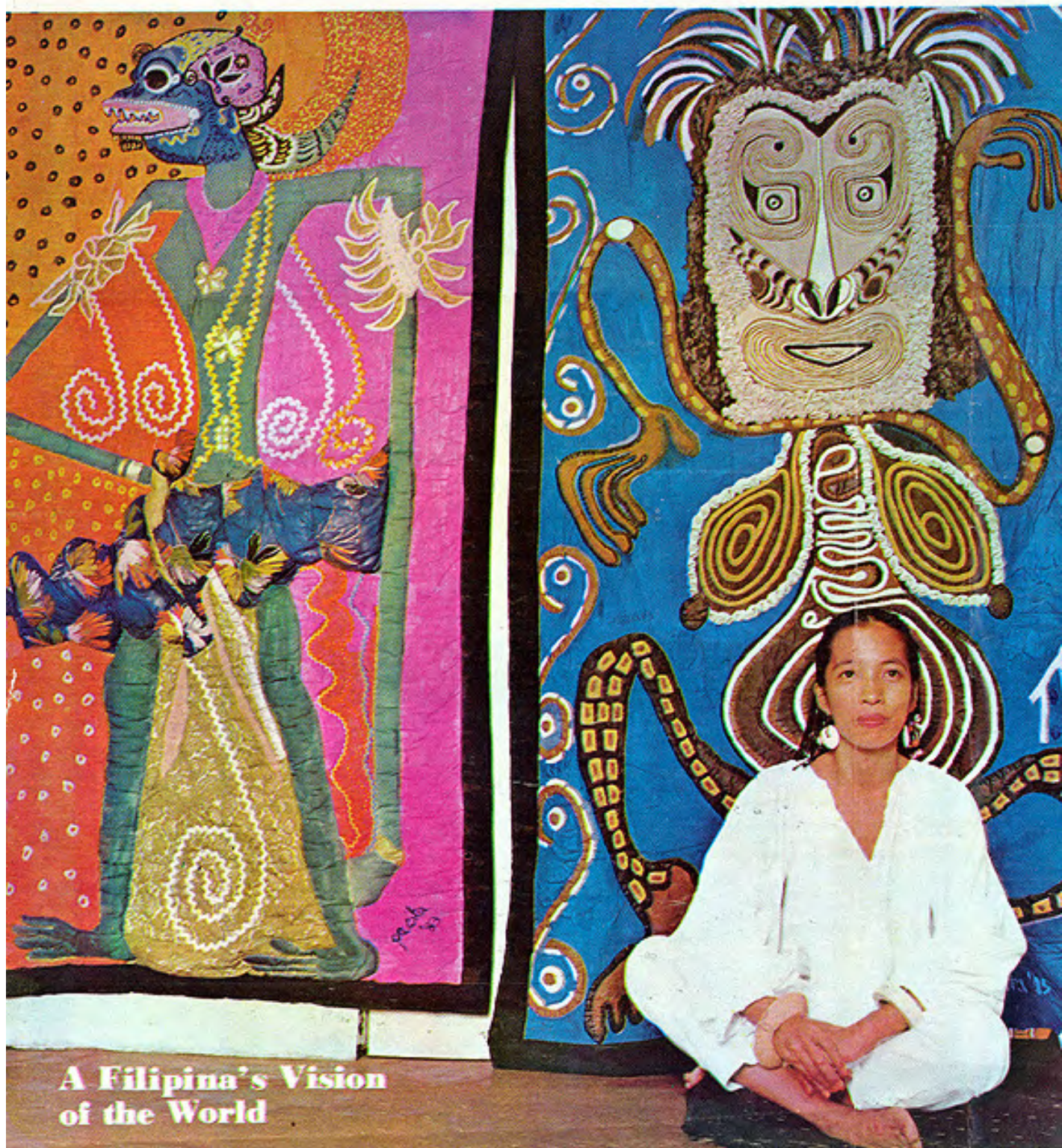


# Philippine panorama

SUNDAY MAGAZINE OF THE BULLETIN TODAY • FEBRUARY 26, 1984



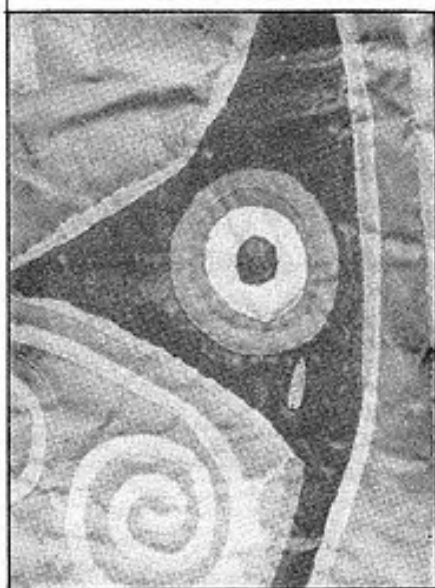
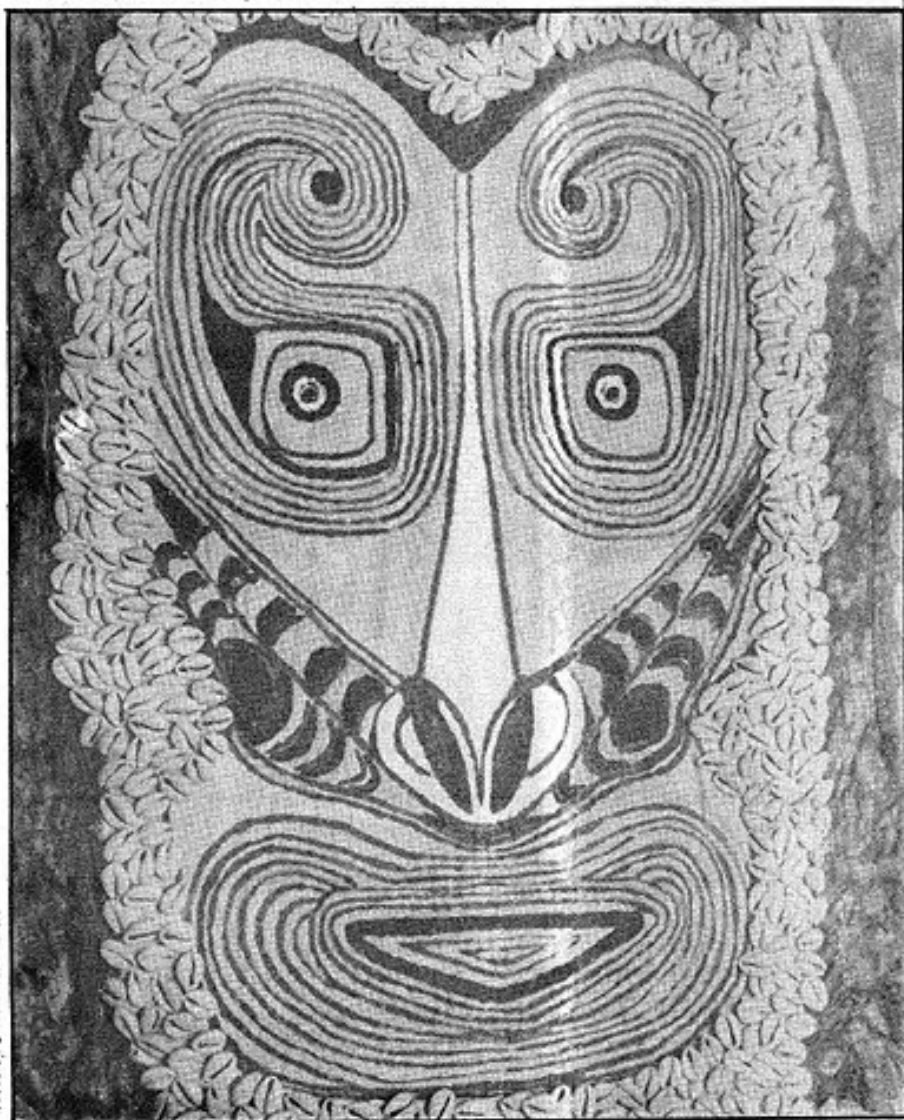
**A Filipina's Vision  
of the World**

By MARGOT J. BATERINA

**N**AME the colors of the colorwheel and Pacita Abad, Filipino artist, has recaptured them all in large and small paintings, silkscreens and trapunto paintings, or, if you wish, "painted and quilted tapestries." She uses nearly all media: oil, acrylic, gouache in combination with canvas, muslin, colored glass, multi-hued buttons, beads, sequins, indigenous seashells, *retazos*, rick-rack bands, thread and even rags which she uses to clean the paint off her brushes. With these materials, she paints scenes that are pathetic, painful, nostalgic, ugly, dismal, happy, unsettling, exotic, scary, desperate.

Pacita Abad talks about her

Detail of a trapunto work using cowrie shells.



Photos by JOEY DE VERA

Pacita Abad uses all colors and nearly all media to portray life in various parts of the world.



## Seeing the World With a Paintbrush

works in a husky voice punctuated by a hearty laugh. One hundred eight works in all, she says, including 19 trapunto paintings. She adds that the trapunto works, which, to the layman, would look more like tapestries, enable her to play with colors. "I love colors," she says.

The 108 works are on display at the Museum of Philippine Art (MOPA) until April 15. She has stayed abroad for many years, and it is only her second exhibit in her homeland. The exhibit is called "A Philippine Painter Looks at the World," but it is far from being a traditional travelogue of landscapes and seasonal changes. Pacita's artworks are about people of diverse cultures and circumstances.

Pacita looks at the world with her paintbrushes, palette knives, paints, canvases and sewing needles. And recaptured by these tools are people she has encountered in her travels around the world: the underprivileged women of Papua New Guinea, the refugee children of Kampuchea in a camp in Thailand, needy families in Bangladesh, the shadow puppeteers of Indonesia, the village folk in Southern Sudan, the sun worshippers in the Dominican Republic, a lonely fisherman in Washington, DC., the Burkah women in Afghanistan, the camel traders in Egypt, the workers in Pakistan and, of course, the people of her country, particularly those in her native Batanes.

This sturdy, happy woman was born and raised amid the treacherous sea and fierce winds of Batanes. And her view of the world was largely shaped by her travels with husband Jack Garrity, a Bostonian and an economist of the Asian Development Bank. She spends from six weeks to two months doing a wall-to-ceiling trapunto painting in her spacious studio on the ground-floor of a two-story provincial house in the heart of Pasay City, where she and Jack now live.

In that studio, Pacita translates on canvas and other media her experiences with people around the world. She says she'd been away from the Philippines

for 12 years, but had always managed to "drop in" whenever she was in a neighboring country. And on such occasions, she makes a flying visit to Batanes, 300 miles north of Luzon. The first time she did a portrait of Batanes, she recalls, she hadn't quite made up her mind yet on whether to be a painter or a lawyer.

The Abad family was politically active in the 1960s. Both Pacita's parents were members of Congress during the Macapagal administration. Her father, Jorge, had also served as secretary of public works. The Abads had wanted their middle child (in a



"Hanuman, the Monkey King":  
Another trapunto work by Pacita Abad.

brood of 13) to be a lawyer and perhaps become as politically involved as they were. But things did not turn out that way. After Pacita got her bachelor's degree from the University of the Philippines in 1968, she went to California for a master's degree and was about to enter law school when she met Jack. Their subsequent marriage changed the course of her career.

Traveling with Jack around the world coaxed out the artist in Pacita, so to speak. Not long after, she was dabbling with paint and brush, then she enrolled for an art course at the Corcoran School of Art in Washington, DC. Thus began a lifetime career of painting.

Pacita takes pride in her tra-

punto paintings through which, she says, she has developed her style and found an outlet for using "as many colors" as there are in real life. Her love for colors can also be seen in the accessories to her wardrobe, in the way she has her hair done (corn rows tied with colorful plastic ends) and in the odds and ends in her house, most of them souvenirs from all the places she has been to.

The paintings reflect not only Pacita's knowledge of basic art techniques but also her sewing and embroidery skills — a legacy from her mother, an early feminist from Batanes.

In the early stages of her career, Pacita confesses, she was influenced a great deal by the works of the Fauves and the German expressionists. Her works became more vivid and alive with the colors of life through close contacts with people in more than 65 countries, specially tribes in Africa and Papua New Guinea.

Pacita says she's glad she's a painter because it is a "portable" profession, one that enables her to express herself immediately and just as quickly gives its rewards.

Her trips with Jack would last from two to three weeks, and this she would devote to painting—in the villages, in the markets, temples, streets, rivers, reservations and orchards of the world. What tugged strongest at her heart was the tragedy of the refugees encamped in Thailand. This she has ably recorded on canvas for posterity.

Has she also come upon unforgettable happy scenes? Yes, she has, because the world Pacita has traveled is not all that unhappy or depressed. The happy ones, again brought to life in her use of color, include "Puerto Galera" and "Sing-Sing Dancers." But happiness is a state of mind, and perhaps the viewer can see gaiety even in the trapunto painting called "Weeping Woman." That the painter is a happy and fun-loving person may belie the sadness and bitterness of her works. But that, perhaps, is another story. ●