
Art

Layered and Embellished Trapunto Paintings Exude Spirit in Pacita Abad's First Retrospective

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Image courtesy of Pacita Abad Art Estate, shared with permission

Having created more than 5,000 paintings in her lifetime, traveled the world, and shown in over 200 exhibitions, Pacita Abad (1946-2004) was one of the most prolific and lauded Filipina-American artists. Now on view at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, her first retrospective showcases over 100 of her bold, distinctive works.

Abad was born in Basco, Batanes, the northernmost province of the Philippines. As her parents were politicians, the young artist initially had the aspirations of following in their diplomatic footsteps, and she avidly organized student demonstrations against the authoritarian Marcos regime, which eventually led to the political persecution of both Abad and her family. To escape this unrest and find security, her parents urged her to move overseas.

During what was initially a pit stop in California, Abad's amazement with the unencumbered vibrancy and freedom of expression in San Francisco acted as a catalyst for her abundant life-long career. Informed by her experiences with despotism, political refuge, and immigration, Abad began to create work underscoring these disquietudes.



Exhibition view at MCAD, Manila, (2018). Image courtesy of Walker Art Center, shared with permission

The years that followed involved travel, living in a number of different countries, and connecting with creative communities in every hemisphere. Abad was able to learn artistic techniques from different cultures and gather materials from diverse environments, which she would later incorporate into her own practice, especially her mask painting series.

Along the gallery's pink walls at the Walker, hand-stitched meandering lines run across canvas hanging more than two meters high. Though it was not Abad's intention for her art to be seen from both sides, viewers are able to experience her work in a more intimate way by observing the artist's hand, evident from the delicate stitching on each backside. Part of her signature trapunto painting technique, these sewn sections of canvas puff up with padding as geometric patterns house vibrant areas of color. Calling to Africa's masks and abstract carving, Tibet's Thangka tapestries, and Italy's trapunto techniques, Abad's series of masks are a conglomeration of community encounters as well as real stories of strength and strife inspired by those that she met along the way.

Abad's retrospective is on view at the Walker Art Center until September 3. Later this month, Tina Kim Gallery in New York will be showcasing Abad's work in a solo exhibition, as well.



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Exhibition view at the Walker (2023). Image courtesy of Walker Art Center, shared with permission



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Abad with the work. Image courtesy of Walker Art Center, shared with permission