

*A Passion to Paint:
The Colorful World of
Pacita Abad*



THE WORLD BANK
Art program

As she challenged the great sea of her native Philippines, braving her childhood memories of almost drowning, so Pacita Abad pushed the limits of her imagination and of her search for personal and artistic growth all her life.

From December 13, 2005 through January 31, 2006 Jack Garrity — Pacita's husband and spiritual partner — and the Institutional Art Program of the World Bank will celebrate this love for life with the exhibition *A Passion to Paint: The Colorful World of Pacita Abad*. This exhibition is organized in collaboration with The Pacita Abad Art, the World Bank's General Services Department, the World Bank Group/IMF Filipino Staff Association and the Cultural Center of the Philippines, with special participation of the National Museum of Women in the Arts and the Philippine Arts, Letters & Media Council (PALM).

Pacita was a daring woman, an adventurous person and the Institutional Art Program is pleased and honored to let once more an artist inspire all of us to reach our limits...and go beyond.

"I passionately believe in public art and hope that [this project] inspires many more like it and brings art into the every day lives"

— Pacita Abad

MARINA GALVANI
Art Curator
Institutional Art Program



There are many similarities between Abad's works on canvas and those on paper that are striking to the eye. There is her trademark boldness of colors and a similar emotional and visual dynamic, for example, that reminds one of the best of her art. But there is also a different sense of lightness, a fresh sense of humor, and a softer edge to her line that are striking. This is particularly true of her earlier work, referencing as they do important journeys of discovery into other cultures and her desire to make strong sculptural objects, that would be different from any three-dimensional explorations that had gone before.

Her *trapunto* work is dense with many materials and ideas and has a weighty three-dimensional quality. Oil pastel, acrylics, painted and printed canvas and paper are the materials at the center of much of her work. But Abad also regularly included such things as silk, batik, glitter, mirrors, sequins, cowrie shells, buttons and traditional handwoven fabrics.

With her more careful use of many standard materials of recent years Abad was able to make a very different impact on the imagination with a more subtle range of images. Here there is a sense that the earlier anxious tension of some her *trapunto* works has been replaced by a gentler, more relaxed view of the world, but still an incisive one.

There are many who may feel that Abad was at her best and most dramatic and expressive when her work is large in scale. This, of course, is very far from the truth as many of her early and later range of work clearly shows. For some artists large-scale works signify the defining of the artistic ego, strength, and that the power of ideas requires the dramatic of huge space. For such artists small works act as stepping stones to larger ideas. This, as Abad said, is not the case for her. Small-scale works represent "different places and different feelings" and "they are like jewels and though they are small, they generally require the same amount of time and energy as larger works. I like the focus of working on small works. They have their own separate identity and sense of space. On occasion, I have tried to make a small work that I particularly liked on a larger scale, but it just didn't have the same feeling."

While many of her small works are clearly to be read as a general view of the world, there are many others that are obviously of a deeply personal nature, secret moments that stand at the door of revelation. Abad's skill here is not to disclose through the structure of her images, but rather to tease the viewer's imagination to the challenge of discovery. There is a sense of the artist's profoundly private self that we can only guess at. This self is revealed acutely in the simplicity and directness of the image's construction. Frequently one wonders how such intensely felt emotions can be held within such a small space. There is, however, the notion that there is much, much more happening beyond the confines of the frame. This is very much a part of Abad's achievement as an artist



Sweet 'n low (2004)

— the ability to suggest the world far beyond each individual painting or collage. It is clear that time and space for Abad were as much part of the inner self as they were part of the wider world.

Abad's development as an artist was the result of great diversity of experience — emotional, artistic, physical, intellectual. With each new phase of her work she makes us aware, not of the limitations of life, but of the extraordinary potential that life offers even under astonishingly difficult private circumstances. Even in anguish she was able to smile and that is the center of her strength as an artist and inspiration to others.

Ian Findlay-Brown is the editor/publisher of Asian Art News and World Sculpture News

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Location

The World Bank Main Complex
12th Floor Gallery
1818 H Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20433

December 13, 2005–January 31, 2006

For information and visits contact the Institutional Art Program of the World Bank

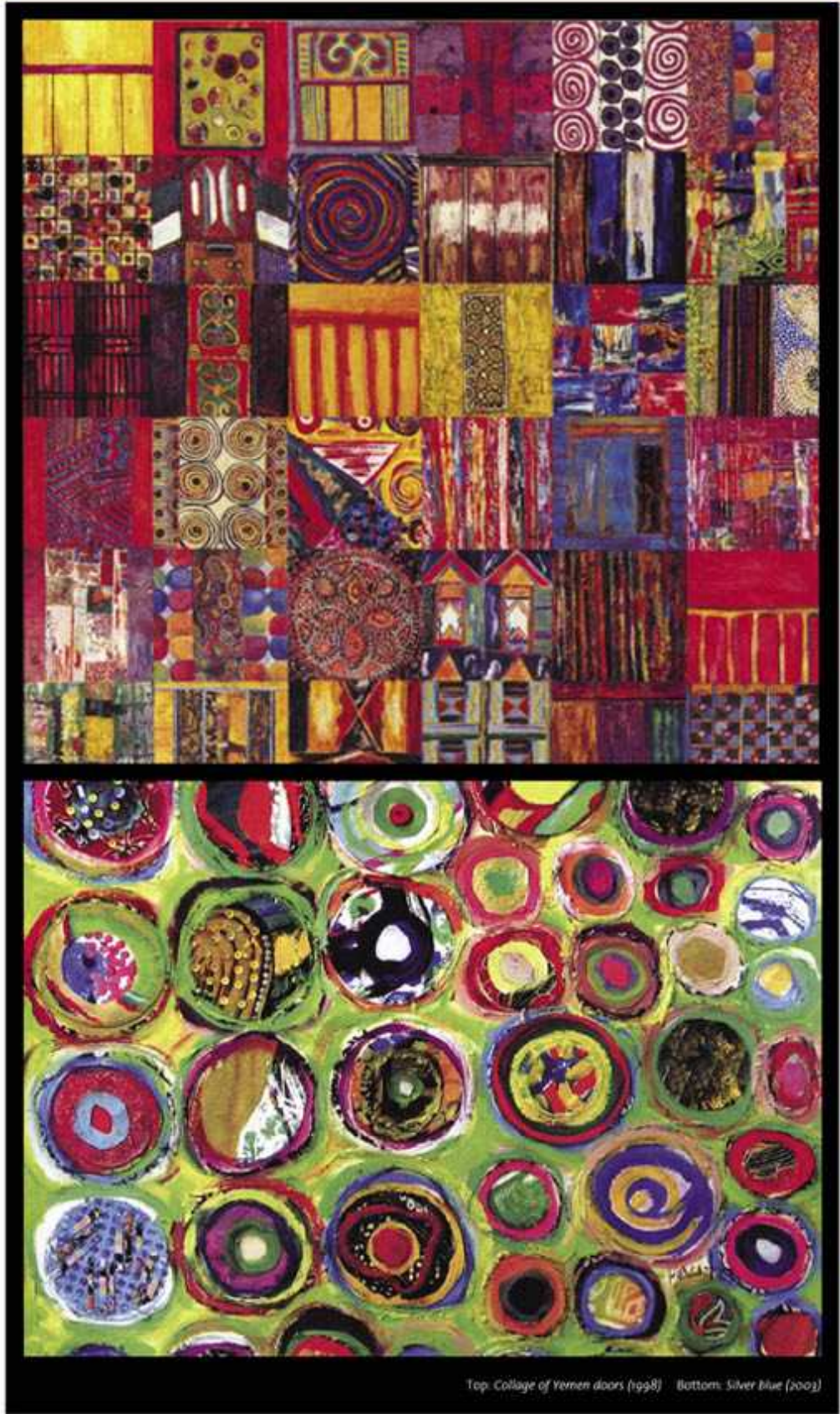
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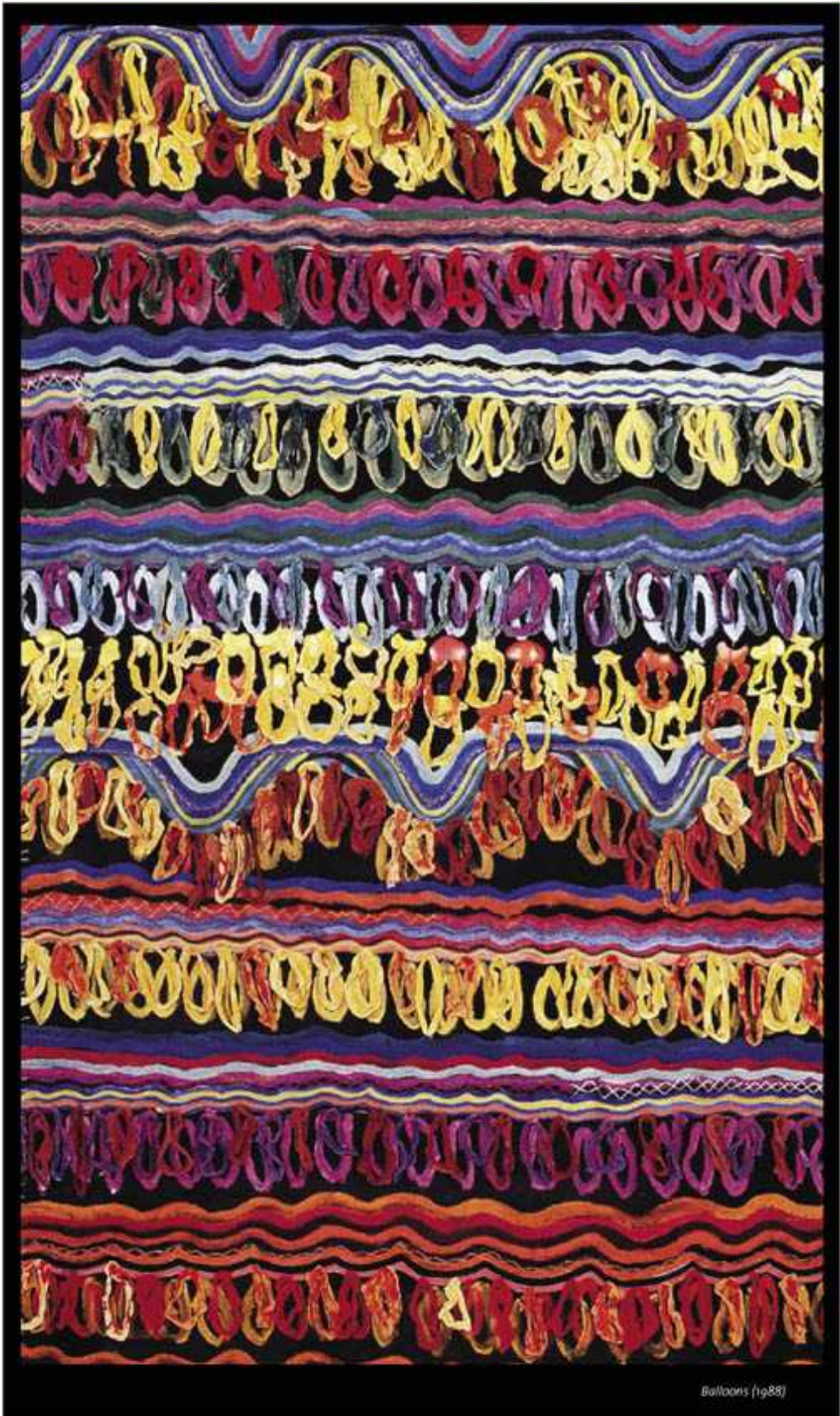
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Your visit was like a storm (1997)





Top: Collage of Yemen doors (1998) Bottom: Silver blue (2002)



Balloons (1988)



"I always see the world through color, although my vision, perspective and paintings are constantly influenced by new ideas and changing environments. I feel like I am an ambassador of colors, always projecting a positive mood that helps make the world smile."

— Pacita Abad

From Pacita Abad's earliest sketches and oils to her last collage and works on paper there has always been a compelling energy, one that speaks of an uninhibited zest for life and an appetite for experimentation. The boldly colored and often multidimensional structure of Abad's works have also served to confirm her as an artist for whom a universal vision is central to her being. This is clear in the figurative and abstract works that have made up the dynamic visual narrative of her art of the past three decades, which have included intensely moving statements on refugees and immigrants, as well as interpretations of numerous diverse cultures around the world and dramatic colorful abstractions of her personal thoughts. Her collection of works confirms that her voyage into self-discovery and experiment was intense to the end of her career.

Intensity of color, emotion, line, and patterning strike the eye and the imagination powerfully at the same time in almost all of Abad's works. The combination of color, emotion, line, and patterning seems to flood haphazardly from an artist so brim full of ideas and energy that there would appear scarcely enough time to get everything down on canvas or paper, or to bring order to the turbulent emotions simmering within the artist. The sheer vibrancy of the images sometimes overwhelms the eye for, at first glance, many of her works seem to be fortuitous collections of circles, triangles, squares, heavy lines, and confident color patterns. This is entirely deceptive, however, since Abad — though frequently spontaneous in the execution of an idea — was always fully in control of the outcome.

While one might be confident in accepting the boldness of Abad's vision of the world, her abstract work is rarely readily accessible emotionally and intellectually. The meanings of many of her pieces are frequently couched in deeply personal terms which inhibit interpretation. And while Abad may be intent in bringing a sense of joy to the world, on smiling on the world even in turbulent and painful times, our comprehension of this is to be embraced through her visually challenging art. This is Abad's way for she was letting us know that what one sees on the canvas, or the paper, or in the collage is an experience of the world not easily come by and not readily surrendered. It is only right that she should make our eyes and mind tussle with that which she has seen and felt.

Her intuition was not ours, of course, neither were her feelings and insights, but through observing her process we will surely be embraced by them, warmed by them, and matured by them. What Abad saw and felt and suggested in her works seems to the eye an effortless interpretation of her world. Yet our mind and imagination, tell us that it is not so since the subtlety of collage, the layering and juxtaposition of different materials requires a unique sense of time and space, and the understanding of emotion in making visual choices.

Always on the run (2004)



© *pacita abad*

Artist Profile

Pacita Abad (1946–2004) was born in Basco, Batanes, a small island in the northernmost part of the Philippines. Her more-than-thirty-year painting career began when she journeyed to the United States to pursue graduate studies. Following that trip, Pacita became committed to her painting and the joys of travel around the world. She studied painting at the Corcoran School of Art in Washington D.C. and The Art Students League in New York City, living on 5 different continents and working in more than 80 countries. Pacita's extensive travels to destinations like Guatemala, Mexico, India, Afghanistan, Yemen, Sudan, Mali, Papua New Guinea, Cambodia and Indonesia had a major impact on her life and art, and were the inspiration for many ideas, techniques and materials used in her paintings.

Pacita's art is characterized by constant change, experimentation and development. Pacita's body of work includes vibrantly colorful figurative and abstract works on a complete range of materials from canvas and paper to bark cloth, metal, ceramics and glass. A disciplined and prolific painter, Pacita created over 3,500 artworks and even painted a 55-meter long bridge in Singapore.

A truly global artist, Pacita had over 40 solo exhibitions at museums and galleries in the U.S., Asia, Europe, Africa and Latin America. She also participated in more than 50 group and traveling exhibitions throughout the world. Pacita's work is now in public, corporate and private art collections in over 70 countries. One of her works is in the collection of the Smithsonian Museum of American Art and three very special artworks are part of the World Bank's Institutional Art Collection.



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