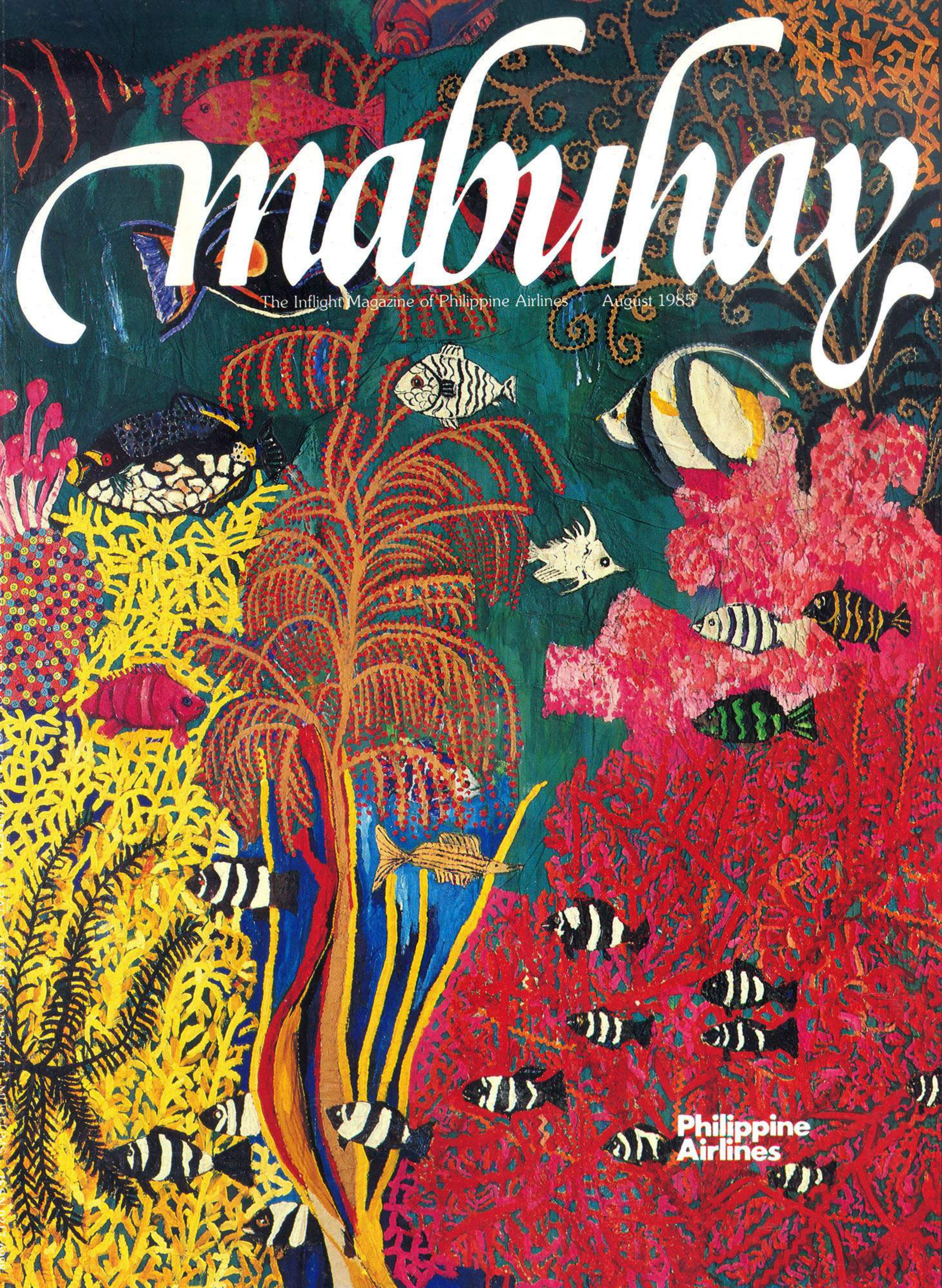


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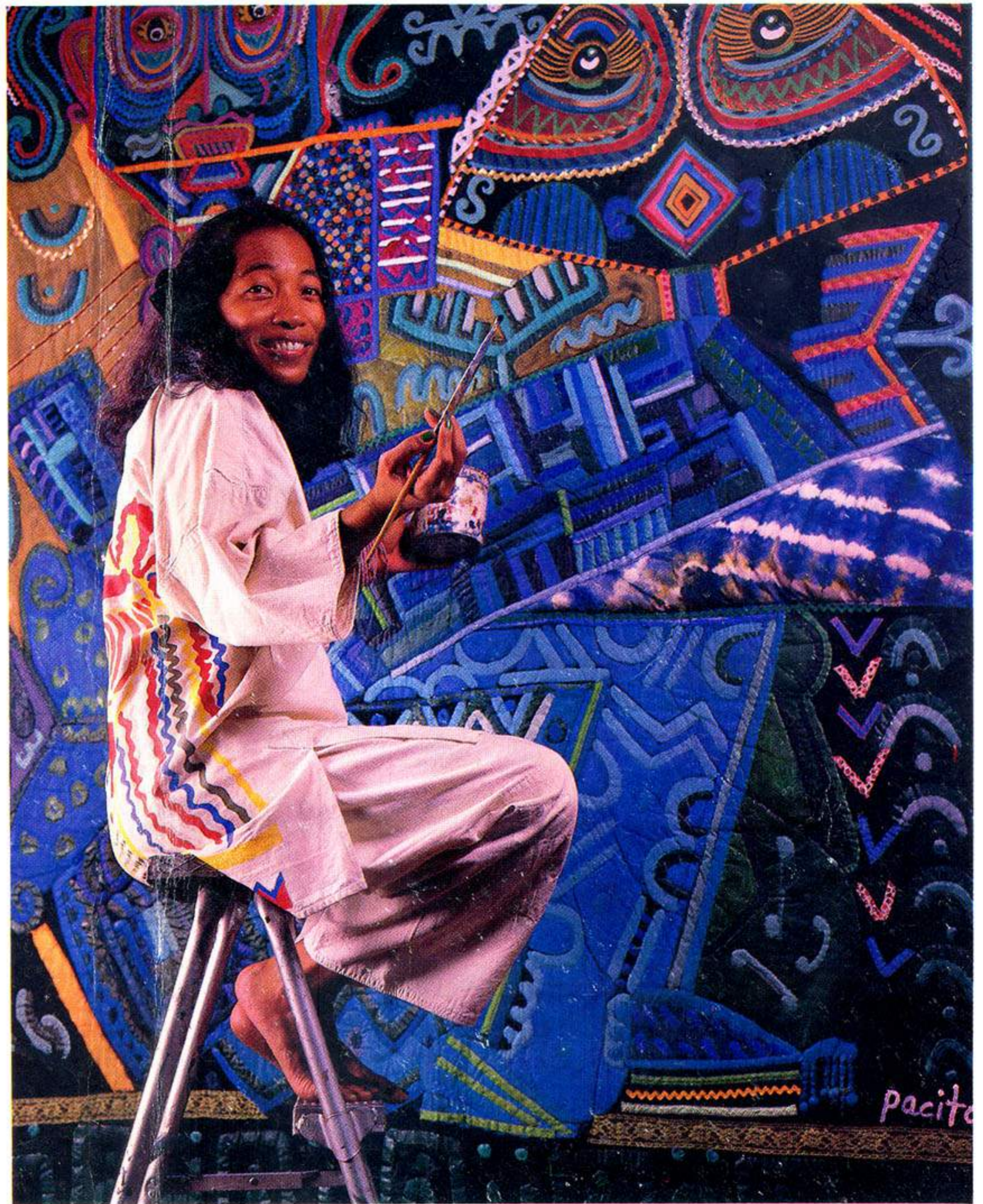
AN EXPLOSION OF COLOR

*F*abulous! Extravagant! An Arabian Nights fantasia of color and imagination. A feast for the eyes, a challenge to the senses. Visual richness that does not cloy. Fabric art to take us out of the doldrums of everyday life.

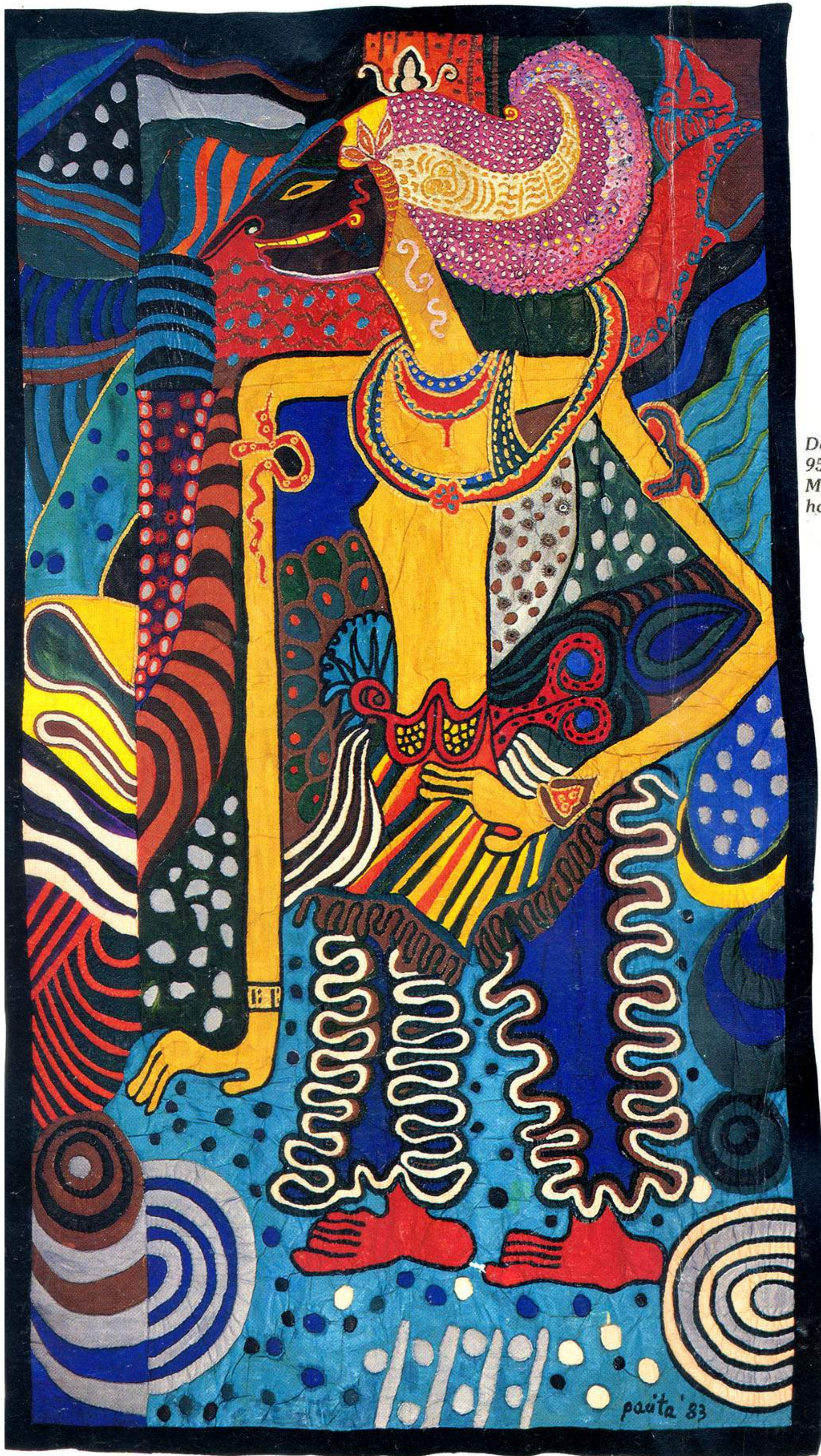
These outsized trapunto wall hangings are the creation of Pacita Abad, a peripatetic Filipina of kayumanggi (tropical brown) complexion, brimming with talent and joie de vivre. Pacita's travels around the world have opened her eyes to its richness and exoticism and she has chosen to portray in her exciting wall hangings some of the most colorful areas in which she has traveled.

The Indonesian tapestries depicting more than life-size versions of wayang puppets are not only true in spirit but contain a wealth of background detail that enhances their sumptuousness. The revelry of colors offends neither the eye nor the senses. It contributes immensely to the feeling that each piece evokes in the beholder.

Hanuman, The Monkey King is noteworthy for its use of shocking pink, orange, brick red, and jade green as background for a dark green-bodied puppet. Liberal use of rick rack, batik cloth and beads adds to the visual effect.



The artist at work.



Dewi (1982)
95in x 56in
Mixed media, trapuntoed and
hand sewn.

paita '83

The untutored artists of the Dark Continent have attained a certain degree of sophistication through centuries of contact with the Middle East and the absorption of various aspects of Arab or Islamic culture. In her tapestries, Pacita depicts the riverine people of the Middle Nile who, in ancient times, were called Kushites. These people are tall, long-limbed and handsome.

African Mephisto is a portrait of a witch doctor in all his finery. Despite the profuse amount of decoration on his costume (ribbons, rick rack, batik fabric, dyed cloth, etc.), there is a dignified and serious expression on his painted face.

The other tapestries, *People of Wau*, *Masai Man*, *Mask with Red Eyebrow*, depict people of the Nile whose ancestors can be traced back to centuries before the Christian era — ancestors who produced a very important and advanced early civilization of inner Africa and established two great centers of metal production: Kush and Axum.

Papua New Guinea is a region that brings to mind a people of primeval instincts: stone-age man, nature worshiper, steeped in symbolism, adopting the mask as the chief outlet for his artistic expression. Pacita's wall hangings reveal the barbaric ethnology of New Guinea.

"Sepik art has been called the most vital in the Pacific, if not the entire world of primitive art," to quote Sylvia L. Mayuga. This is well demonstrated in the tapestry *Dancing Demon*, executed in earth tones of light and dark brown against a background of blue, which could well represent the sky. It is primarily a representation of a mask, with undulating, spindly arms and legs (in the posture of dance). Pendulous breasts hang above a cavernous, labyrinthine abdomen revealing a womb. The

mask is typical of those worn in rituals to bridge the gap between man and his ancestral gods. Pacita's version is lavishly embellished with cowrie shells. S-meanders in brown and white, and leaf fronds in white interspersed with dark blue fruit-like dots, fill out the background.

Weeping Woman, *Kaunga*, *Goroka Man*, *Hagen Man*, *Papuan* and *Sing Sing in Port Moresby* are brilliantly hued interpretations of New Guinea's ethnic vitality, all heightened by the addition of the traditional cowrie shell.

Our last stop is nearer home. The Philippines also has its share of "color" and exotic aura. Pacita Abad interprets these in wall hangings that picture the attractions of this country to the foreign eye. *Dancing Couple* portrays two of the Philippines' most popular festivals: the Moriones of Marinduque and the Ati-Atihan of Panay. The Moriones festival reveals an aspect of Christian beliefs as inculcated by the Spanish colonizers, while the Ati-Atihan is a revival, turned into riotous revelry, of an obscure

Puerto Galera I (1983)

102in x 99in

Acrylic on muslin, trapuntoed with fabric and buttons, hand sewn.



chapter in Philippine prehistory. *Pacita Sailing* depicts the vibrant colors of the south with its Islamic culture. The tapestry is an organized whimsicality in reds, yellows and blues, with a profusion of rick rack, buttons and appliquéd cloth.

The most enchanting of the Philippine tapestries is the one simply entitled *Puerto Galera*. During the Spanish colonial period, Puerto Galera was the port where the galleons that sailed from the Philippines to Acapulco were built of indigenous hardwoods. Today,

Puerto Galera is where people go to enjoy fishing, sailing and scuba diving. Its marine wealth is one of the most dazzling in these islands and Pacita's wall hanging reveals an underwater fantasy replete with coral reefs and brilliant tropical fish.

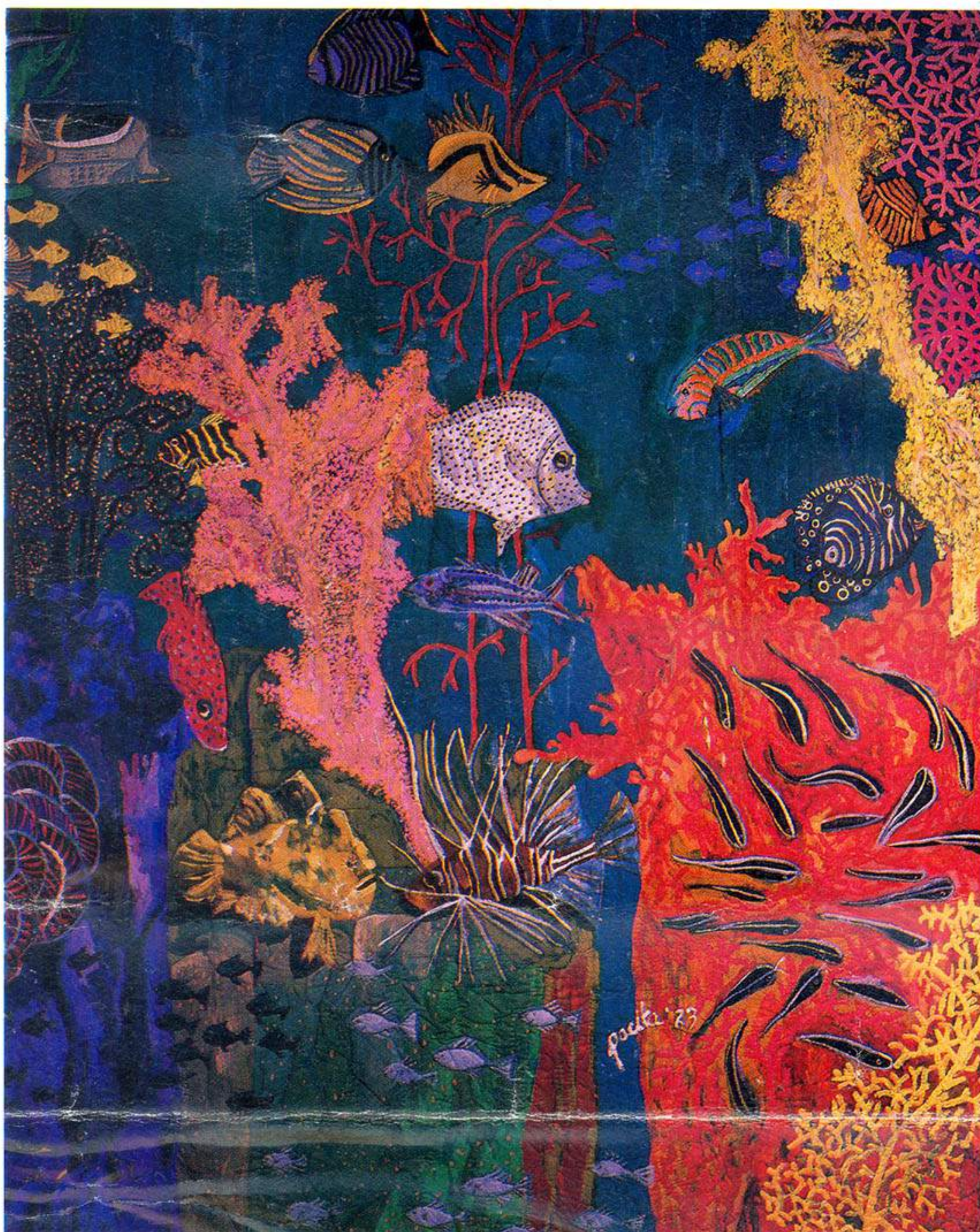
The earliest known example of trapunto was created in the 14th century in Sicily. What exactly is trapunto? It is a high relief worked through two layers of cloth. The top layer, which carries the design, is laid over another layer, usually muslin, and the two are joined

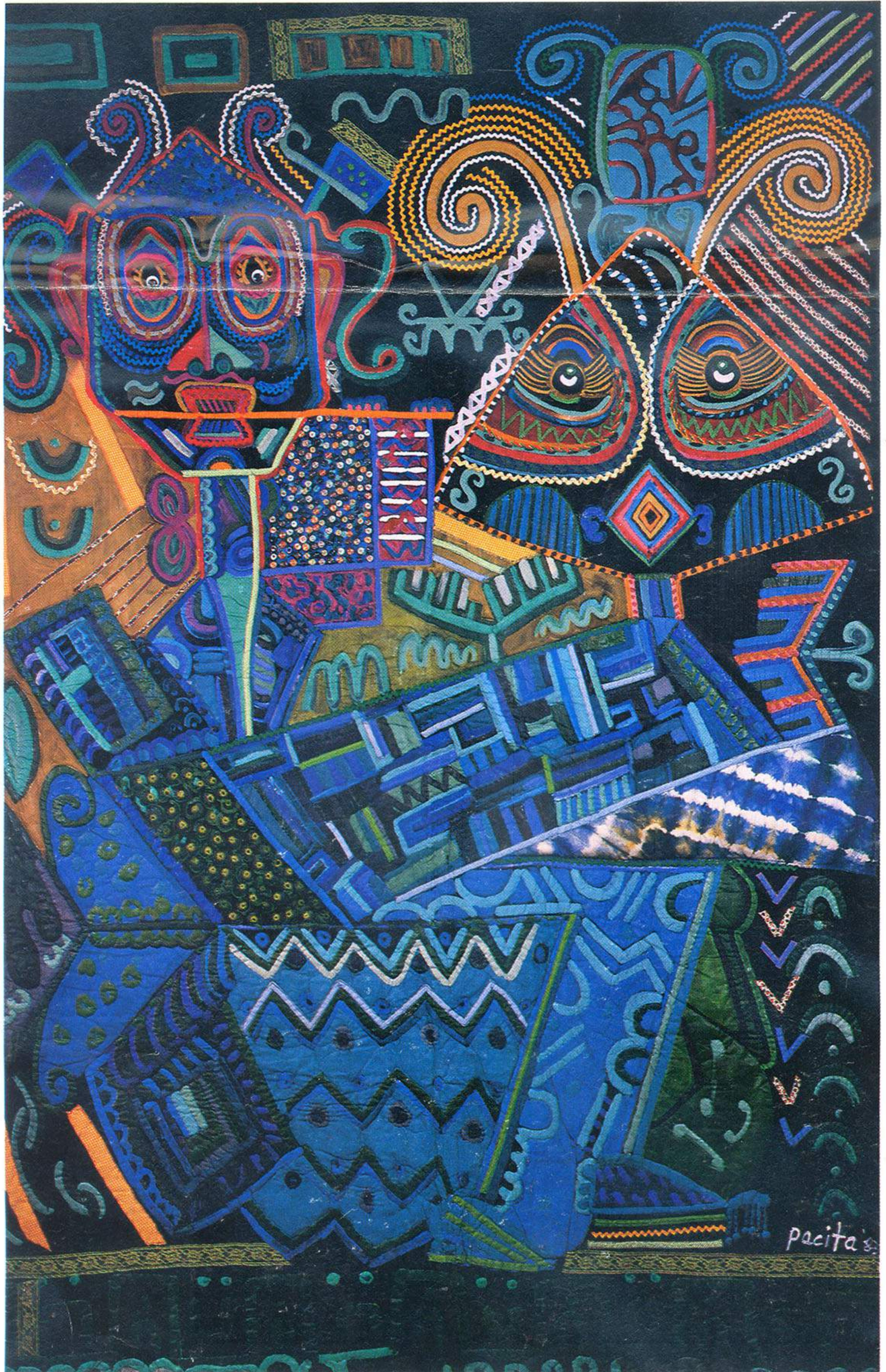
with running stitches. These stitches are used to define areas and to delineate the design. Stuffing is then used between the two layers to give the tapestry a puffed-out or three dimensional effect. A variety of materials are used for this purpose — kapok, cotton batting, woolen yarn, foam rubber, old blankets and even soft feathers. You can also combine appliquéd and trapunto, patchwork with quilting and trapunto, and use embroidery and appliquéd as surface decoration. Other materials used by Pacita for enhancing her tapestries are acrylic and fabric paints, rick rack, ribbons, lace, batik cloth, Ifugao weaves, tie-dyed material, mirrors, colored buttons, cowrie shells and Nepali beads. When the stuffing is finished the tapestry is edged with bias binding; Pacita's have borders of black cloth six centimeters wide.

There is another aspect to Pacita Abad's art and outlook on life. This is the somber, compassionate humanist who looks at the tragedies of mankind with understanding, sympathy and a fierce determination to bring them to the apathetic conscience of people all over the world. Her oil paintings of Cambodian refugees chill the blood for they are a searing exposé of the misery, hunger, sickness and degradation of thousands of refugees and an indelible record of man's inhumanity to man.

What kind of woman is this who can produce two such divergent forms of art — one filled with exuberant color, excitement and whimsicality, the other somber and full of pathos and tragedy? Her academic background gives no clue. Perhaps it is her early environment. She was born and raised on the windswept, storm-lashed, isolated island of Batanes in the northernmost part of the Philippines where life was harsh and communication with the outside world

Puerto Galera II (1983)
102in x 99in
Acrylic on muslin, trapuntoed
and hand sewn.





Dancing Couple (1983)



Meringue Fever (1983)
87in x 69in
Acrylic on canvas, trapuntoed
and hand sewn.

spasmodic and perilous. This has infused in her “strong moral convictions and human emotions” enabling her to “present a powerful commentary on the plight of the lost souls of Cambodia,” to quote her own words. Her travels to 65 countries “have been very rewarding because my exposure to different cultures and interesting people has been an important catalyst for my painting.”

Pacita Abad is a warm, loving person who makes you feel at ease the moment you meet her. She has a strong sense of humor and laughter comes easily to her. Her travels have broadened her horizon, sharpened her perceiving eye. Today she is the complete cosmopolite ●

Text by
M. Covarrubias Jamir
Photographs by
Bryan King

In the eight years since she had her first one-woman show in Washington DC, Pacita Abad has participated in a number of individual and group exhibitions, both at home and abroad. Some of her works are included in the *Three Faces of Philippine Painting* show that opened in July at the BMW Gallery in Munich and will later be seen in other German cities. She made history this year when Philippine Jaycees listed her among the *Ten Outstanding Young Men of the Philippines* in the arts field.