

Black Cats (Drolleries) by Moss

DROLLERY \drol-e-re\ pl -eries (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary). Fanciful designs of a playful character... historically used in the margins of medieval manuscripts: whimsical humor. Also French spelling: "DROLERIES" (Handbook of Art History, key to Janson).



Hangin' in the Pumpkin Patch, 2012,
Giclee

People frequently notice and are curious about the crisply drawn, stylized, images of black cats included by Pat Moss in many of her recent paintings and prints. Usually, these images are so imaginatively integrated into a work that they don't disturb either its aesthetic rhythm or its color impact. They're apparently meant to be subtle presences rather than primary subjects. So subtle, in fact, that to many casual viewers their visual existence becomes apparent only upon close examination.

Cats in the history of art are ambivalent, usually female, animals who at different times have symbolized both good and evil. Ancient Egyptians associated cats with the protection of homes, mothers, and children. Painted and carved cats along with their mummified remains have been found in numerous tombs. During the Middle Ages, cats were taken as signs of the devil and his evil ways and were believed to be witches' animals. Luckily for the species, its reputation was redeemed when it was noticed that in towns or homes with cats residents were less likely to suffer the consequences of the Black Death, a disease carried by flea-infested rats. Religious art of the time, with its many cat-like drolleries, likely reflects the notion that the presence of cats - rat-killers - was a good omen.

In the art of P. Buckley Moss, these black cats are intended to be positive manifestations. Perhaps their presence was inspired by the Medieval cat images that Pat saw cavorting through and along the margins of old manuscripts that she may have studied at the Cooper Union. It was through such manuscripts that she became familiar with Romanesque calligraphy (fancy writing), Scholastic ideas, and vivid religious illuminations (pictures).

Perhaps Moss was familiar with the early Christian legend about the "cat of the Madonna". It tells the story of a mother cat who gave birth to kittens in the same stable at the same time as Christ was born. In this popular tale, a feline symbol is used to represent a presence observing a memorable event.

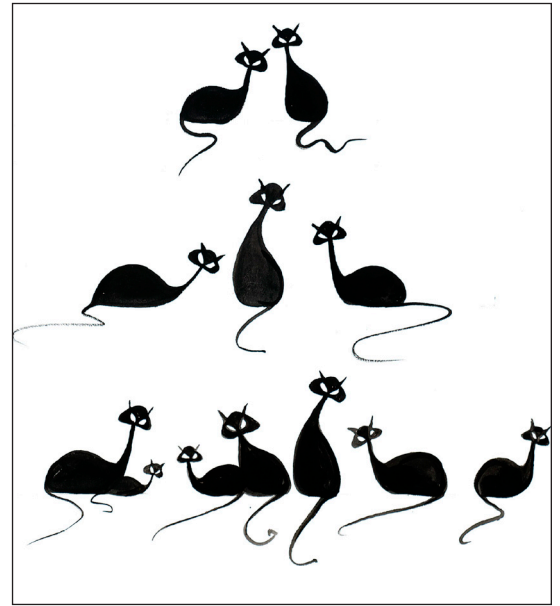


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Naturally, there's always the possibility that cats in Moss paintings simply mean that there were lots of cats around when Pat was painting, especially in a household with six growing children. This scenario is suggested as a comfort to those who are hesitant to look for meaning in art beyond whatever is obvious. A cat, after all, can be just a cat.

But if one looks carefully and thoughtfully, Moss' curious black-cat-drolleries can hardly be considered to represent flesh and blood animals. They're just too stylized. Notice how their eyes are always staring out of the plain of the picture, looking at the looker. These are not portraits based on living cat models, either past or present. They're drolleries: "...fanciful ...playful ...whimsical humorous.." - symbols of a presence. But whose?

A reasonable conclusion is that these highly stylized animals represent the spirit of the artist herself. Perhaps it's of Moss' way of not intruding into her art, but still being therefor time immemorial... to observe, to enjoy, and to be a part of the action that she created? I believe that her spirit is the drollery - cat-like - presence. It's Pat Moss watching those who are watching the art of P. Buckley Moss!



Meow I, 2012, Giclee

Black Cats (Drolleries) by Moss, *Peter Rippe, Author, published originally in 1993 or 1994 and in The Consolidated Moss Museum Messenger III*

P. Buckley Moss is an American and Virginia artist, whose art expresses her interest in strong family values and cultural heritage in her own distinctive style, giving us a collection of art that is filled with a lifetime of experiences. She is known as America's most celebrated living artist. She currently lives in Radford, Virginia and travels around the country to attend shows with galleries and meet her collectors and sign her work for them.



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