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## All eyes on tattoos, up close Susan Moore's paintings pose many questions.

By Edith Newhall  
For The Inquirer

If you happened to see the family-friendly "Pierced Hearts and True Love: A Century of Drawings for Tattoos" at New York's Drawing Center in 1995, you'll recall that the exhibition steered away from troublesome images of the tattooed.

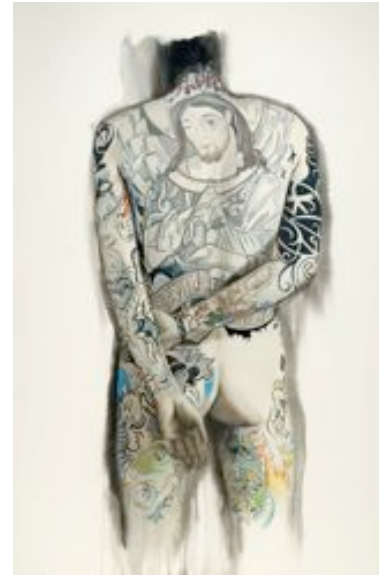
Instead, it offered tattoo artists' intricate, colorful works on paper and related vintage ephemera, such as advertisements for tattoo parlors. It even boasted an old-fashioned tattoo machine. Tattooing was presented as a quaint, legitimate category of Americana, a cousin of the carnival.

This is not remotely the mood that Susan Moore is conjuring in her recent paintings of tattooed figures at Locks Gallery.

These 11 large works depict tattoos on various men and women in such a way that only the tattooed sections of their bodies are shown - chests, arms, legs, backs. Occasionally, the lower half of a person's head might be revealed, but beyond gender and body type the only identifying features are the tattoos.

In contrast to their vivid, elaborate markings - rendered in emphatically sharp relief by Moore - her subjects have a cadaverous pallor and stillness heightened by the fact that she has left several inches of blank canvas around their bodies so that their extremities appear to fade, ghostlike, into the neutral background.

Moore's paintings make a viewer question what it is that is more unsettling about them - her cool, even formal, depictions of complex networks of tattoos on anonymous, flaccid flesh, or her subjects' desire for permanent, somewhat extreme physical expression that is just as likely to be kept private as not. One thing is certain: Moore's paintings catch tattoos up close and still, as they rarely are seen by the curious eye, and their vining, snaking quality is a little frightening. The title of her show, "Second Skin," is extremely well-chosen.



Thy Will Be Done, 2007, oil and acrylic on canvas, 78 x 50 inches