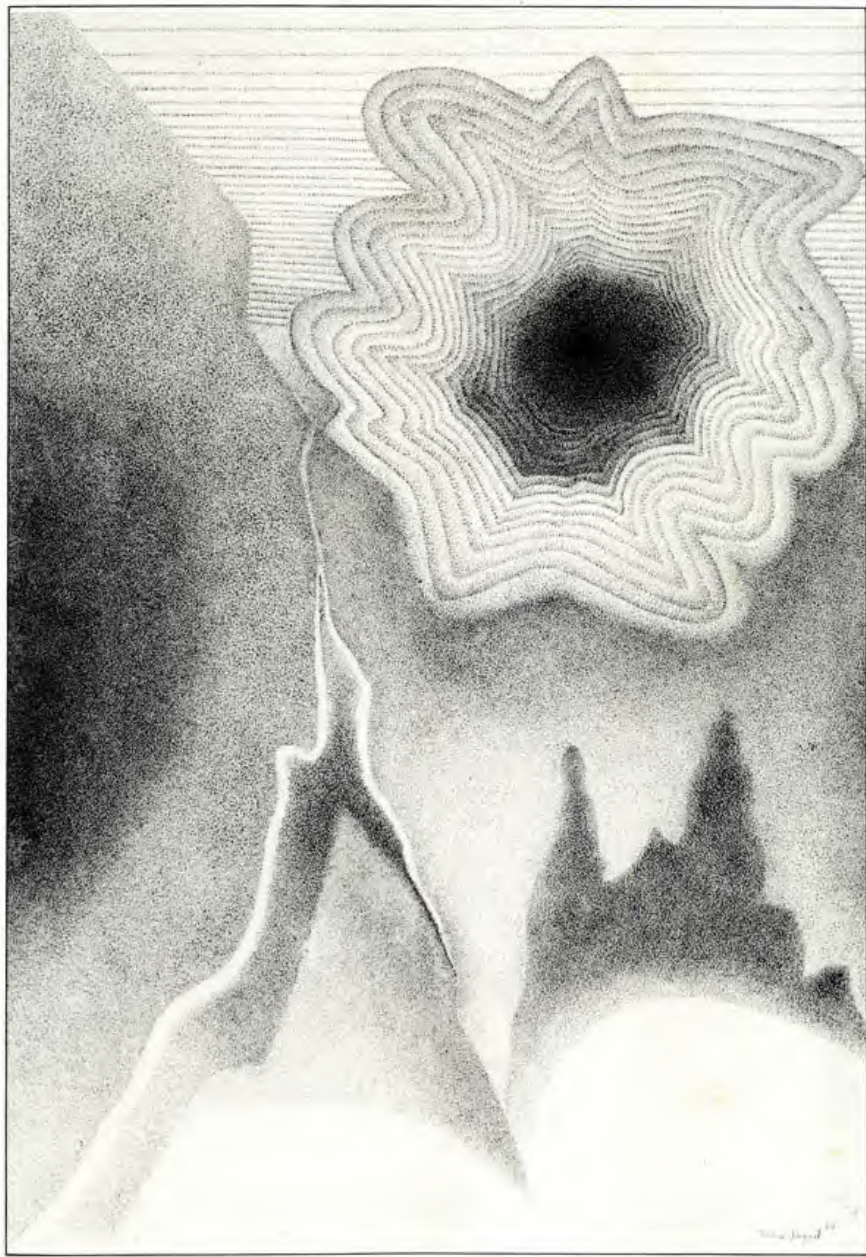


THE ART COLLECTOR



NENA SAGUIL:
"ALL SERIOUS
ART IS CALM"
BY BAMBINA C. OLIVARES

SOLER'S
MAGNIFIED
GARDEN
BY KAREN HERNANDEZ

BOTONG
FRANCISCO'S
LOST MURAL
BY SONIA P. NER



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Editorial office

2nd Floor, The Ayala Museum
Makati Avenue, Makati, Metro Manila
Philippines
817-82-08, 88-77-02

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Cover: EVENING ILLUMINATION, pen and ink drawing
by Nena Saguil, 1983, 65 x 50 cm.

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THE ART COLLECTOR

PACITA
ABAD

STITCHING ON A GRAND SCALE

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BY THERESA C. HIDALGO

Fabric art made another spectacular appearance in the Philippine art scene in 1984 through wall tapestries. Spirals, scallops, curvilinear or geometric motifs appeared in painted design as well as appliques of cloth, ribbon, rickrack, beads, shells and mirrors. The large tapestries intrigued and fascinated the art circle. Art critics hailed them for their "freshness and vivacity" and for being a "triumph of art over material."

The tapestries are the work of internationally-exhibited Filipino painter, Pacita Abad. She calls her fabric art trapunto paintings because the stuffing techniques of trapunto is sometimes employed over the painted forms. All these paintings, however, use one or more fabric techniques, making Abad's trapunto paintings so visually charged.

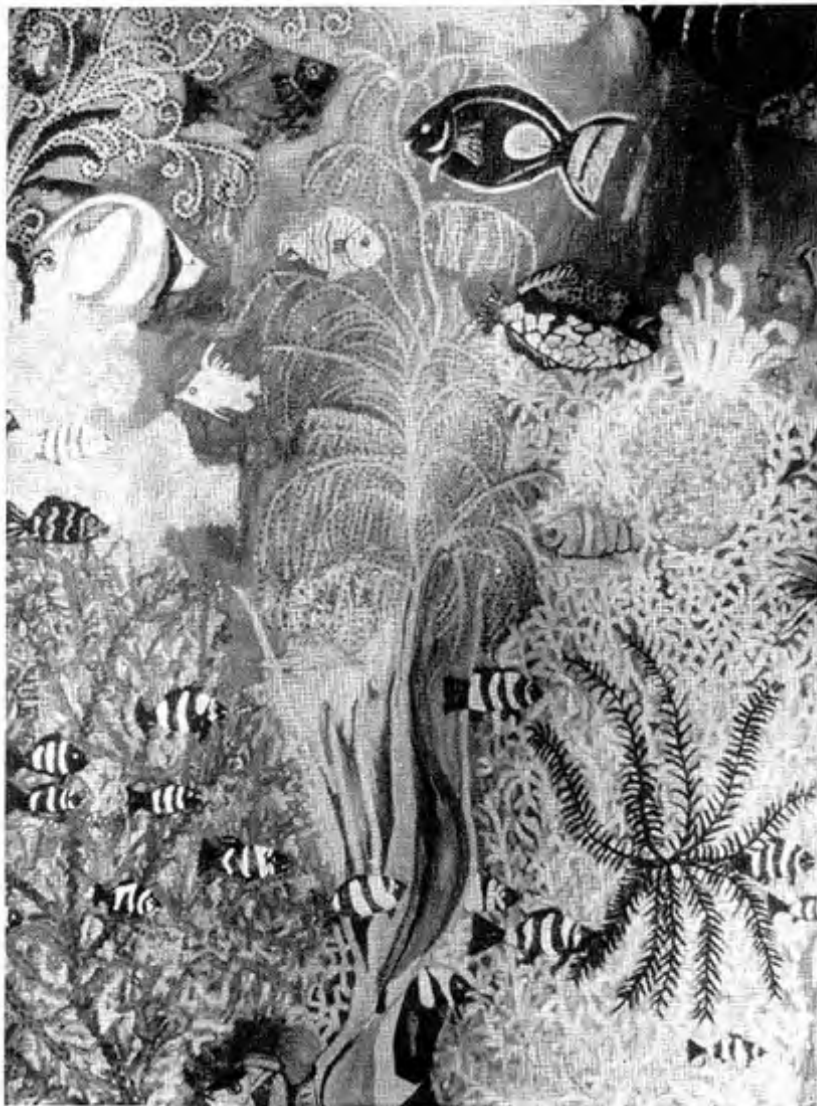
Trapunto, a stuffing technique used as early as the 14th century, gives a three-dimensional or sculptural effect to the paintings. By stuffing certain areas of the design with foam, Abad brings these areas into relief. For her works with masks, the eyes and mouth are usually trapuntoed, making the facial form pulsate with life.

Appliques are generous in most of the tapestries. Juxtaposed on the fabric are snatches of cloth (tye-dyed, printed, or painted on), plastic buttons, and strips of ribbons and rickrack. Unexpected objects are stitched on, too. There are also small pieces of broken mirrors, glass beads, cowrie shells and what looks like strings of lint in many of the trapunto paintings. For the underwater coral scenes, mirrors and bits of glass beads and color buttons very effectively suggest the constantly shifting light and color from the movement of water. In "Pacita Sailing", differing widths of rickrack and trapuntoed curlicue become charming and amusing ripples and waves as well as the strands of hair on Pacita's head.



Right: Paola Abad with one of her trapunto tapestries, *SINGSING IN PORT MORRESEBY* (Papua New Guinea), 1983, acrylic on muslin, trapuntoed & hand-sewn with tie-dyed cloth, 241 x 150 cm.





Above: Puerto Galera I (Philippines). 1983. acrylic on muslin, trapuntoed, and hand-sewn with fabric and cotton. 252 x 259 cm

Opposite page: Dancing Couple (Philippines). 1983. acrylic on muslin, trapuntoed, hand-sewn with mirrors, tie-dyed, buttons and rickrack (108" x 72")

While her fabric pieces may or may not have trapunto or appliques, quilting is performed in all. The back of each piece is wadded entirely with rubber foam and then running stitches are applied on certain lines and patterns of the design.

"I do it to highlight certain painted forms," says Pacita, "I like to make them come out of the walls."

The expressive potential of fabric suits Pacita perfectly in her depiction of various subjects. However, she could take more advantage of this expressive potential. Many of Pacita's trapuntos rely mainly on paint for form and pattern. In these cases, fabric is seen less as a creative medium, its function limited to amplifying rather defining her creative images.

Trapunto painting is not pure fabric painting but rather painting on

fabric. An American artist, Leslie Fuller says: "The painting provides a sense of depth and texture that amplifies the applied design. I find this effect gives the details an intensity and perspective difficult to achieve with any other technique." An exception to this method is in "The Dinka" which fully employs strips of cloth and ribbons. On the other hand, "Nightwatch" is entirely a painted abstract subject.

Any Pacita Abad trapunto painting is a captivating experience. For one, their average size is 60 x 100 inches. "I never thought of limits," says Pacita. "Covering the wall is much better." Only her studio walls has stopped Pacita from making her trapunto painting even grander in size.

Married to economist Jack Garrity whose work has brought him to different parts of the world, Pacita's artistic vision is fed by the unique sights and sounds of Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean. For her trapuntos, Pacita draws subjects and images from the primitive art forms and folk tales of Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Bangladesh, Haiti and Africa, the underwater scenes at Puerto Galera and Batanes and the scintillating street scenes of Mabini. For her abstract trapuntos, images were drawn from the "walls in Manila—the cracks, shapes and different forms expressed with color."

Before working on the fabric itself, Pacita begins and modifies the designs on a much smaller scale, in five mediums—oil pastels, silk screen, oil on canvas, collage printing, monoprint. Some of her work have been spontaneous, though. "When I'm abroad," relates Pacita, "I start with the head but then I have to do the rest of the design on my notebook of canvas."

Pacita needs from two to three months to finish, a trapunto painting. She does everything by hand and refuses a sewing machine, although she used it two or three of her earlier works. She declines assistance as well for the laborious work of appliques. "I have to control the work," Pacita insists. However, she has accepted the assistance of her sister, Rency, a chemist, whose creative ideas are also welcome.

They carefully applique materials simply picked up at the artist's home. "I can use most things, we recycle things," says Pacita, "When my mother's compact broke, I had the

pieces cut up with a diamond cutter as circular or rectangular mirrors." Bric-a-brac from her many travels are also used—beads from Nepal, shells from Papua New Guinea. Fabric which she applies in strips must be a "top-quality 100% cotton. Pacita winces at the thought of using polyester. She keeps two boxes of fabric at hand. Recently, an American friend gave her ten huge boxes of Australian lace and buttons which we can expect to see as expressive details in her future work.

Pacita usually works on two trapunto paintings at the same time—going from one to another as it suits her. Sometimes during the process, she may stop both altogether and do a still life with oil or pastel. During the stitching portion of the trapunto, painting in another medium becomes a natural form of resting. Aside from the company of her sister, music blasting from a nearby radio helps fill in gaps in concentration. Pacita relates though that her power of concentration is exceptional, helping her as well in her daily game of talents."

Pacita takes up her paintbrushes every day except Sunday. She begins at eight in the morning. "Very much like an office job," says Pacita whose studio is as neat as the boss' office room. Her first trapunto painting was begun in 1981; with her work schedule, it isn't surprising that she has completed 70 huge tapestries, in addition to numerous oil paintings.

Pacita's trapunto paintings were first exhibited in the country at the Museum of Philippine Art and the Luz Gallery. Shows abroad are forthcoming, with Pacita shopping for galleries in New York. An exhibit is definitely planned for Hongkong's Art Center. Its massive circular atrium makes Pacita think seriously of hanging a trapunto painting or two from the ceiling. "The back of a trapunto is very interesting," says Pacita. "People should see the stitching at the back."

Seven of her trapunto paintings have also been selected along with renowned Filipino artists to represent the Philippines in the Contemporary Art Show in Munich and Stuttgart, Germany to be held from May to September 1985.

Private art collectors and personnel of office buildings in Asia, Europe and the United States have the pleasure of viewing Pacita Abad's



trapunto paintings. The monetary value of a trapunto painting ranges, depending on size, from P10,000 to P20,000 and P50,000 to P100,000.

Pacita's delightful excursion into trapunto, after years of oil and pastel, began in Boston. An artist friend intrigued Pacita with her life-sized stuffed and painted dolls. At the time, Pacita was doing studies on masks, after she spent two summers in Africa. "I wanted something different and unique," Pacita recalls. She thus began her first fabric creation by translating her fascination for primitive African art form to a medium in total contrast.

Fabric art offers very good opportunities for endless invention. We may expect Pacita's trapunto painting to evolve to more creative height in cloths and paint. In a country of millions of sewing hobbyists and professionals, Pacita's trapunto paintings may well be the portent of a new thing—amplified fabric art—to come and flourish in Philippine art.

Her artistry continues to win public acclaim. Last summer, she was chosen as one of the outstanding Filipinos of the moment. The national award, given by the JAYCEES, and hitherto billed as the TOYM Awards for The Outstanding Young Men had to be rephrased for Pacita, the first woman awardee. □

Above: FREEDOM FROM ILLUSION,
1984, fabric paint on canvas,
trapuntoed & hand-sewn,
190 x 206 cm.

Opposite page: PANATAYAN
(Batanes), 1982, oil on canvas,
211 x 68.5 cm (From the collection of
Mrs. Diana Franco)

