

# PACITA ABAD BLENDS ART WITH SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

By Yolanda Canseco-Hernandez

On July 31, 1985, Pacita Abad made history when the Philippine Jaycees listed her as one of the Ten Outstanding Young Men (TOYM) in the field of arts. It was the first time that TOYM awarded a woman for her excellent achievements and by bestowing this honor on Pacita Abad, they too had paid tribute to Filipino Womanhood.

Pacita Abad, born in the lovely, windswept Batanes islands and now artist par excellence, is respected and recognized in many Asian and Western countries because of the visual impact of her paintings. They generally carry meaningful commentaries and dramatic messages of the plight and struggles of people in various societies.

Pacita once wrote: "I have always believed that an artist has a special obligation to remind society of its social responsibility."

Her *Portraits of Cambodia*, for instance, provide a "deeper understanding of the Cambodian tragedy and tell the story of adversity, bitterness, boredom and not too often, happiness . . ." Moreover, in her canvases, "vivid colors are fused with moral convictions and human emotions to present a powerful commentary on the plight of the lost souls of Cambodia."

Hanging on the walls of her gallery at her well-appointed residence on Robert St., Pasay, are hundreds of paintings, trapuntos and tapestries depicting, in her unique inimitable style, her various encounters with humanity. Some of these are the *wayang*



*puppets, Hanuman, The Monkey King, African Mephisto, People of Wau,* and others, which give visual delights to the viewers. They are executed in "mixed media, trapuntoed and hand-sewn."

Meanwhile, two of her important and popular paintings, "Puerto Galera" and "Sampaguita Girl", done in acrylic and oil, respectively, were reproduced by the Girl Scouts of the Philippines last year for its Christmas greeting and multi-purpose cards and were sent to GSP friends here and abroad. Permission to reproduce these works of art was given by Pacita through GSP International Commissioner Estefania Aldaba Lim.

"Puerto Galera", according to history, used to be the port where galleons were built. These galleons,

made of indigenous hardwoods, sailed those famous voyages from the Philippines to Acapulco.

At present, Puerto Galera, is a beautiful hideaway for locals and tourists where they can go swimming, scuba-diving, fishing or just enjoy the idyllic beauty of the place.

"Sampaguita Girl," on the other hand, features a subject that is familiar to Manilans. The young girl vending her garlands to churchgoers in Quiapo, is a common sight in the city; and through Pacita's versatile brush, the "magsasampaguita" has been immortalized on canvas.

Pacita takes deep pride in her trapuntos which come in vivid, exuberant colors. A trapunto is a "high relief worked through

**PACITA ABAD . . .**  
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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 . . . to delineate the design."

According to Pacita, when asked if Girl Scouts can do trapuntos, she said that the young can do this art easily because they can maximize their talents and skills. Trapunto paintings, she added, use any material like button, shell, old cloths, twigs, all sorts and the painting comes alive in this "quilted art."

Pacita Abad has held solo and selected group exhibits in various galleries of the world. Her paintings hang in the homes of private collectors in Asia, Europe, Latin America, Middle East, Africa and the United States of America.

Born to a family of politicians (her father was once Secretary of Public Works) Pacita would have wanted to be lawyer had not art intervened when she was already



**ABAD PAINTINGS.** "Puerto Galera" (top) done in acrylic and "Sampaguita Girl" (left) have been reproduced by the GSP as Christmas and multi-purpose cards.

taking up a graduate course in the United States. She decided to pursue this new-found interest at the Corcoran School of Art in Washington D.C. and later, at the Art Students League. This was after she met and married Jack Garrity of the Asian Development Bank.

At the time of the interview, Pacita Abad (who would again be winging to some parts of the world), announced that when she returns in May, she would have a

special show at the Ayala Museum which she calls "Assaulting the Deep Sea," an Installation Show of trapunto paintings, tie dye, serigraphics, and soft sculpture in paintings."

Many of her admirers look forward to another creative visual adventure with Pacita Abad and by the looks of it, her newest fans, the Girl Scouts, will be lining up for that much-awaited show. ■