

Hope in Endless Blues

There's nothing negative about Pacita Abad's Endless Blues. It bubbles with optimism, the same way she bounced back after a year-long battle with cancer

By CLARA CHOW

FILIPINO painter Pacita Abad is bouncing back after a year-long battle with lung cancer.

Diagnosed with the illness last December, she underwent treatment and was given a clean bill of health five months ago.

Wearing a tiger-striped outfit, she glows with energy.

She is exhibiting her new works at Artfolio Space until Dec 15. Titled Endless Blues, the exhibition — her third solo show here — features 32 paintings inspired by American blues music and the Sept 11 tragedy. Prices range from \$800 to \$18,000.

The gregarious 56-year-old, her long hair now cut into a stylish spiky 'do, says: "I wanted to challenge the perception of the blues. Endless

blues may not necessarily always be sad. It's a positive outlook."

Testament to that, her paintings are suffused with bright yellows, impulsive oranges, hot reds and sprawling greens.

One striking piece is a batik-on-canvas collage titled Blue, after the album by 1960s folk-rock singer Joni Mitchell.

Says the artist: "I worked on that piece after my chemotherapy sessions. It brought me peace of mind."

Other paintings bear blue-inspired names such as Red Hot And Blue, Tangled Up In Blues (from a Bob Dylan song), Blues And The City and The Moody Blues.

Little wonder then that homegrown Universal Blues Band played during the opening of her exhibition last Friday.

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The show will move on to Norway, then Washington, after Singapore.

Abad, one of the best-known artists in Asia, is comfortable with the tag of feminist painter.

Many Singaporeans would have seen her mural Celebration And Joy, commissioned by Singapore Expo, which graces its foyer.

She gets her woman-centric views from her mother, Philippines congresswoman Aurora Abad. She learnt how to sew from her mother, a skill which she now uses to create mixed-media works with stitched-on fabric. For example, a work titled Deleted Lines uses cloth that she collected on a visit to Afghanistan in 1975.

Even the handbag she carries is decorated with silver trinkets from her

travels to Yemen.

During her illness, she was placed on a "travel ban" by her doctor.

She recalls jokingly: "It was like house arrest."

Now that she is well, she is globe-trotting again.

As Veronica Howe, owner of Artfolio, observes: "In her last two shows here, Pacita's paintings were crammed with information. But in this one, her style has crystallised. She dares to leave the works be, letting her objects speak to you."

◆ Endless Blues is on at Artfolio Space (Raffles Hotel Arcade, #02-25, tel: 6334-4866) until Dec 15. Opening hours: 11 am to 7.30 pm daily. Admission is free.



ERNEST GOH

ORANGES ARE NICE: Abad's paintings are suffused with bright yellows and hot reds.