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ART / PICTURE GALLERY

## Patchworking the World: Pacita Abad's Celebration of Global Diversity

The textile assemblages of the Filipino American artist combine buttons, sequins and shells with riotously colourful results. Her work is a tribute to the lives of immigrants, celebrating diversity on a global scale. Words by Louise Benson



Pacita Abad, L.A Liberty, 1992

to have nowhere that you truly call home? This is the reality for migrants all over the world, many of whom must travel in search of safety. For others, it is a glimpse of a different future, of what is possible beyond the known, that moves them across borders and seas. Life in the Margins, the first exhibition in the UK by Filipino American artist Pacita Abad, explores these dual sensations of connection and dislocation.

Abad, who was born in 1946 in Basco, Batanes, a small island in the northernmost part of the Philippines, was active as an artist from the 1970s until her death in 2004. Her work is characterized by bright explosions of colour, vibrant and often clashing with various hues, textures and patterns. Her approach to the canvas was a patchwork assortment of styles and stories, gathered from her many journeys across the globe. Following her move to San Francisco in the early 1970s, she changed her intention to study law and began to focus on building a career as an artist.





*“Abad’s approach to the canvas was a patchwork assortment of styles and stories, gathered from her many journeys across the globe”*

Cloth and stitching are often overlooked in the art world, seen as the basis for garments rather than artworks, but Abad saw the potential in found and inherited fabrics. Filled with history, she gathered printed material and objects, including buttons, sequins and shells, for her “trapunto” paintings. For these, she used a quilting technique to pad and stitch canvases before painting and layering them with her assembled trinkets and textiles. The results are intricately constructed compositions that cross boundaries of culture and history, from social realist tableaus incorporating indigenous textiles to richly detailed abstractions inspired by Korean ink brush painting, Indonesian batik and Papua New Guinean macramé.

[Life in the Margins](#), at [Spike Island in Bristol](#), presents a selection of the large-scale “trapunto” paintings that Abad created with fabric between 1983 and 2002. They reveal Abad’s keen eye for the hidden intimacies of everyday life, which can be read not only in human gestures and faces but in the items that they surround themselves with. Her work depicts the lives of immigrants like herself, tracing the porous line between borders, continents and cultures. Adad’s patchwork assemblages swirl across the world, a joyous representation of diversity, drawn from the very fabric of our lives.

All images courtesy the Pacita Abad Art Estate. Photographs by Max McClure, courtesy Spike Island



## Pacita Abad, Life in the Margins

At Spike Island until 5 April 2020

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