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Not shy about ornamentation

By Edith Newhall
For The Inquirer

A founding member of the 1970s "Pattern and Decoration" movement, Robert Zakanitch has always been an unapologetically exuberant painter who does what he loves, which has even included portraits of dogs.

He moves from series to series, but his fascination and facility with patterning and his penchant for humor are always evident. His paintings are as full and rich as he can make them. Nowhere is this more true than in the paintings of his "Lace Series" now on view at Locks Gallery.

I happen to be a fan of Zakanitch's sophisticated, animal-free paintings of the 1980s, the ones shown at New York's Robert Miller Gallery that seemed to define that gallery's unerring eye at that time. By comparison to those paintings, his works of the last decade have displayed a conscious awkwardness, charm, and thick paint application reminiscent of folk art.

Interestingly, the "Lace" paintings, especially those depicting predominantly white lace patterns over black backgrounds, remind me of the earlier, more formal paintings, even though his subject matter is inherently Americana. I even like the flattened, folk-inflected images of birds, squirrels, and cats he's worked into his compositions.

There is something else slightly different about this body of work, by the way, that the casual viewer probably would not consider without having read the show's catalogue essay by art historian Arthur C. Danto.

Apparently Zakanitch, who began this series in 1999, made six of the show's 10 paintings in 2001 and 2002, in the aftermath of the World Trade Center attack, with the intent of not letting the event affect his work. That they are the most confrontational but also the most eloquent works of this series can't be an accident.

Locks Gallery, 600 Washington Square South, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays. 215-629-1000 or www.locksgallery.com. Through Sept. 29.



"Cat" (2001), by Robert Zakanitch, acrylic on canvas, 88 by 102 inches.

LOCKS GALLERY



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