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Inspire

Passionate about Pacita

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On the 40th day after artist Pacita Abad's passing on Jan. 17, the Ateneo Library of Women's Writings (ALIWW) hosted Parangal for Pacita Abad at the St. Thomas More Garden. A very prolific artist, Ms. Abad exhibited in some 80 countries all over the world throughout her long and literally colorful career.

An exhibition of a selection of her art, personal papers, interviews, and memorabilia is on view at the Pardo de Tavera Room in the Ateneo's Rizal Library Building.

Corazon Alvina, director of the National Museum, delivered a lecture to honor the visual artist in behalf of The Helenica Foundation. Formerly known as the Ellen Francisco Fajardo Foundation, The Helenica Foundation awarded an endowment fund to ALIWW to establish an annual exhibition or lecture in honor of an outstanding Filipina in the visual arts. Parangal for Pacita Abad is the fifth of its kind. Past exhibitions were held in honor of Julie Lluch, Araceli Dans, Nene Saguil, and Anna Fer.

As former director of the Metropolitan Museum of Manila, Ms. Alvina has worked with Ms. Abad in an exhibition of her big trapuntos and large mixed-media works. "I was tasked to curate this show and to this day I consider it one of the most exhilarating exhibitions I have put together," said Ms. Alvina.

"As a curator, working with a good work is half the undertaking. Working with the art of Pacita was professionally gratifying and delectable... her technique inviting empathy and identification."

Ms. Alvina also curated Thinking Big, a back-to-back exhibition of works by Ms. Abad and Paz Abad Santos; At Home and Abroad: 20 Contemporary Artists, which included Ms. Abad; and Alab ng Puso, Met's centennial exhibition.

"Pacita's works for Thinking Big presented faces of immigration, images of Philippine

social issues, environmental inspirations, and expressions of her unadulterated passion for color, texture, and form in art seen at every thrust and turn of the needle, whatever the substance and content of her work," noted Ms. Alvina.

"I had not seen anyone use a thimble while handsewing for a long time," she recalled. "Without missing a stitch, she said that she liked using buttons in her trapuntos because buttons reminded her of Filipinos. Filipinos and buttons had potentials for different roles and functions... could also not be overly visible, appear to disappear even as they added to the texture of trapuntos, and to that of life wherever the Filipino chooses to be."

In 100 Years of Freedom -- From Batanes to Jolo, part of Alab ng Puso exhibit, Ms. Abad mounted a 15 x 15-foot work that incorporated textiles from all over the Philippines. The artist noted this work was "a quilt of the archipelago's cultures" as well as a story of her relationships with family, community, country, and friends.

Ms. Alvina concluded that, "Pacita's artworks truly reflect her commitment to her connection to those near and dear to her. They are unselfish revelations of her passions, her convictions and opinions, as well as a sharing of her emotions, her joy of life, her life."

Also present during the event were the artist's brother Department of Education Sec. Florencio Abad; Ian Findlay-Brown, chief editor of Asian Art News and her biographer; and Jack Garrity, her husband.

Mr. Abad said that they never expected Pacita to become an artist. On the contrary, she was being trained for a life in politics since their father was long-serving congressman of Batanes. "We never had an inkling, except for her miniskirts and big bangles, that she was going to be an artist," quipped Mr. Abad.

To their family's surprise, Ms. Abad left law school and went abroad. One day she wrote she was coming home to do a solo exhibition. "We were all concerned that she may not be the big hit that we wanted her to be in this country after being gone for 10 years," he recalled.

But with that first exhibition, Ms. Abad proved to be on her way to becoming one of the country's most important artists. Her family could only wonder, "Where did she get that?"

Mr. Abad expressed his gratitude to ALIWW for the recognition they gave his sister. "You allow her to be known, to be shared, to be understood, to be appreciated by more and more people who recognize her as the great artist that she was and continues to be in her works that reflect her passion and dedication."

"When someone as unique as Pacita passes away, [it seems] a light has gone out of the world," said Mr. Findlay-Brown. "But it didn't. Her works continue that light. The light does not die. We die."

He believes that there is more to Ms. Abad's works than the brightly colors of her trapuntos. Rather, her works signify that "Life has to be lived. Life is about moments. Those moments add up to a full life. And the life that really matters is that which you pass on to others."

Ms. Abad's partner for 31 years, Mr. Garrity pointed out her zeal to go on despite her illness. One of her last projects, the Painted Bridge in Singapore, was done as she went to the hospital for checkups. Her doctors were amazed at her will; she never once admitted to being in pain. "Fine, doctor, fine," was her answer when doctors asked her how she felt.

He also pointed out the huge influence Ms. Abad brought into his life, teaching him to wear colorful and light clothes for one. "It was not I who made her to who she is. Pacita made me into what I am.

"I'm confident that in a hundred years, no one won't know Pacita and her paintings."