

# Fruits of her travels

By LAURIE GRANIERI  
On the Go Writer

**D**on't try to figure out Pacita Abad; it won't work.

Abad, 55, is a native of Basco, Batanes, a group of islands in the northern Philippines. She emigrated to the United States in 1970.

She is a modern-day nomad, living for years at a time in China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Sudan and Tripoli. She's been living in Singapore for the last seven years.

## PALAY

Trapunto murals by Pacita Abad

Through Dec. 15

Montclair State University Art Galleries

Valley Road and Normal Avenue,  
Upper Montclair

FREE

(973) 655-7640

Wherever Abad is, she is an artist, taking in the local show — the sights, the smells, all of it.

Seven of her mixed-media *trapunto* murals are on display at Montclair State University Art Galleries through Dec. 15 in an exhibit called "Palay."

The works are contemporary, abstract, undulating and dense, and "mixed media" doesn't even begin to describe them: They are constructed of canvas in the *trapunto* technique (*trapunto* is Italian for quilting). The surface is painted and covered with a variety of found objects — anything from Kenyan shells to sequins, Indian mirrors, buttons and bits of lace from Latin America.



Montclair State University

"To Paint in Ecstasy" is a *trapunto* mural by Pacita Abad.

"These are her souvenirs," says M. Teresa Lapid Rodriguez, acting director of the Montclair State University Art Galleries.

"She would pick things from her travels. She doesn't travel like a tourist. She becomes involved with the culture and the people," Rodriguez says. "The things she picks up are things she really knows."

Rodriguez is the curator of "Palay," and she's enchanted by Abad's work.

"It's very busy," Rodriguez explains. "She uses canvas, but it looks more like tapestry. The finished product is a cross between fine arts and craft. It is inspired by rice ('Palay' means rice in Tagalog), the overall curving design."

The seven murals are part of a 30-mural series (Abad always works in series, Rodriguez says) called "Oriental Abstrac-

tion Series."

Her work is "pioneering," Rodriguez says, "in the sense that Pacita Abad was the first person to introduce this kind of art," meaning *trapunto* and a surface highly worked with found materials the viewer might not expect to see side by side.

Although Abad seems, in many respects, to be a citizen of the world, the rice references are interesting to explore in light of her Filipino identity.

"Rice is a staple food in the whole of Asia," Rodriguez says. "There's a lot of rituals generated over hundreds of years on account of rice-growing."

In many countries, including the Philippines, rice is associated with prosperity. In fact, Rodriguez says, a tribal group in the northern Philippines

**art ♦ preview**

measures wealth by how much of one's land is devoted to tilling rice.

"The rice stalk is not straight. It bends, it bends gracefully," she says, pointing to the same movement in Abad's work.

"Each curator has a tough time (defining) her," Rodriguez admits. Abad's work is abstract, expressionistic in style, Rodriguez says, but her materials are in the craft realm.

Ultimately, it seems, Abad is a maverick, defying convention and definition. She is Filipino. She is American. She is crafts-woman, artist, creator.

"She's the quintessential traveler," Rodriguez says, "an adventurer."

A symposium, "Bringing Filipino-American Art to the Mainstream," takes place 1-4 p.m. tomorrow in Montclair State University's Calcia Auditorium. It features a review of Filipino-American art, a discussion about the Filipino community and America, and it provides resource information for Filipino-American artists.

General admission is \$5, \$3 for senior citizens. If you do not register in advance, admission is an extra \$1 at the door.

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