



PACITA ABAD

Exploring the Spirit

Brilliantly colourful, bursting with vitality and composed of multiple layers - the description fits both Pacita Abad and her art like a glove. "I love colour," says Pacita with great enthusiasm, and this is plain to see. Her house is a riot of rich tropical colours, decorated with many of her truly wonderful works which vary from small works on canvas, bark and her own handmade paper to huge, fantastically coloured, three dimensional *trapunto* (derived from an Italian word meaning to sew and stuff) canvases and silk-screens incorporating a diverse range of materials

from buttons and mirrors to *kain ikat* (traditional cloth) and batik fabrics.

Pacita's art is a product of years of travel which combine to give her a very worldly aura. In 1970 she went to San Francisco from her home in the Philippines to study Law, but once there she met a number of artists and began to paint. She soon developed an all-consuming passion for art that has strengthened throughout the years. "I worked part-time for the college as an art director and that was the start. I thought 'To hell with law. This is what I want to do, this is my future, this is my destiny.'"

Pacita could not have made a decision with more foresight. In 1973 she met Jack Garrity and set off to travel overland from Turkey to Asia, "I have been on the road ever since," she says. Her early paintings are a product of her travels through Bangladesh, the Philippines, Thailand, Sudan and the Dominican Republic. Further travel inspired her second series; depictions of primitive masks from Africa, Papua New Guinea and Indonesia. Learning to scuba dive resulted in her third series; large scale paintings of underwater scenes and tropical flowers. Her fourth series has been her abstract works on canvas, bark and paper.

Pacita's art has been entirely influenced by the multicultural world in which she lives. "I am so attracted to exotic places," says Pacita. "Primitive and ethnic art is the soul of my work and I feel the same way about the people. Look at



Indonesia, this country is so incredibly rich in culture - everywhere you go they have something special. For example, the wonderful *ikat* weavings from Sumba, the beautiful gold cloth from Lampung, the wonderful wood carving from Toraja and then Bali, so different again - for an artist this is paradise."

During her first visit to Indonesia Pacita became fascinated with the *Wayang* puppets. "I was so moved by the elaborate costumes, the theatre props and the interpretations of stories from the Ramayana, and they are still used for moral teaching in the villages. This is fantastic." A superb series of *trapunto* canvases depicting the puppets was the result of this fascination. Pacita has been back in Jakarta for three and a half years during which she has continued to travel the world with her exhibitions - she travelled to the States seven times in the first year alone. At the same time she is producing further works of such boldness and vitality that they simply take your breath away.

Pacita's work is immensely popular. "I held my first art show in my house in Washington. I had 100 paintings and I sold 78. I believe that if you have confidence then you can do anything!" This success has continued through the years. Her art has been exhibited in major galleries all over the world and has found its way into many prestigious public and private collections. In addition, Pacita has been awarded numerous accolades and fellowships.

This vibrant lady is also concerned as a social activist. Her series 'Portraits of Cambodia' clearly demonstrates her deep concern with the suffering of the disenfranchised. There are many layers to both Pacita Abad and her work and one can but wish to learn her true depth of inspiration.

One way we may begin to understand though, is to read the recently published, "Exploring the Spirit", a comprehensive hardcover volume of Pacita's work during the period 1985-1996. An essay by Ian Findlay-Brown (Asian Art News, Editor-In-Chief) provides a historical background and details the artistic development of Pacita's work. The fabulous colour images of her work make this book a superb object of desire. Divided into six sections; A Passion for Colour, Expanding the Surface, Painting on Bark, Playing with Paper, Oriental Abstractions, and Abstract Emotions, "Exploring the Spirit" is a truly fascinating record of Pacita's life and work.

Exploring the Spirit

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