

Mpls St Paul



April 27, 2023

5 Things to Know About Pacita Abad at the Walker

The global artist's colorful and decadent trapuntos drape the walls of the Walker Art Center, in her first retrospective exhibition.

by Peter Diamond



The globally renowned artist [Pacita Abad](https://walkerart.org/calendar/2023/pacita-abad) [imbedded her life and her work with color—so much so that the Walker Art Center painted the gallery walls in its latest 13,000-square-foot exhibition to strip them of an empty white.](https://walkerart.org/calendar/2023/pacita-abad)

"I always see the world through color, although my vision, perspective and paintings are constantly influenced by new ideas and changing environments," the Philippines-born artist once famously said about her life. "I feel like I am an ambassador of colors, always projecting a positive mood that helps make the world smile."

The Walker's latest exhibition is a long overdue career retrospective on the late artist, which opens this month before touring the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, MoMA PS1, and Art Gallery of Ontario. Organized by the

Walker in collaboration with Abad's estate, there are more than 100 works on view, many of which are being displayed in the U.S. for the first time. Here's what to know about the enigmatic and prolific artist, whose works are as vibrant as ever, and who saw no separation between her life and her art.

Global Artist

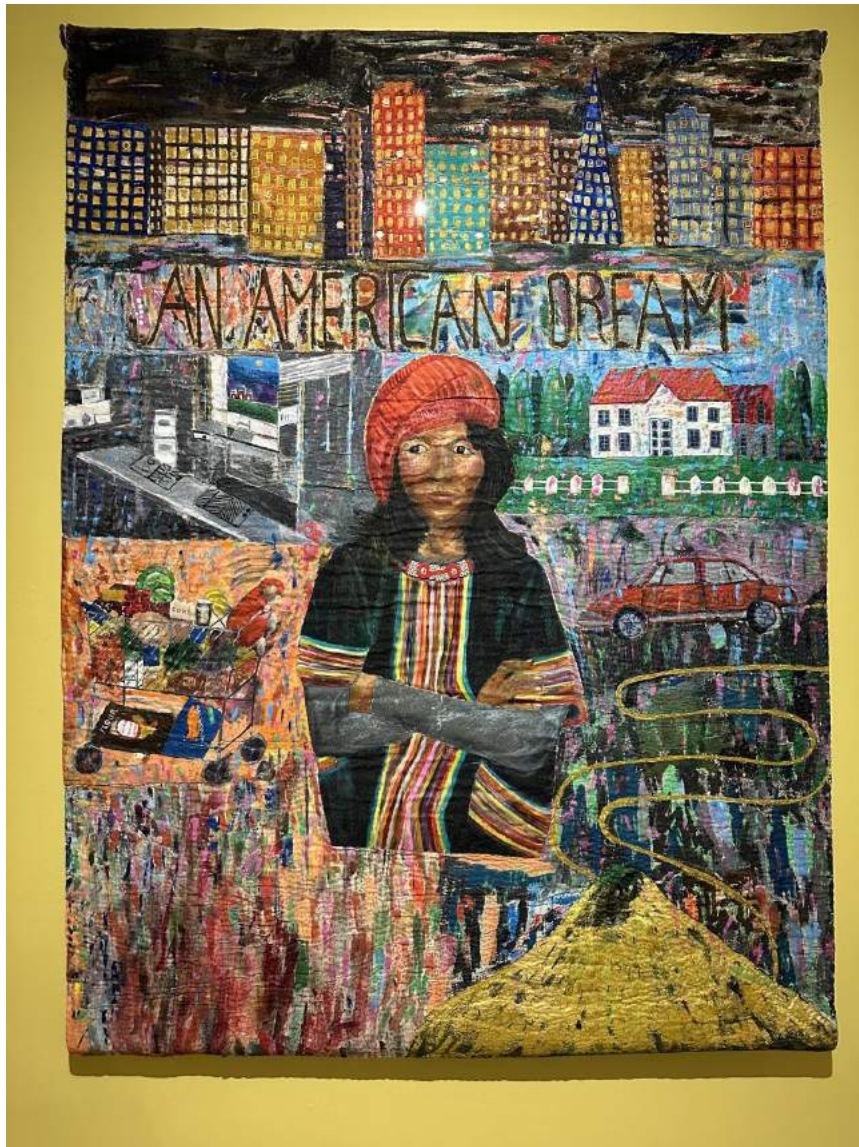
In 1946 Abad was born in Batanes, Philippines, but she didn't settle in one place for long. Over the course of her life, Abad lived on six different continents, and her work brought her to more than 50 countries. She moved to the U.S. in 1970, becoming a citizen here in 1994, but traveled extensively and spent the majority of her career living around the world, with visits to places like Bangladesh, Sudan, and Singapore. It was through meeting with global makers that piqued her interest in using textiles as a medium, experimenting wildly with color, patterns, and a range of materials and techniques. She passed away in 2004, but made thousands of works in her lifetime.

Trapuntos

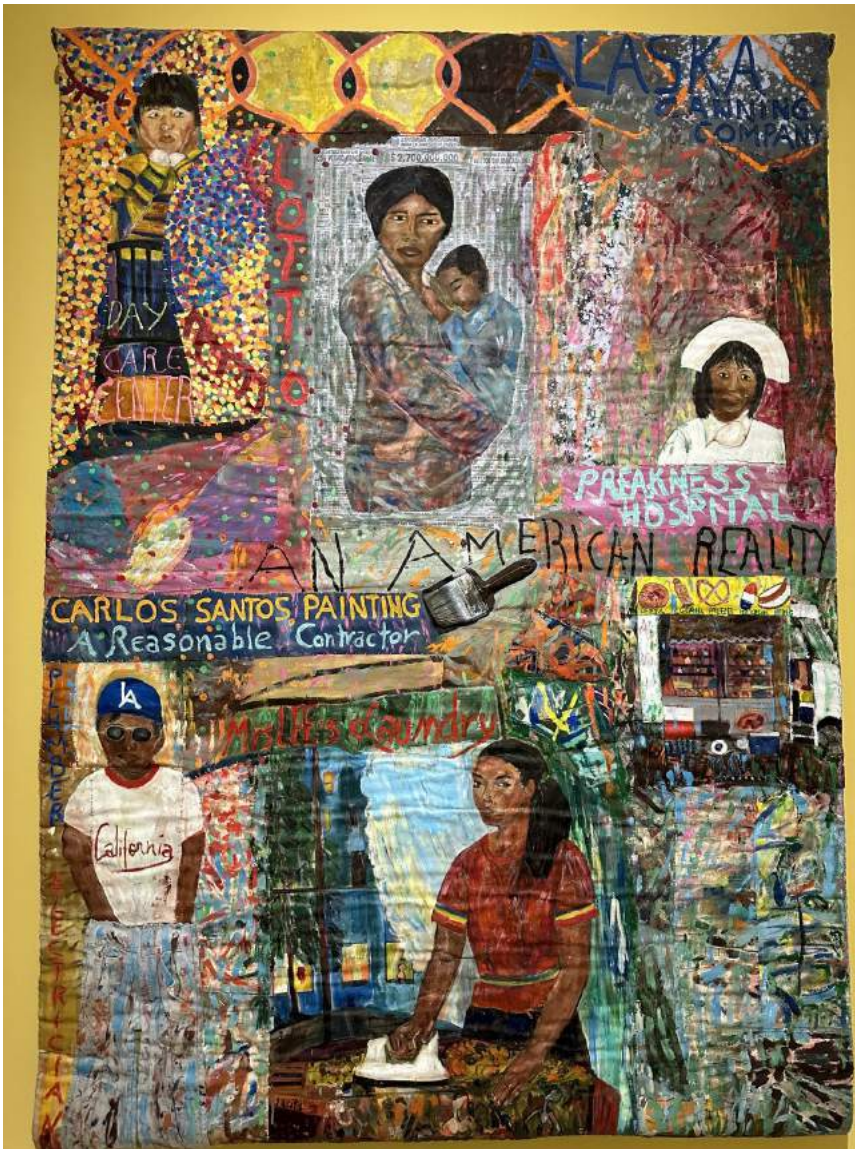
Abad is known for this form of painting, named after a quilting technique, in which she hand-stitched her painted canvases as opposed to stretching them over the frame, and then peppering an array of ordinary objects like cloth,

beads, and shells into her work. The exhibition includes a variety of these paintings, in addition to lesser known works from early sketches, sculptures, and costumes. Textiles, which are often associated with feminine and non-Western labor, are central to her work.

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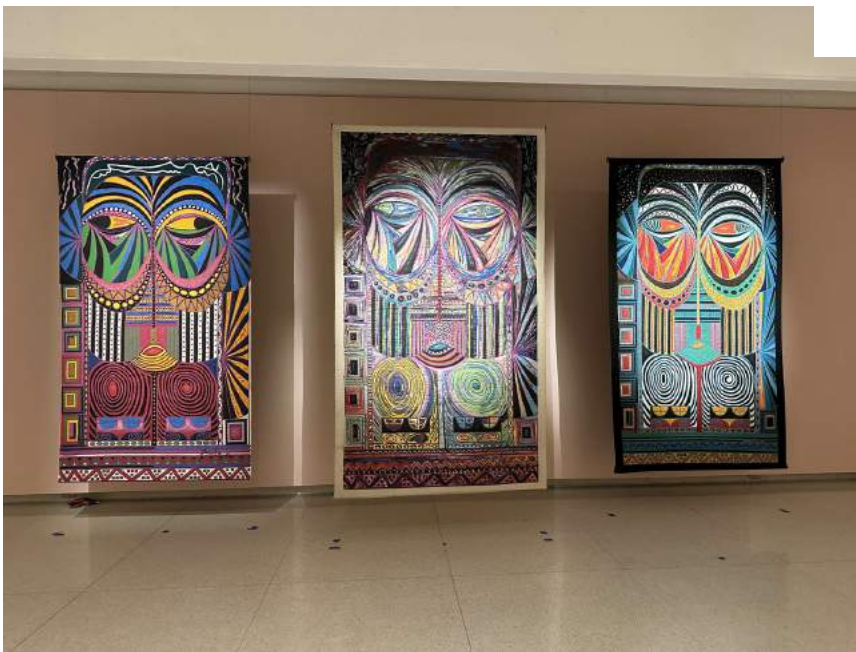
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The Immigrant Experience

Abad's life was marked by migration, and she was truly an artist of the people. Born into a family of politicians (her father was the Congressman of Batanes before being appointed by President Diosdado Macapagal as Minister of Public Works and Communications, and her mother would become Governor of Batanes), she left the Philippines after her father

was targeted in an election fraud case and it became too dangerous for her to stay under the dictatorship of President Ferdinand Marcos, whose regime she organized student protests against. Her *Social Realist* series from the 1970s is included in the exhibition, which depict portraits of people escaping political persecution and facing injustice, in addition to her *Immigrant Experience* pieces from the 1990s, which reveal a diverse cross-section of diasporic faces from Asian, African, and Latin American communities and references the 1992 Los Angeles riots, the Haitian refugee crisis, and the detention of Mexican migrant workers at the U.S. border.



Masks

Upon entering the exhibition, visitors will come face to face with a variety of tapestries depicting different Indigenous-inspired masks, inspired by

her travels to Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, that explore the concept of what being Indigenous even means. Her *Masks from Six Continents*, a 50-foot-long fabric mural, is also being installed for the first time in over 30 years.



Underwater

One prominent section of the exhibition features Abad's gigantic underwater series of works, as she was drawn to the colors of the ocean and marine wildlife and the fragility of the world's

ecosystems. Herself an avid diver, the aquatic scenes are huge. The deep sea depictions are like stepping into an aquarium when you enter the gallery, with gorgeous ocean tapestries with fish and sea life in beautiful harmony.

Pacita Abad

<<https://walkerart.org/calendar/2023/pacita-abad>> is on display at the Walker Art Center until September 3.

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