

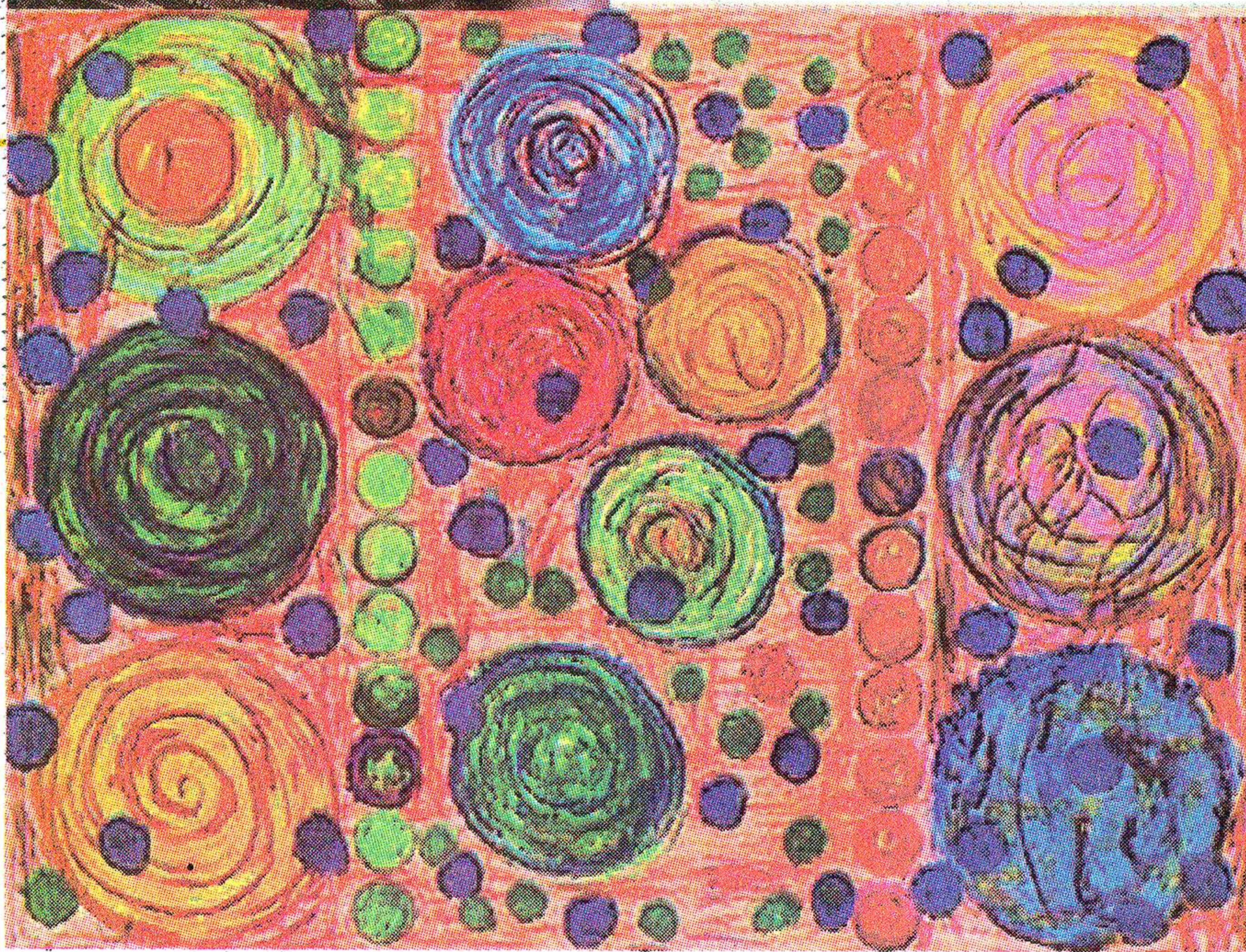


THE ARTS & CULTURE

THE MONDAY LIFESTYLE SECTION OF THE PHILIPPINE STAR

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Pacita Abad goes big in her latest show that ponders the circle in its myriad forms.



"Make Love Not War" by Pacita Abad

Pacita Abad ponders the circle

ARTWEB



By RUBEN DEFE0

All roads led to the CCP last Sept. 9 when Pacita Abad opened her big exhibit, entitled *Circles in my Mind*, featuring close to a hundred works. The exhibit runs until Oct. 31.

In a lunch meeting with exhibit organizers, Abad was casually asked why she chose circles as the carrying motif for her works. She quickly retorted without recoil:

"And why not circles?"

Expectedly, the conversation that ensued went around in circles, until everyone was humming the lyrics to Michel Legrand's *The Windmills of Your Mind*.

Round, like a circle in a spiral

Like a wheel within a wheel

Never ending, or beginning

On an ever-spinning wheel

And indeed, why not circles?

In everyman's visual vocabulary from the beginning of time, the circle has become a pervasive presence.

From the ritual rings and bracelets that adorned our pagan forbears to the prayer beads that balm today's believers, from the glass marbles and paper balls of early childhood games to the gilded CDs and digital versatile discs of high technology leisure, circles are here to stay.

The works in exhibition come in small, medium and large sizes, all executed on paper. They foreground the artist's way with materials and processes.

A variety of materials circuit the series. They may well have been sparked by the extent with which circles have electrified much of contemporary life. The plethora of processes Pacita employs — painting, printing, pasting, piercing, pouncing, peeling, and making a hybrid

of painting and printmaking, sewing and stenciling, collaging and de-collaging — amplifies the very same attitude.

Pacita shows that the circle as a visual shape rotates, mutates and concatenates. Ergo, the ideas of cyclical movement, of evolution, development, or growth, and of interconnectedness wire the paintings in a network.

Circles in My Mind follows Abad's highly successful three-month stint at the Singapore Tyler Print Institute in 2003. The first Filipino artist to have been invited by STPI to participate in its Visiting Artists Program to further the language and medium of printmaking, she gladly took the challenge by converting her critically and internationally acclaimed *trapunto* art of quilted textiles to works on handmade paper.

Like her *trapunto* tapestries, the works on paper display the same spirit of spunk and gay abandon. The feeling for highly textured surfaces, the audacious way with color, using as many as 44 hues all at the same time, and the indefatigable oomph that sustains the works, have remained enviably consistent.

Collectively, the works enable the viewer to conjure a pantheon of circles seen everywhere and which are very much a part of everyday life — the sun that shines in the morning and the moon that glows at night, the knobs to open and close doors, or the tri-colored lights of red, yellow and green to either ease or jam traffic on the road.

Rain or shine, the circle of an umbrella provides shelter. Male or female, gender signs embody the circle as a shared motif. And when one tosses a pebble in a stream, nature ripples with concentric circles.

In keeping with her multi-faceted persona, Abad's art is dizzying and busy. Her works joyously reflect the rich cultures of Asia, America and Europa — from the igloo of Alaska to the *colosseo* of Roma, from the mandala of India and China to the cupola of Italia. She transports her viewer around the world. For again, the world is round, ergo, a circle.

The universe may just be round, too. The solar system revolves around the concept that all heavenly bodies rotate around the sun, the biggest circle that lights the cosmos. The planets are also circular, where even the satellites that go around them, like the moon in the earth's case, are round. Hence, the circle aptly represents the concept of time, night or day.

Nicolaus Copernicus discovered the solar system in 1543, at the height of the Baroque in Europe. But prior this discovery, the circle already informed many developments in human life. The invention of the wheel, from where contemporary tires evolved, happened in Asia and Africa circa 4000 to 3500 BC and facilitated man's commerce with life. It sped up conveyance as it eased pottery, birthing myriad forms from the utilitarian clay water jugs of the Neolithic man to the princely decorative porcelains of China.

The circular stone architecture in the United Kingdom — the Stonehenge included — dates as far back as 3000 BC. By 650 BC, the Persians were recorded using windmills to generate energy. At the same time, the manufacture of coins in Lydia in Asia propagated trade. Circular domed churches mushroomed during the Byzantine period in the sixth century — all to stress the symbolic character of the geometric shape derived from the *ouroboros*, or the image of



"Wild Thing I Think I Like It"

a snake biting its tail, to intimate spiritual infinity of Christ as both beginning and end.

By 1498, Vasco de Gama, distinguished as the first explorer to circumnavigate the world, declared that the earth was round.

These amazing accounts must have influenced Abad's fascination with the circle.

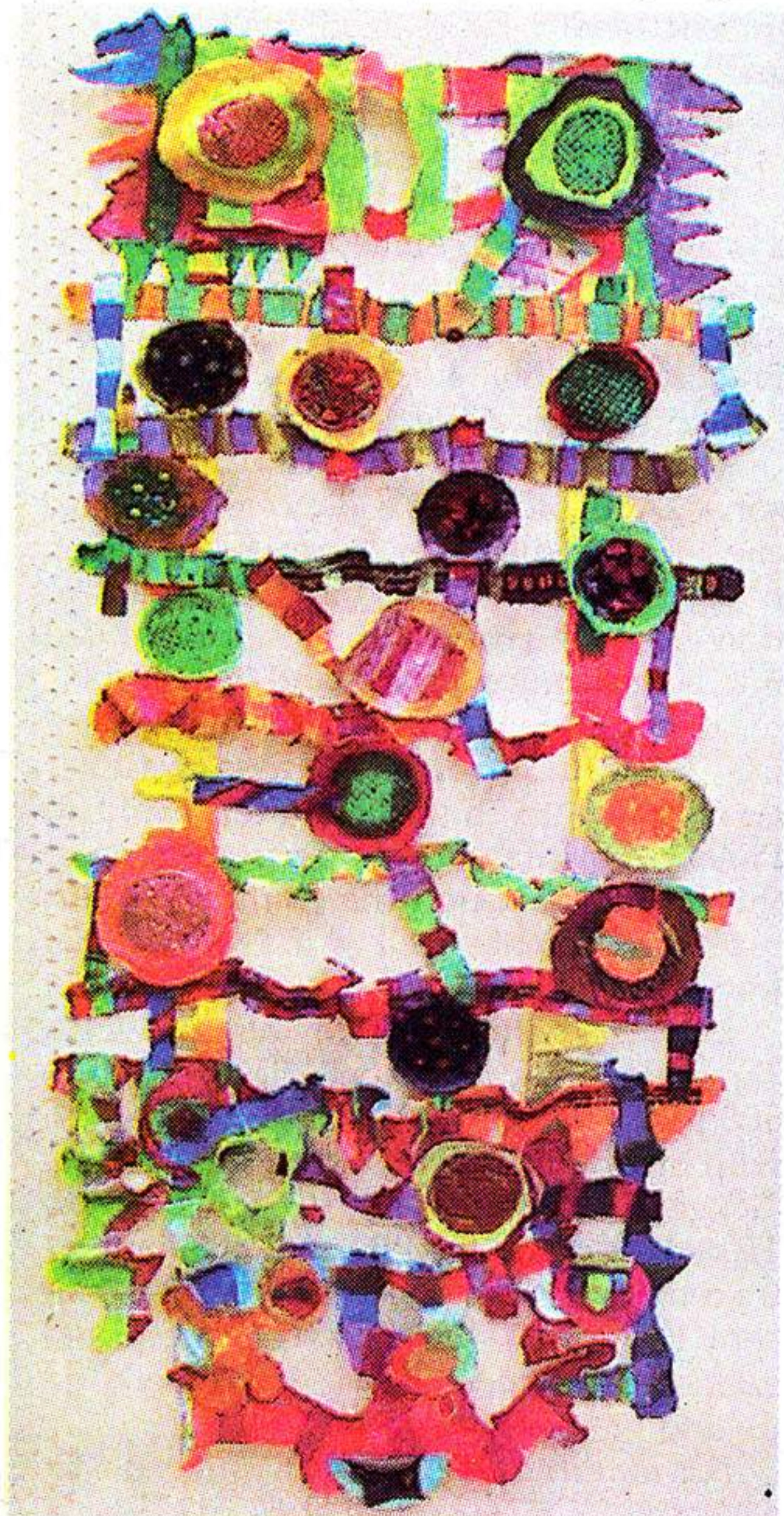
As an iconography in Philippine art, it has a time-honored and enduring tradition. She joins Nena Saguil, José Joya, Napoleon Abueva and Nestor Olarte Vinluan, among a host of others, in paying paeon to the circle.

In her case, the circle does not confine. On the contrary, it is harnessed for its liberating power. She emphasizes the circle as a unifying theme for her art due to its strength in alluding to visual metaphors for things both abstract and real. If the Indians catch dreams and moonbeams in circular traps, who knows? The mind may also be in the shape of a circle: Infinite, boundless, and continuing? Indeed, imagination overflows. And for Abad, the circle does not implode. It explodes.

One, in the end, is tempted to ask: Where does she get all the energy to do art?

No one particular rhetoric can adequately answer the question. For the art of Pacita Abad, like the celestial sun, is emptyrean.

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"Bra Sale"