panels and paper.



"Breath" (2007) is among Joy Feasley's paintings at Locks Gallery. Feasley, a Philadelphian, shares the second floor with Clare Rojas, a San Franciscan.

Somewhat similar to Shahzia Sikander's paintings, which borrow their look and style from traditional Pakistani miniature painting but refer to contemporary issues, Rojas' are archetypal images of humanity forged from multiple sources. She can also bring the old-fashioned, anonymous sign or banner painter to mind, especially in her large unstretched linen pieces.

It's exciting to see what two young artists can do with a grand space like Locks'.

Locks Gallery, 600 Washington Square South, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays (10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mondays through Fridays in July and August). 215-629-1000 or www.locksgallery.com. Through July 27.

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