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PARA SA MGA PILING PILIPINO

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# FilPost



## Pacita's Passion

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# for paper



Filpost continues to cover the whereabouts of renowned Filipino artist, Pacita Abad. A painter of Pacita's calibre would always be in the thick of things, harnessing her craft for exhibition in art galleries around the globe. Indeed, the prolific artist has developed a loyal following for her creations – all concrete manifestations of her creative dynamism and flourishing innovative spirit. This time, Pacita applies her artistic flair on paper as part of her 3-month residency at the Singapore Tyler Print Institute (STPI) at 41 Robertson Quay.

### Pacita's New World

Pacita's flamboyant use of colors, shapes and textures incorporated with the process of advanced printmaking and papermaking is redefining the conventional portfolio of paper prints produced in Singapore. She becomes an eager teacher-apprentice as she learns to apply her painting techniques onto a new medium, paper pulp.

Inside STPI's papermill, Pacita seriously eyed the engaging panels of paper artworks laid out in front of her. Glad in an artist's work clothes and perched on top of a ladder, Pacita was conferring with Master Papermaker Richard Hungerford. Meanwhile, Gordon, another STPI talent, was adding onto the huge artwork, an interesting pattern made of hand-dyed paper pulp.

We scanned the premises of STPI. It is definitely a five-star printmaking and papermaking facility! And it is right here in Singapore! The Institute's neatly-assembled work stations emerged into full view as Matin Tran, STPI's Head of Communications, Marketing and Sales, took us on a comprehensive tour of the impressive 4,000-square meter facility which also houses a state-of-the-art printmaking workshop and contemporary art gallery.

Pacita's enthusiasm when we met her in February was just as noticeable two months after she started her residency at STPI. She was passionate about working on prints, something which she did ten years ago. At STPI's Artist Studio, Pacita's artistic fervor flashed vividly before our eyes. Stretched on the walls and laid out on the floors was her stunning collection of multi-colored works done on pulp paper. The studio is decked with Pacita's new artworks – bright collages of prints artistically blending into multi-colored patterns of dyed paper, batik cloth and thin panels of wood carvings. The lushness and fullness of the aesthetic mass of ink and fabric colors over multiple layers of paper pulp are breathtaking when one sees the perfect crispness of the underlying paper surface.

A bit exhausted but nonetheless excited about her work, Pacita gazed at her paintings. "Oh! It's about the marriage of paper and fabric!" Pacita's voice rose in excitement. "You know it's amazing because the paper is done right here at the Institute. I have traveled to so many places, but I have never seen anything as integrated as this facility. The fact that there is a close collaboration between the artist and the technical people creates better quality artworks. Here, I have learned a lot about papermaking and printmaking."

Matin clarified the misconception that paper prints are mere reproductions of the artist's paintings. "The artist, together with a master printer and his team, develops an image on one or more printing surfaces, such as a stone or a copper plate – depending on the process used – which is then inked with colour and run through a press to transfer the image onto paper. The process is refined until both the artist and the master printer are satisfied. This is then meticulously repeated for each print, creating original impressions to make an entire edition. We are fortunate to have our own paper mill, which is rare among print workshops. This allows us to create custom-made paper for each artist that we collaborate with, offering a diversity of texture, shape and size. It also allows the artist to create works entirely out of paper pulp itself, which is what Pacita has done."

STPI's unparalleled excellence in printmaking is primarily attributed to the collaborative relationship between the resident artists and its remarkable team of international printers and papermakers. It becomes an interactive learning process as the collaborators acquire new knowledge about their respective techniques, and apply the techniques themselves to create original artworks.

### STPI signals new era of advanced printmaking

"I would love to have Filipinos come over and see the work that we are doing here," Pacita is the latest resident artist to come under STPI's Visiting Artists Programme. Each year, STPI aims to invite six top-calibre artists – mostly from Asia, to work with its team of prominent master printers and papermakers. Pacita's stint comes after that of Singaporean artist Chua Ek Kay whose impressive portfolio of lithographs and paper pulp paintings are currently on exhibit at STPI's gallery.

A non-profit organization, STPI turned a year old last 10



*Pacita's ultimate dream is to have her prints reach as many people. "I want it to be as accessible as possible to people all over the world and STPI is helping me realize that dream." Through printmaking, STPI is able to create works with Pacita that are more accessible and affordable to people from different continents.*



April 2003. It is performing a critical role in improving and refining the standards of contemporary printmaking worldwide, as well as, the quality of gallery exhibitions. Last year, STPI opened with a launch exhibition of the exemplary paintings and sculptures of legendary and multi-awarded American abstractionist, Frank Stella. Through workshops and tours, STPI is spawning greater public awareness and cultivating appreciation for prints in and out of Singapore. Having a three-fold objective, STPI's spacious facility is used for advanced printmaking and papermaking, for education, and art exhibitions.

The articulate Marketing Head of STPI, Matin, gave us interesting bits of STPI's history and strengths. Every detail of STPI's architectural design and layout has been carefully planned to achieve an efficient work area. STPI was founded by the Singapore Government in collaboration with the veteran Master Printer, Kenneth Tyler, who played a key role in revolutionizing the printmaking industry in America over the past 40 years. The Government acquired all the printmaking equipment for STPI from Tyler's famous New York workshop called Tyler Graphics Limited. With its state-of-the-art facility, STPI is able to set new standards in the industry, as it produces superior quality prints that push the boundaries of printmaking and papermaking. "Our diversity of equipment and technical bravo offers us the potential to create, together with artists, prints that combine various processes in a scale and variety that compete with other leading print workshops around the world."

STPI is scheduled to launch a showcase of Pacita's works from from 23 October to 28 December this year. Matin acknowledges that the market in Singapore for paper prints is promising. He has seen a growing interest among young art collectors. "There is a growing market in Singapore, but Pacita's works are known all over the world. We are working together to tap our networks in Europe, the Philippines and other parts of Asia", says Matin.

### Light Moments with Pacita

Taking a break at the end of a day's work, Pacita relaxed in her lofty and cosy apartment housed at the STPI's quarters. Over cups of steaming cappuccino and slices of delicious banana-walnut bread, which Pacita baked herself, we caught some personal glimpses of the mindset of this highly innovative artist.

Being around Pacita brings about a renewed sense of optimism, something which is essential in these troubled times. Pacita shrugs off any anxiety about the SARS virus spread. "I am not restricted by the virus. I believe that there is nothing to be scared of, just like what Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong has been saying. They are undertaking all safety and control measures to protect the people." Pacita goes about her normal activities outside of work – like taking her dog for a walk at 6 o'clock in the morning, attending socials, and playing golf on weekends."

Asked how she keeps her mind brewing with ideas, she lightened up and gave us handy advice. "I love to read books – autobiographies, novels. I have so many books at home. It's a hobby that I have developed since childhood. I relish the time when I'm alone as I get to indulge in reading. After my early morning walks, I read four different dailies – The Straits Times, Business Times, Financial Times and The Herald. I never miss out on the New Yorker, which I get to read once a week. I love New York and I am keen to know what's happening there. Reading gives me the confidence to talk to people from different backgrounds."

Pacita credits a lot of her success to her mother who has equipped them with the right tools to reach their ambitions. "She encouraged all her children to travel. My mother did not finish high school but she was very bright. She told us that traveling is the best education. She built up her knowledge of Philippine law by reading law books to my father who had no time to study because he was always busy working."

It is amazing how Pacita finds the energy to work almost everyday. "I am very passionate about my art. I (unconsciously) breathe art, think art and live art. As an artist, my mind is constantly attuned to my paintings. Sometimes, I can't sleep at night because I'm thinking of my work. Oh, what would I do with that yellow? The yellow keeps coming to my mind."

Precious opportunities are knocking on the doors of world-class artist Pacita, who will soon be traveling to Norway for some painting exhibitions and France, where she will undertake another project. Pacita is taking Philippine contemporary art to a higher platform and breaking international barriers. Her achievements generate greater appreciation for the Filipino talent. Indeed, Pacita's print designs will travel to remote places all over the world, eventually promoting the rich artistic heritage of Filipinos. Art museums, international galleries, offices and homes in many countries showcase her aesthetically and technically advanced artworks. With so many art luminaries from Europe, America and Asia, it makes every Filipino proud to have an indigenous artist like Pacita Abad make an invaluable contribution to the development of contemporary international art.