

Press release

Pacita Abad, Tosh Basco, Ser Serpas

20 November 2024 - 2 February 2025

Opening 19 November, 6 - 8 pm

Karma International is proud to present the exhibition of works by Pacita Abad, Tosh Basco and Ser Serpas.

To quote the title of Abad's retrospective exhibition at Museum of Contemporary Art and Design in Manila in 2018, there is "a million things to say" about her work: born in 1946 in Basco, Batanes in the Philippines, the artist produced an immensely rich oeuvre crossing media and genres, including prints and paintings, often presented in immersive installations that were reminiscent of the intimacy and directness of studio spaces she used at various locations around the globe during three decades of her intense work as an artist, before she passed in 2004. Abad studied political science and law in Philippines and left the country in 1969 following her involvement in the student political movement confronting the Marcos regime. She received a degree in Asian history at the University of California, Berkeley in 1973 and decided to become a painter in 1974, pursuing formal training at Corcoran School of Art in Washington, DC. But more importantly, she traveled incessantly in the Global South, including Asia, Central and South America, Africa, Middle East and Australia, thoughtfully absorbing cultures that stretch far away the Western canon, and bearing witness to histories largely ignored in the discourse of the Western minority that attempted to dominate the world in the framework of coloniality. Abad worked, without stopping, to open doors and windows to the world's possible other futures outside of that framework. Abad's titles often read as small manifestoes, or calls for action, such as *Let everything around you reflect it*, 1998—a "mirror" painted in oil and acrylic on dyed and painted cloth stitched on canvas, reflecting the "everything," in equally abstract frame—both the "mirror" and its frame adding up to a dedifferentiated totality of experience. Modestly sized paintings from 1997, *Bathurst door* and *Bathurst design*, echo the indigenous patterns perpetually kept alive by Wiradjuri people, the Aboriginal Australians of New South Wales, subjugated but not defeated by the British during Bathurst Wars between 1813 and 1850. The origin of pattern making in the floral world can be traced in *Gumamelas in my garden*, 2004, an aerial view of hibiscus flowers growing in all colors. *Stained glass door in Sanaa*, 1998 (not on display), is a frontal representation of a traditional glass door in Yemen's capital – a powerful antidote to the currently prevailing (albeit only in the Western world of CNN) perception of Yemen as the hotbed of terrorism. Doors are portals to a world that is a possibility, of flight and respite, as suggested by *I am by the door in a second*, 1999. For *Door Connects me to the Greatest Happiness I Have Known*, 1999—the title of another piece in the show, made with oil, painted cloth, and buttons stitched on padded canvas, explains it all.

Tosh Basco is an American-born performance artist whose work also navigates photography, drawing and sound. At Karma International, several drawings on canvas and paper are included that betray their genealogy in performance. They are residues of ambidextrous mark-making, moved by the motion of the body and rejecting the idea of disegno as an activity of the skilled hand moved by speculative mind. All Not yet titled, all made in 2021, these recent works are mobilis in mobili — triggered by affective movement and recording the process of their own transition at the same time. Some drawings are executed on sheets of paper in the ringbinder, the margin dotted by holes, suggesting another movement—that of pages of a diary, turned fast and carefully torn out.

Ser Serpas (born in Los Angeles, 1995) works with sculpture, painting, poetry, found objects and photography. The artist shares her time between New York, Tbilisi, Paris and Geneva—where she founded a project space Cherish with fellow artists and curators, James Bantone, Mohamed Almusibli and Thomas Liu Le Lann. Incorporating discarded consumer objects, household appliances, elements of urban infrastructure and other materials found in the streets of big cities, Serpas introduces myriad new disorders into the unified, global capitalist schizophrenia. She is a notorious Baudelairean ragpicker of our diehard modernity, adding to the misery instead of making things better through small improvements. Serpas's sculptures are borne out of hit-and-run action, leaving the scene smoking and protagonists in pieces: see sick breath now, 2024, featuring a broken fire hydrant reclining on a homemade three-tier metal workshop trolley, with words HOBS and DRUMS clumsily handpainted in red on upper shelf—a prophecy of unknown disaster coming. Untitled (studio party), likewise 2024, is a large, folded painting on tarp, which can also be shown on vertical surface, with inflatable silver letters scattered over, from which an optimistic phrase HAPPY BIRTHDAY can be figured out. That party is over, and Serpas knowingly works through past catastrophes and moments of shared happiness, navigating to yet unknown destinations.

Adam Szymczyk