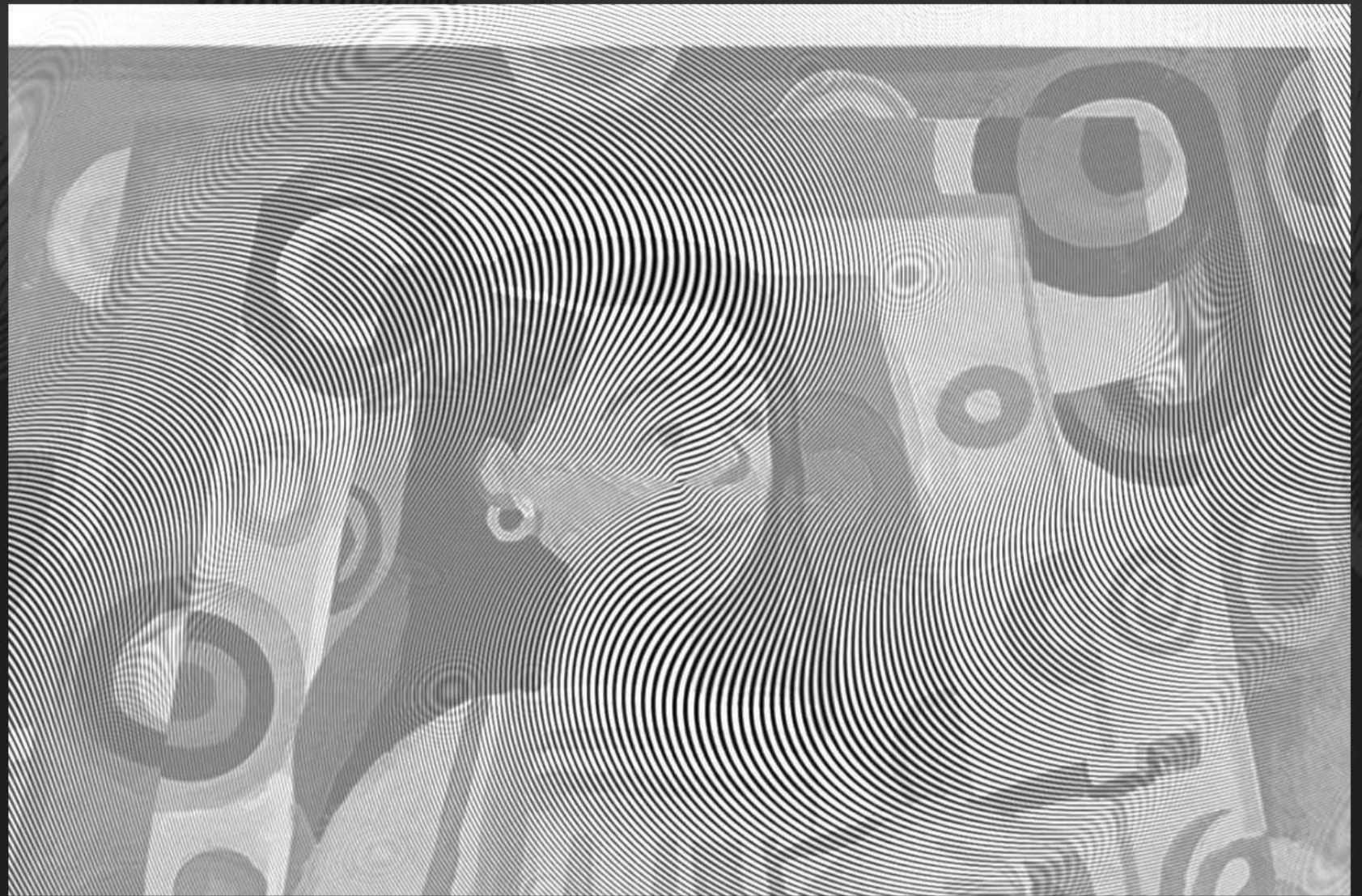


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CULTURE

# PACITA ABAD: SHE MADE SO MANY MEN ANGRY 36 YEARS AGO -- AND CHANGED HISTORY



On this day 36 years ago, Filipino artist **PACITA ABAD** made a *whole* lot of people, mostly men, very angry.

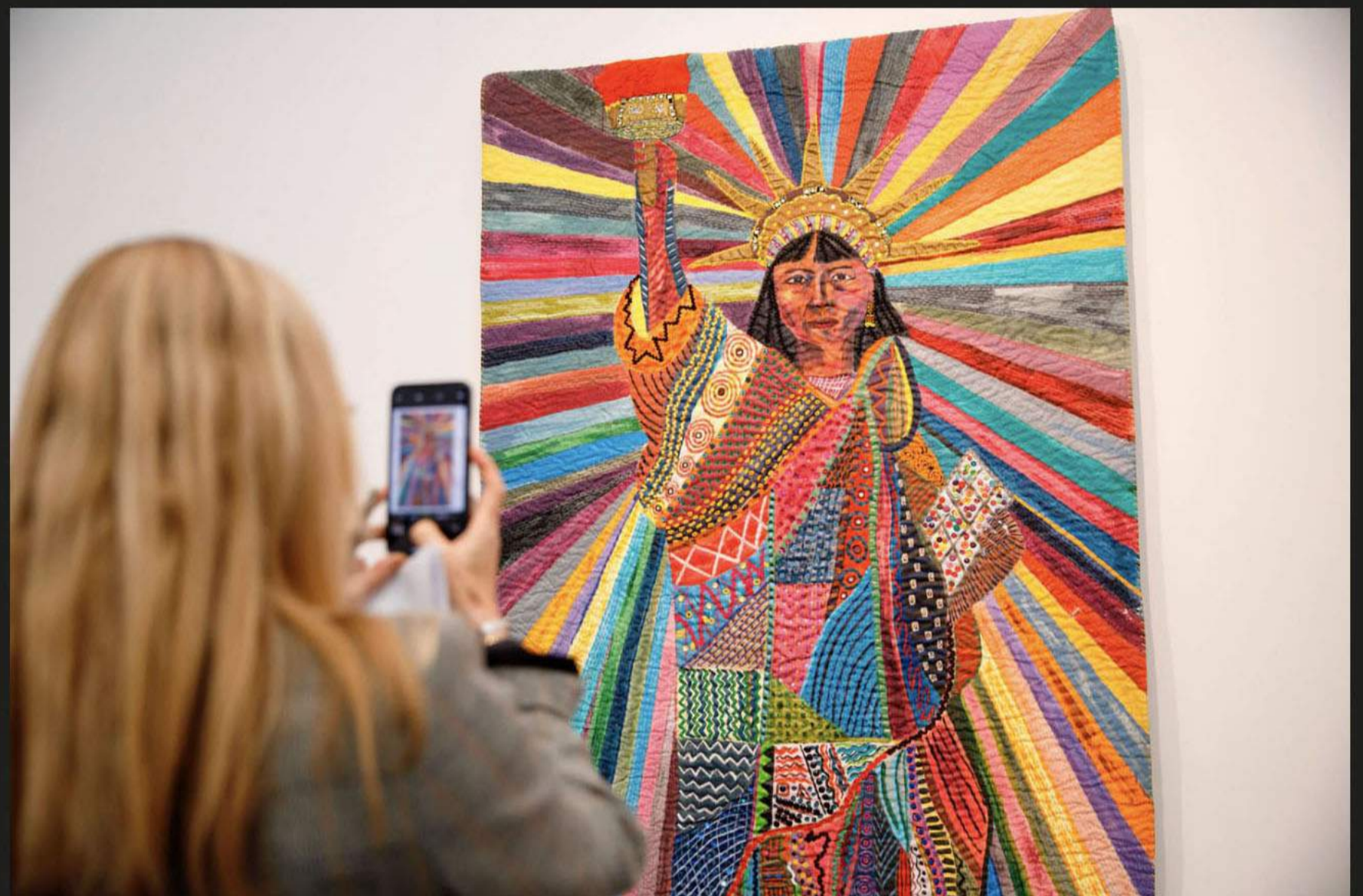
In 1984, Abad was one of ten recipients for the **Ten Outstanding Young Men Awards**, a prestigious recognition for young men awarded by the Junior Chamber International Philippines.

Before 1984, women were not eligible and no woman was even considered — until Pacita Abad.

Today, Google commemorates the day Abad broke through gender barriers with a Google Doodle that pays homage to her distinct style and use of colors.

A renowned artist born in Basco, the small capital of the Batanes Islands in northern Philippines, Abad traveled around the world, lived in six continents, and innovated a style of painting that uses the Italian quilting technique, trapunto. A form of quilting that results in a "puffy" look (it was used on the Starfleet uniforms in *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*), Abad gave her paintings a third dimension. Trapunto allowed Abad to incorporate her immediate surroundings in her work. She embellished pieces with rocks, seashells, and whatever else was within literal reach, ensuring each piece really came from a very specific corner of the world.

In many ways a woman of color, Abad's paintings are known for her vivid use of colors and experimentation. She learned she had a knack for color early on. While studying at the Corcoran School of Art in Washington D.C., her instructor, abstract painter Blaine Larson, showed the whole class one of Abad's first canvases, titled "Fishing." Larsen said to everyone: "We can teach Pacita a lot about figuration, composition and perspective, but let me tell you I would die to have her colors. You can not teach someone color; either you have it, or you don't."



Pacita Abad's 1992 piece 'L.A. Liberty' hung in the October 2019 Frieze Art Fair in London. TOLGA AKMEN/AFP/Getty Images

As with many provocative artists, many of Abad's paintings were abstract commentaries on social politics. Abad documented the abject poverty in Cambodia, Filipino workers' strikes, and the May 1998 riots in Jakarta. Abad's worldwide travels, utilizing tribal mask designs from people she encountered in Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

Because no woman was ever nominated to be one of **Ten Outstanding Young Men**, Abad's inclusion caused "quite an uproar," writes Pacita Abad's official website.

Local newspapers were sent "lots of angry letters" from "men and male artists who thought that they, not Pacita, should have received the award."

But Pacita Abad proudly accepted the honor of being included among that year's **Ten Outstanding Young Men**, dedicating to the honor to her mother.

Abad then warned men they "better watch out" because more women will be eligible in the future.

And in 1996, the awards were changed to **The Outstanding Young Filipinos**, as more women were recognized, though the name *reverted* in 1999 to "preserve the sanctity of the awards." (Really.)

In 2019, female engineer and CEO Aisa Mijeno was awarded for the Science Technology and Engineering-Green Technology category.



In 2004, Abad died of lung cancer in Singapore. She was 58. She is buried next to her hometown studio in Batanes. In her lifetime, Abad produced almost 5,000 pieces, which survive in collections around the world in 70 countries.

"I don't think of my illness," Abad said in the last years of her life. "There is so much to do. I just want to paint, paint, paint."