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Pacita Abad: A Million Things to Say

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Installation view of 'Pacita Abad: A Million Things to Say' at MCAD. Image courtesy of MCAD.

14 years after her death, the prestigious Filipino artist Pacita Abad still has 'a million things to say', condensed into 24 works at the Museum of Contemporary Art and Design (MCAD Manila). The exhibition is co-curated by Joselina Cruz and artist Pio Abad, Pacita Abad's nephew, and consists of Pacita Abad's distinctive *trapuntos* (quilt in Italian), textile collages and abstract assemblages. Abad's global vision, reflected in her embrace of a variety of styles and subjects, serves as a timely reminder for us to reflect on racial and cultural divisions in the current age.



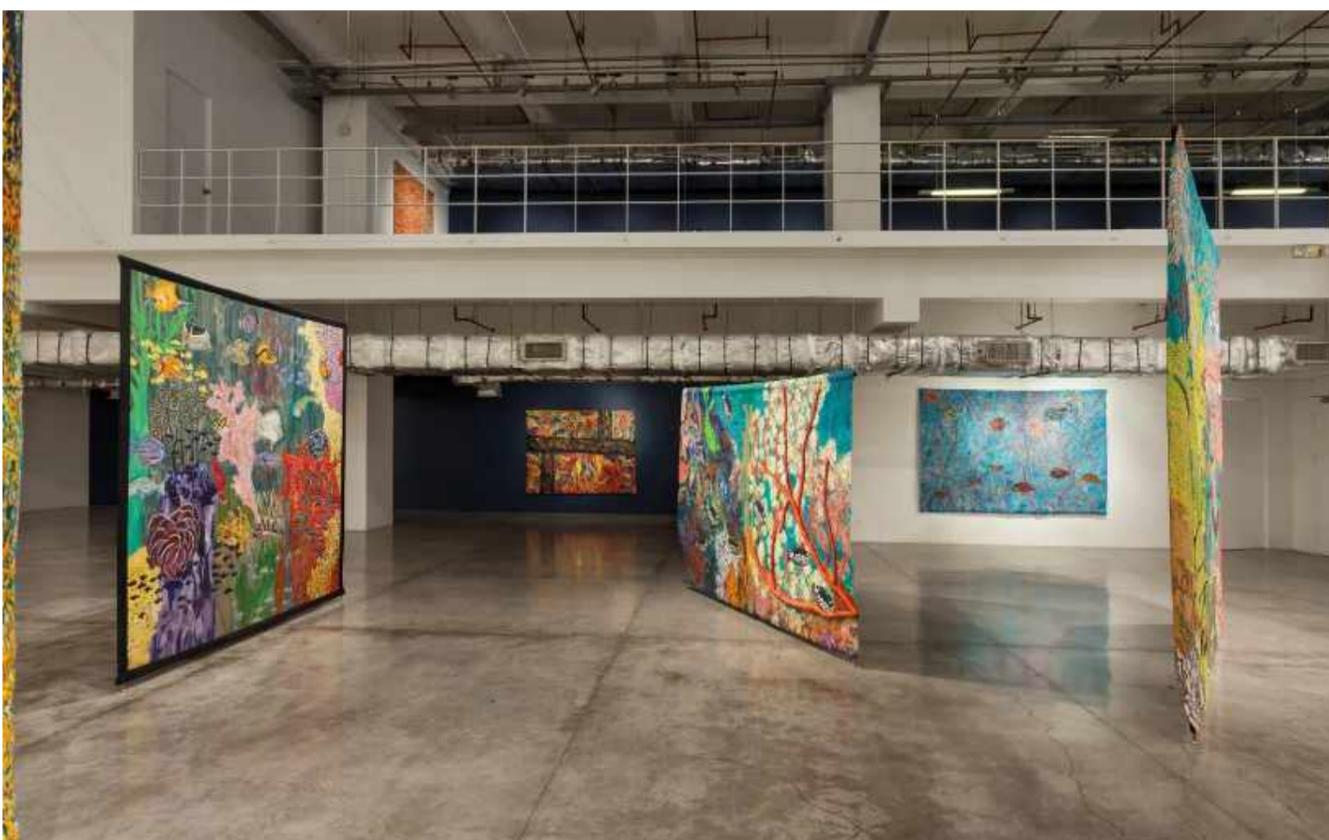
Installation view of 'Pacita Abad: A Million Things to Say' at MCAD. Image courtesy of MCAD.

Traversing through the monumental vibrant paintings hung from above, one feels towered over by the surrounding abstract or geometric forms and myriad of colors. Upon entering the exhibition space, viewers are greeted by geometric and figurative works like *Bacongo*, which consist of an eclectic mix of linear and circular forms marrying together to resemble a mask. As they move through the space, one becomes even more captivated by the *Underwater* series depicting sea creatures in overwhelming details of seascapes.



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In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Abad experimented with quilting *trapunto* onto her canvasses, and layering objects on top of her quilted material. The materials range from stones, sequins, glass, buttons, shells, mirrors to printed textile, which offer a subtle texture to her otherwise flat paintings when viewed from a close distance. The display method of hanging works away from walls reveals the back of the paintings, with hand stitches offering a clue to Abad's process. Abad recounted her interest of "creating the surface", mainly by "[...] building it up[,] whether it is just painting or adding mirrors, shells, and beads". The use of different indigenous materials is especially important to her, most probably influenced by her extensive travel experiences in places such as Bangladesh, Sudan, Jakarta, Boston, Washington D.C., Manila, Yemen and Singapore. From these diverse geographies, each embedded with their own unique objects and histories, Abad collected references and used them in her own endeavour, such as ink-brush painting in Korea, batik painting in Indonesia, etc.



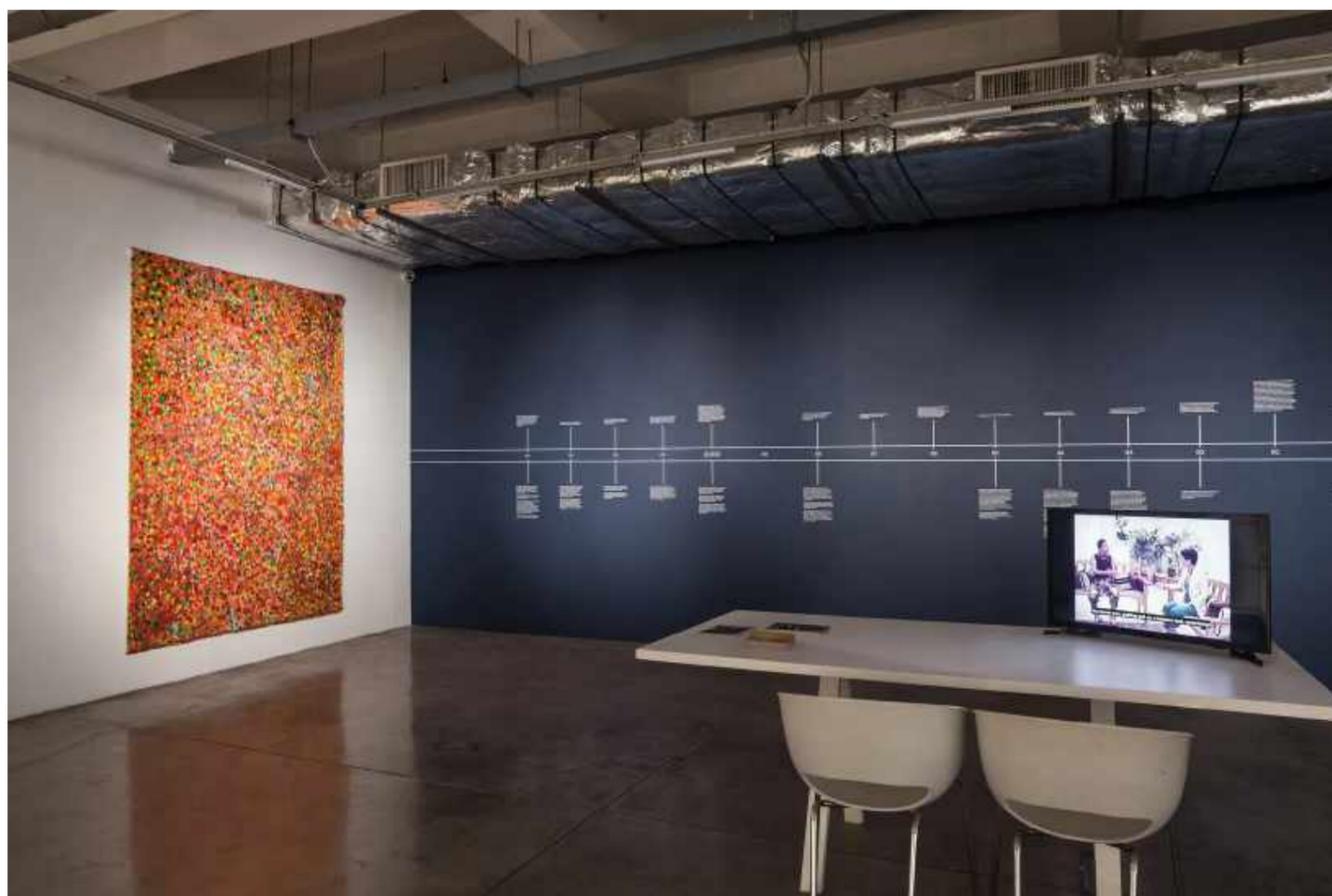
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The influence of Abad's travel experiences is also seen in the wide range of subjects she covered. Abad responded to issues of colonialism and national identity indirectly by depicting events of similar situations in other countries, ranging from refugees in Cambodia, Yemeni homes after the riots, and Laotian immigrants

losing their identity. She was particularly concerned with the issue of immigration, and she strove for an inclusive and global vision through incorporating multi-ethnic elements.



The title of the exhibition ‘A Million Things to Say’ takes its name from a work produced during the end of her life. According to the curator Mr. Abad, it refers to “the multiplicity of textures, materials, and narratives in the works of Pacita”, and also the complexity of her persona. As a female artist of colour, she was exposed to discrimination and difficulties in her artistic endeavours. Perhaps informed by her own background, her efforts to breaking down boundaries between nations and ethnicities are even more admirable, and serve as a stepping stone for us now to reconstruct art histories of minority artists.



[Click here](#) to find out more about Pacita Abad and to purchase her works.

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