

Walker Art Center opens first retrospective of artist Pacita Abad in April



Pacita Abad, *Freedom from Illusion*, 1984, oil, painted cloth on silk-screened, stitched, and padded canvas, 75 x 81 in., courtesy the Pacita Abad Art Estate.

MINNEAPOLIS, MN.- [The Walker Art Center](#) opened the first retrospective of artist Pacita Abad (U.S., b. Philippines, 1946–2004), featuring significant and rarely-seen works from across her 32-year career. Pacita Abad serves as the most comprehensive exploration of Abad’s works to-date, including more than 100 objects drawn from private and public collections across Asia, Europe, and the United States. A largely self-taught artist, Abad developed a distinct visual vocabulary that embraced the artistic traditions of global cultures and actively blurred the boundaries between fine art and craft. While Abad was engaged in artistic and political dialogues during her life, the depth, range, and inventiveness of her work is only now coming to prominence. The presentation positions Abad within art historical narratives, providing new insights into her conceptual and aesthetic evolutions as well as the life experiences that so richly influenced her practice. Following its run at the Walker, through September 3, 2023, the exhibition will travel to the San Francisco Museum of Art (SFMOMA).

Pacita Abad is curated by Victoria Sung, Associate Curator of Visual Arts at the Walker, with support from Matthew Villar Miranda, Curatorial Fellow in Visual Arts at the Walker. The exhibition is developed in collaboration with the Pacita Abad Art Estate, managed by Jack Garrity, Kristi Garrity, and Pio Abad, which provided unprecedented access to archival materials, including photographs, correspondence, sketchbooks, and other primary sources, as well as to the depth of existing artworks by the artist. Pacita Abad is also accompanied by new scholarship in a 352-page catalogue, edited by Sung, and with texts by Sung and Miranda as well as by Julia Bryan-Wilson, Professor of LGBTQ Art History at Columbia University; Ruba Katrib, Curator and Director of Curatorial Affairs at MoMa PS1; Nancy Lim, Associate Curator of Painting and Sculpture at SFMOMA; and Xiaoyu Weng, Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Art Gallery of Ontario. It also features an expansive oral history, edited by Sung and Pio Abad, with 20 contributors, including artists, curators, family members, and friends.

Abad was born in Batanes, Philippines, and moved to the United States in 1970. While she spent more than a decade living in different parts of the country, and became a U.S. citizen in 1994, she traveled extensively and spent most of her career living in cities across the globe. Over the course of her life, she visited more than 60 countries, including Bangladesh, Sudan, the Dominican Republic, Indonesia, and Singapore. Her engagement with local makers inspired her lifelong interest in textiles, color and pattern, and experimentations with an impressive range of materials and techniques. The exhibition at the Walker highlights the significance of both Abad's immigrant experience as well as her many travels to the development of her practice and the ways in which they gave rise to an aesthetic that celebrated non-Western art forms historically associated with women's work and craft.

Pacita Abad is organized in a loose chronological order that emphasizes overlapping themes and material engagements. The exhibition is anchored by a wide selection of Abad's "trapunto" paintings, a hybrid art form in which she hand-quilted her painted canvases instead of stretching them over frames. Examples of the artist's trapunto paintings—many of which have never been on public view in the U.S.—are featured in each gallery of the 13,000-square-foot exhibition, capturing both the flexibility and play that the approach afforded Abad and its importance to her overarching practice. The exhibition also includes lesser known but equally significant selections of her works on paper, sculptures, ceramics, and costumes, further extending the dialogue about the range of Abad's work.

During her lifetime, Abad made thousands of artworks. Among the featured cycles of works in the exhibition are Abad's Social Realist works from the 1970s, which include powerful portraits of individuals escaping political persecution and economic injustice, as well as her Immigrant Experience works from the 1990s, which capture the contemporaneous experiences of diasporic communities from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Also featured are works that are inspired by Indigenous masking traditions Abad encountered in Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, including *Masks from Six Continents* (1990–93), a 50-foot-long fabric mural originally commissioned for the Washington, D.C., Metro Center that will be installed for the first time in over 30 years for the exhibition. The artist's decades-long engagement with patterned abstraction was in part inspired by late nights listening to jazz and blues, with numerous works capturing the idiosyncratic spontaneity and syncretic sensibility of those musical idioms. Abad's works inspired by the electric colors of marine wildlife are also included, highlighting her sensitivity to the beauty and precariousness of the Earth's ecosystems. Together, the featured works showcase the energetic interplay between abstraction and figuration in Abad's practice and illuminate her engagement with people, places, and critical issues of her time.

"Pacita Abad's practice is marked by constant evolution and experimentation. She lived her approach to artmaking completely—in her artworks, in her person, and in her surroundings—blurring the boundaries between center and periphery, self and other, and art and life," said Sung. "Pacita Abad foregrounds the visual exuberance and material innovations of this visionary artist and seeks to position her contributions within American, Philippine, and transnational art histories."

“The Walker first exhibited Abad’s work in 1995 in a traveling group exhibition. It is our distinct pleasure to now—through the vision and commitment of curator Victoria Sung—present Abad’s first retrospective and to capture her singular artistry, innovative spirit, and passion for exploration,” said Mary Ceruti, the Walker’s Executive Director. “The Walker has a long history of championing and supporting underrecognized artists, and we see this exhibition as a historic moment to celebrate the life and work of an artist who so richly deserves greater examination, study, and appreciation.”

Pacita Abad (1946–2004) has been the subject of recent solo exhibitions, including *I Thought the Streets Were Paved with Gold* at the Jameel Arts Center, Dubai (2021); *Life in the Margins* at Spike Island, Bristol (2020); and *A Million Things to Say* at the Museum of Contemporary Art and Design, Manila (2018). Her work has been featured in group exhibitions, including the 58th Carnegie International (2022); the Kathmandu Triennale 2077 (2002); the 13th Gwangju Biennale (2021); and the 11th Berlin Biennale (2020). Her work can be found in the collections of Tate Modern, London; M+ Museum, Hong Kong; and National Gallery of Singapore, among others. Her art and archives are managed by the Pacita Abad Art Estate in Los Angeles. Visit pacitaabad.com for more information.