

Sunshine work from a sunshine lady

Visual Arts

By Michael Mealyer

I ARRIVED at the Hongkong Arts Centre Club feeling the worse for wear. But within a few seconds of meeting Pacita Abad, I began to experience the radiating sunshine of her personality.

Looking at Pacita's work it is hard to imagine that 12 years ago she was preparing herself for the sober world of law.

Within a year of law studies she looked for a summer job and assisted the curator of the San Francisco Museum. That was it. Art was to be her career.

However, she decided to complete her masters degree in Asian Studies (Spanish Imperialism in The Philippines).

Pacita Abad rounded off her art studies with the Arts Students League in New York in 1978. Pacita and her husband Jack Garrity have taken it in turns to study and support each other.

Pacita travelled extensively for the next four years and her exposure to cultures in Sudan, the Dominican Republic, Bangladesh, Thailand, England, Germany, Japan and Indonesia has profoundly influenced her work.

Whilst in Thailand, she had one of her most immotive experiences. She met the local director of an American agency working with the refugee camps of Kao Dang, Sakeo and Arangyaphrathet, who asked if she would like to do work on the subject of the refugees.

Thoroughly delighted with this opportunity, Pacita produced a major trapuntoe depicting the struggle of refugees carrying the most portable of their possessions from sewing machines to fighting cocks. Not forgetting either to carry an old uncle to keep the family unit together.

Trapuntoes, have a long history and are known to have been made in Sicily in the 14th century. They differ from wall hangings in as much as they are three dimensional. The range of materials is limitless and the experience is not just one of viewing but is combined with a tactile experience.

To give the three dimensional quality, any range of stuffing is used and reflects the availability of local materials.

Pacita said, "I like to make use of the tactile experience as much as the visual. I like to reflect the sand of Sudan and the sea shells of the Philippines to give a full range of textural qualities."

Pacita revealed that her inspiration in this direction came from a friend who made large dolls from old stockings and tights which were then painted and further decorated with appliques.

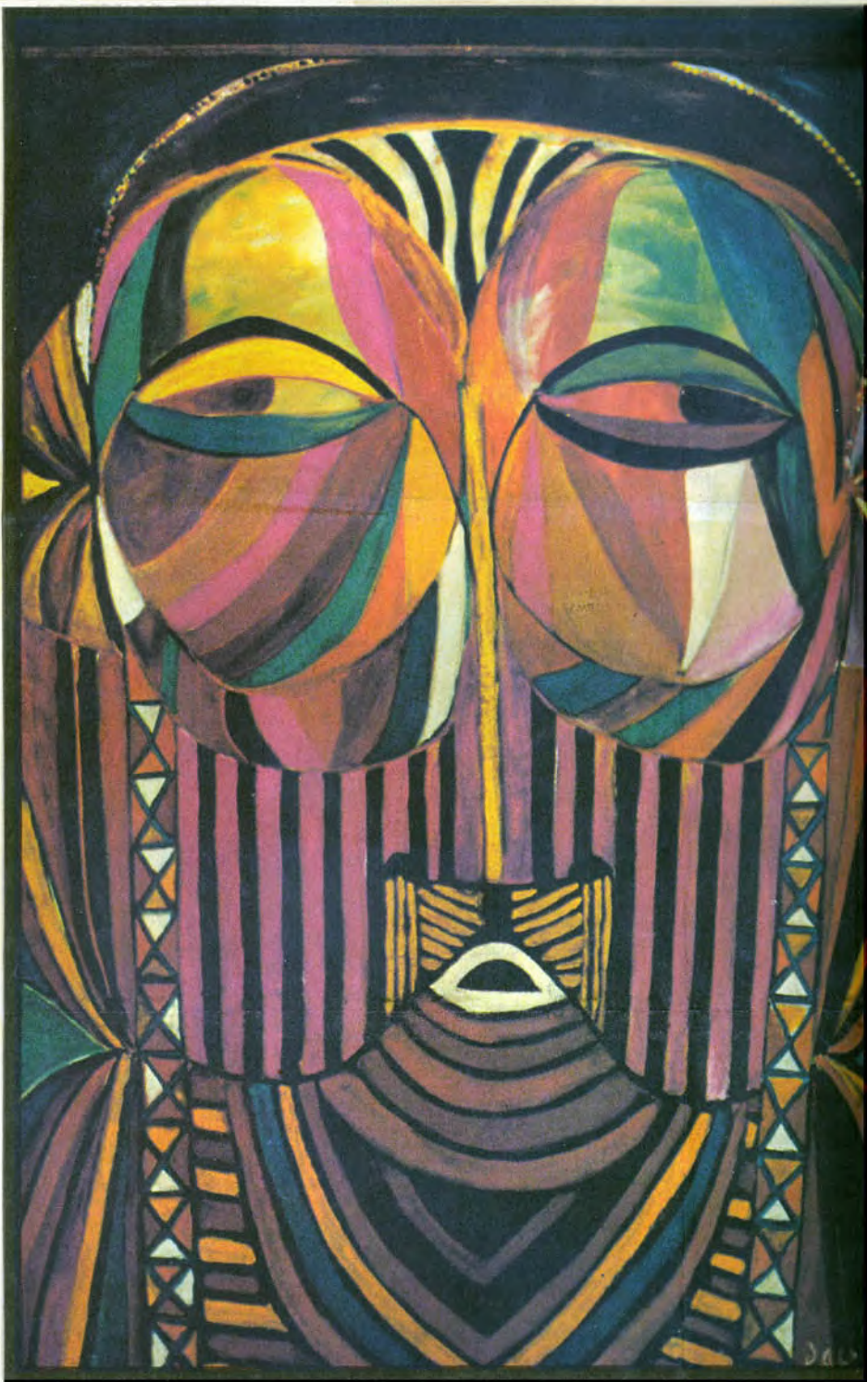
The vibrant sunshine colours of Pacita's work are very much alive to the cultural essence of non-Western cultures.

It is as if temperate climates have tempered colour sensitivity. This point was brought out when Pacita Abad first showed her work in New York at the Art Students League. Her Western contemporaries used refined neutral colours whereas her work by contrast was a kaleidoscopic feast.

Pacita's work is really reminding us that we may see but do not perceive the magnificent treasure chest of shapes, forms, textures and colours that surround us.

Pacita does not like the contrived boxes of conventional painting but prefers work to 'find' its form. Visual literacy is an attribute, that can help us enjoy life to the full.

First impressions are merely an introduction to visual awareness and yet for many their life is but a series of first impressions. Pacita Abad's work can cer-



tainly heighten visual awareness for those who lack confidence in art and its appreciation. It is a demonstration of what is possible given the will to make a creative contribution.

Pacita's contribution is fully appreciative of social issues and her work in Manila highlighted the abuses of Marcos and the Army in the Philippines. She was

awarded the 1984 TOYM Award for the most outstanding artist in the Philippines — the first woman to win this award thereby making the title "The Outstanding, Young Man" a misnomer.

Pacita Abad's exhibition is being held in the Hong Kong Arts Centre until June 23, and she intends to be regularly in attendance.

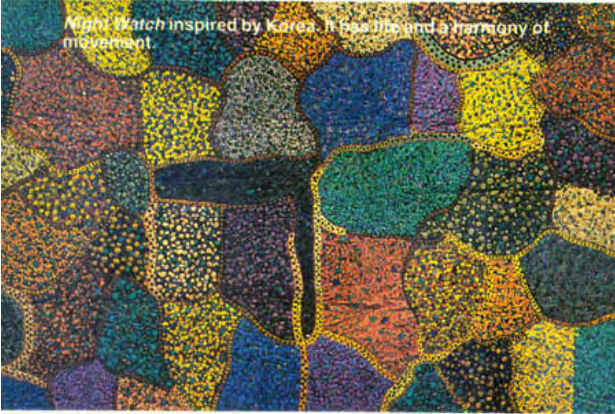
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"Bacongo", acrylic on canvas, handsewn and trapuntoed.

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Pacita Abad at work.

Be-log Be-log is a Filipino term for circle and is inspired by the cracked patterns that appear on house walls in Manila. A complete patchwork of vibrant colour, it typifies Manila.



Night Watch inspired by Korea. It has life and a harmony of movement.



Red Bug — the colours are delightfully evocative of orchids. Surely one of the most beautiful flowers in the world.

