

PRESS RELEASE

ABSTRACT EMOTIONS APRIL 1998

PACITA ABAD HOLDS PHILIPPINE CENTENNIAL PAINTING EXHIBITION IN JAKARTA

As part of the year-long and worldwide celebration of the Philippine Centennial, commemorating 100 years of independence, the Philippine Embassy in Jakarta presents an exhibition of the works of Philippine artist Pacita Abad at the National Museum, from April 29 to May 17, 1998.

Newly appointed Minister of Education and Culture, Mr. Wiranto Arismunandar will open the exhibit.

Called "Abstract Emotions," the one-woman show features Abad's latest collection of paintings inspired by textiles from Yogyakarta and Sumba, trips to aboriginal lands in Australia's Northern Territory, and by the recent Montreaux Jazz Festival in Switzerland.

As in most of her works, but especially in her abstractions, Abad--who simply signs her canvases "Pacita"-- exults in the use of strong, brilliant colors in "AbstractEmotions."

Appreciatively, Ian Findlay-Brown, chief editor of Asian Art News and the author of the book Pacita Abad: Exploring the Spirit --published in 1996, observes: "It is with color that one begins with Pacita's abstract paintings...nothing in her world can be disconnected from it. The power of color is the very heart of her artistic experience."

Pacita's works have been featured in solo exhibition in Asia, the United States of America, Latin America and Europe. She has participated in over 100 group exhibitions internationally. Her paintings are collected by museums and private and public collectors throughout the world.

Her latest exhibit at the National Museum is her third in Indonesia. She held her first one-woman show in Jakarta in 1994, which featured as one of several significant art events on the occasion of the APEC Economic Leaders Meeting hosted by Indonesian President Soeharto.

Art critics hailed her work of "Wayang, Irian and Sumba" paintings with "trapunto" as her medium. This was followed in 1996 by an exhibit of her 100 large, colorful paintings, incorporating Indonesian motifs like batik and ikat, at the National Gallery of Art of Indonesia (Gedung Pameran Seni Rupa).

Born in Batanes, the northmost island of the Philippines, Pacita holds a degree in political science from the University of the Philippines and an M.A. in Asian history from the University of San Francisco. It was in San Francisco, in the early 70's, that she met with artists and began to paint. In 1975, she pursued formal training in art at the Corcoran School of Art in Washington, D.C., and later attended the Art Students League of New York.

"Abstract Emotions" is co-sponsored by the Directorate General of Culture, Philippine Airlines, Communications Counselors and the Jakarta-based Setia-Kawan Ala ala Foundation.

ARTIST STATEMENT

My work has always been influenced by my travels, primitive art and the social and political impact of the places I have been. Living and painting in different parts of Asia including Thailand, Cambodia, Philippines and Indonesia has been very rewarding because of my exposure to their culture, people and their art. My work reflects the spirit in each place I visit and tries to incorporate local materials like tie-dye, batik, shells, beads and hand-woven yarn to illustrate an image.

I have observed over the past twenty years that weather and cultural surroundings have a major impact on my painting. I moved to Washington, D.C. in 1986 and stayed for eight years. I moved to Jakarta, Indonesia in 1993 and I still remember vividly what one friend told me when I was living in the U.S.: he said that my colors were losing intensity, and right then and there I knew it was time to get back to my Asian roots. Being back in Asia, I can't help but be impressed by the vibrancy and vitality that I see here. This is noticeable in the bustling population, booming businesses and the explosion of contemporary art.

Although I have lived and worked all over the world, I still feel like there are essential aspects of my work that is Filipino and Asian. In the last fifteen years I have developed this unusual technique I call Trapunto Painting. What exactly is trapunto? It is a high relief worked through two layers and on the surface to give the work a puffed-out or three-dimensional effect. Trapunto Painting is a form of canvas collage incorporating sewing, embroidery, tie-dyeing, assembling and /or painting on padded canvas. Many Filipinos have been known for the painting and needlepoint, and a combination of these skills produces a good trapunto painting.

My subject matter has included socio-political paintings criticizing the Marcos administration and the social situation in the Philippines. The closest affiliation I would have with regards to this is in the painting I call The Filipina, A Racial Identity Crisis. This focuses on two women, the fair-skinned Maria Isabel very much influenced by Spaniards and the brown-complexioned Liwayway Etnika who comes from the original Malay tribes scattered in the villages all over the country. They represent the opposing racial strains that make the modern-day Filipina confused who she is behind the color of her skin. As you may have guessed I lean more towards the tribal Filipina and that may explain why I am so interested in remote, exotic and distant places like Papua New Guinea, Cambodia and Indonesia.

My two on-going projects are the "Asian Masks" and the "Immigration Experience" series. Masks play a major role in my art as I am interested in the role the mask plays in each culture like the masks I painted from Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Papua New Guinea, Thailand and the Philippines. Say, for example, in the Philippines – I had this large trapunto painting I call Marcos and His Cronies. This painting was started in Sri Lanka and I patterned it after the medicine men. Then I brought it to the Philippines and continued working on it – this was during the time of Marcos in 1985 when he and his wife would go on a grand spending spree and the rest of the country was hungry. It took me two and a half years to work on the monumental painting (250 x 150 inches) which portrays the President with his cabinet members and stepping on his bejewelled wife, Imelda. The President is surrounded by all the dots which are plastic, colored buttons sewn on, and they represent the Filipinos; light, colorful and all over the place.

My other on-going project portrays the American immigration experience of people of color – especially those coming from Asia. It did not initially start as a series, but as individual portraits of people I encountered during the last twenty years. This includes a trapunto painting I call I Thought the Streets Were Paved With Gold.