

Pacita Abad: Painter of Singapore's "Art Bridge"

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A metal plate marker at the end of the footbridge reads: "This landmark contribution to public art is an initiative of the Internationally acclaimed artist Pacita Abad (1946-2004) and the Singapore Tyler Print Institute (STPI). As a gift to Singapore. Pacita transformed the bridge environment around this part of the Singapore River with her joyful and vibrant colours and design. The project was conceived by Pacita while at STPI, where she was invited as the Institute's first female artist to collaborate in its unique Visiting Artist Programme. The painting of the 230 ton, 55 meter long and 35 meter high bridge consisted of scraping and cleaning the old painting with 120 liters of a white base coat; two coating using 930 liters of six base colors; applying 2350 circle stencils; hand painting each circle stencil using 46 colors and painting the railings with additional circles."

When I first heard of Pacita Abad's art bridge I was reminded of the French artist [Frédéric Bartholdi](#), the man who made the statue of liberty. Both artworks are gifts from artists' with thankful spirits towards a foreign land. The Liberty and the Art Bridge are great works of art that brought people together. The former was much bigger in scope, the latter, on the other hand, smaller but the sacrifice and effort that went into creating it was a remarkable story of dedication and perseverance. Abad happily struggled painting the bridge and amazingly finished the project during the last year of her life.

I've been to Singapore several times and even lived in this beautiful island state for awhile but for some strange reason I've never heard of the art bridge (the only one of its kind in the world) until I saw a clip on [youtube](#) where Pacita's brother, Butch, was narrating how his sister accomplished the incredible feat. Here, it's easy to get caught up with the advance metropolitan lifestyle that you forget about the other more important things that exist around you. So, I had planned to visit the Alkaff Bridge a few months ago and see this remarkable artwork courtesy of a fellow Filipino. And as I expected – it was a sight to gaze at for hours.

The painting of the bridge not only showcased Pacita's amazing talent working with colours and shapes, it was also symbolic of how we can all come together and make really

special things happen. The Filipino made the once cold steel foot bridge a happy piece of art. She designed how it was to be painted in France – the project’s approval was said to have taken time and when it was approved, Pacita’s brother recalls her being ecstatic but sadly, months after this merry moment, she was advised by her doctors that her cancer has come back and has spread to other parts of her body.

It’s true what they say that “colors, like features, follow the changes of the emotions” but how could have Pacita painted the way she did when she was undergoing so much stress and pain? This is perhaps the most remarkable part of the story. She saw the brighter side of things even with the horrible hand that was dealt to her. This is the lesson we all can learn from because the world in which we live in can at times be overly negative. Pacita chose to be positive and this had an enormous effect on what she did in Alkaff Bridge – colors and circles that were full of life and soul. It made me proud to think that a Filipino made this part of Singapore a lil’ livelier and brighter.

The Singaporean government continues to promote Pacita’s work with a [dedicated website for the bridge](#). The whole community has shown their appreciation for the Filipino artist whom they saw working everyday with her paints and brushes. Even after the bridge painting was completed, the Filipino still found time from her busy medical treatment and exhibits to paint the steel railings around the bridge. People started calling her the “Bridge Lady”, for months, Pacita became a fixture in the Quay area – these are all testament to her devotion and commitment. It was said that in the last day of her life, she visited the bridge for one final look.