

# Zapkus' geometric paintings —lush, sensuous—create mood

By Ellen Brown  
Post staff reporter

Kes Zapkus' works are based on highly intellectual precepts and geometric structures, with the end result being a series of lush and sensuous paintings.

A retrospective of the Lithuanian-born artist's last decade of work is on view at the Contemporary Arts Center through Aug. 30. The paintings look as if they could have all been done in one period, however, as Zapkus has been working in the same vein for the past 15 years.

Zapkus combines the geometry of late Mondrian works, reduced to the barest elements of a geometric grid,

with the spontaneous overall notation of the abstract expressionist movement. His works are non-objective and non-pictorial. There is no attempt at creating an illusionistic three-dimensional world, yet the surface of the paintings shimmer with unified movement.

**ZAPKUS' PAINTINGS** convey different moods, but they are united by a repetition of process and an unchanging underlying conception. Part of the mood change is due to the dominant colors of the individual works or pairs of paintings.

Zapkus begins each canvas by gridding it and locating symmetrical dots of color to establish an overall

unity and rhythm. Then he silk-screens more geometric patterns onto the surface to visually activate the canvas.

The preparatory work for Zapkus' paintings is entirely rational; the intuitive part begins with markings and notations over the surface that create a structuring similar to the orchestration of a symphonic score. The eye moves around the canvas, guided by the hints of the geometric underpinning.

"Each gesture of marking begins to weave an orderly web to contain the disparity below," Zapkus said.

**THE WORKS** move from a classical mode emphasizing clarity to romantic, almost rhapsodic, explosions of color and sinewy brushstrokes. The surfaces of his canvases are not only animated, but also rich with deep color and heavily applied paint.

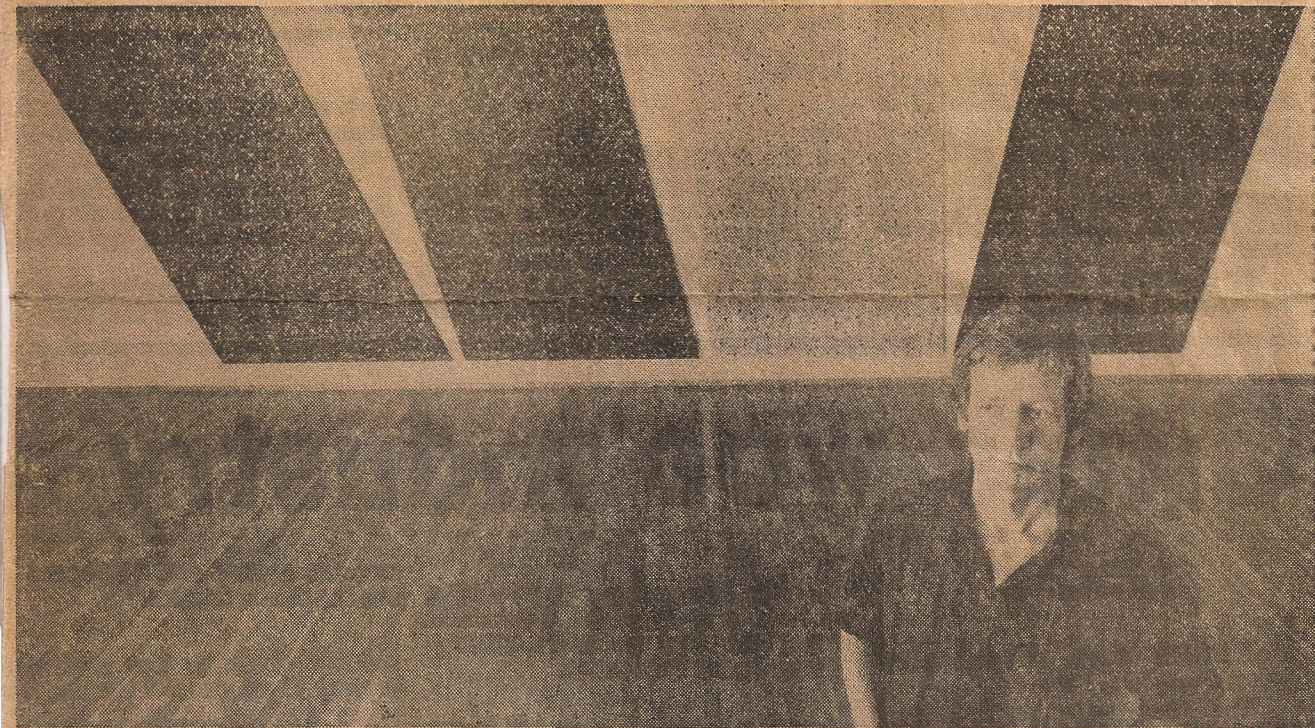
Most of the works are quite large, intensifying the endless variations of dashes and dots of paint. "Homage to H.M.," dedicated to Matisse, is one of the highlights of the show. Zapkus avoids clearly discernible shapes and uses color in densely packed spots to create internal energy.

In "Duo," the paired canvases are primarily purple and chartreuse and are marked with similar patterning. "What I'm trying to do is use color almost like mimicry and make the paintings incomplete statements without the other one to complement it," Zapkus said.

**CHANGING COLORATION** is most effective in "Traffic," a four-part work with each panel a slightly different shade. It is impossible to

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**Kes Zapus with "Traffic"**

view each component as a separate entity. The ambiguities within each panel are resolved only by the balance of the four parts.

In some works, the successive layers of screens and markings are more prominent. In "Block Black," the rich overpainting all but obscures the structuring. It is the most lyrical of Zapus' paintings, resembling the brushwork in a late Monet waterscape.

"North Road" is the opposite. It is architectural, reminiscent of the traces of foundations and places in an ancient city.

Zapus likes to use musical terms to describe his work. He sees his paintings according to musical notation, as one bar of music resembles other bars but builds a theme through repetition and slight variation.

Zapus' paintings are a joy to the

eyes. His lush colors and dancing, energy-charged patterning create unified and enticing works.