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Pacita Abad, an Artist of the World

A new exhibition at the Walker highlights the exuberant and large-scale works of the Philippine-born artist.

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After Hours Party: Pacita Abad. Photo by Carina Lofgren. Courtesy Walker Art Center.

Pacita Abad is now on view at the Walker Art Center, featuring more than 100 joyful and colorful artworks from the Philippine-born artist Pacita Abad. The exhibition showcases her experiments in mediums including paintings, textiles, works on paper, costumes, and ceramics, with many artworks that have never been on view in the United States. Over her 32-year career, Abad made works spanning a range of subjects, from globally inspired masks and intimate portrayals of immigrant life, to patterned abstractions and dazzling underwater scenes.

See *Pacita Abad* through September 3. Galleries are free Thursday evenings and the first Saturday of every month.

[Learn more and get tickets at walkerart.org](https://walkerart.org).



Pacita Abad at work on *To Paint and Wait for You* (1990). Courtesy Pacita Abad Art Estate.

Unapologetically Pacita

Abad grew up in Manila, born into a political family in the northern Philippines. After her father, Jorge Abad, lost a reelection campaign in the Philippine House of Representatives because of election fraud, Pacita organized a student demonstration. The event was so impactful it led to her meeting with President Ferdinand Marcos. Capturing significant media attention and sparking protests around the country, this resistance led to the Philippines's Commission on Elections and the Supreme Court overturning the election in her father's favor.

The experience marked the beginning of Abad's commitment to social causes. Only a few months later, she protested rampant political corruption tied to the rise of the Marcos regime. As threats to her life increased, Abad moved to the United States in 1970 to escape political violence. But she did not go quietly, instead becoming a vocal opponent of the 14-year dictatorship that instituted martial law and violently suppressed freedom of speech, press, and assembly in the Philippines.

Abad's Immigrant Experience

Abad's refusal to conform and her experiences across cultures defined her art-making. Her artwork drew from the traditions she lovingly absorbed during travels in more than 60 countries, including Sudan, Thailand, Bangladesh, Dominican Republic, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Papua New Guinea. Abad created vibrant quilted canvases with

maximalist color and embellishments. Just like the artist who made them, these artworks refuse to speak with a soft voice while incorporating elements of her social activism.



Pacita Abad, *L.A. Liberty*, 1992. View of the exhibition *Life in the Margins*, Spike Island, Bristol, 2019. Courtesy Spike Island, Bristol. Photo: Max McClure.

After a trip to Ellis Island in New York, Abad created *L.A. Liberty* in 1992. She noted how immigrants from primarily Western and Eastern Europe had the Statue of Liberty dedicated to their US arrival, but the immigration stories of people from Latin America, Asia and Africa were historically omitted. In the work, Abad replaced the sculpture's iconic figure with a brown-skinned woman surrounded by bursts of kaleidoscopic color. The painting proudly stands as a monument for those whose images and stories have been left out of official narratives.

L.A. Liberty was the first in Abad's Immigrant Experience series, illuminating the everyday realities of fellow immigrants in the United States. The series includes *Korean Shopkeepers*, which examines the Los Angeles Uprising of 1922, a major flash point between Black, Latinx, and Korean American communities. In *Haitians Waiting at Guantanamo Bay*, Abad depicts the plight of people fleeing poverty, persecution, and discrimination, while *Caught at the Border* addresses the detention of Mexican and Central American migrant workers at the US border in the 1990s.

Abad dared to be visible. With her freewheeling exuberance, Abad spoke truth to power through her unapologetic expression in artwork, commitment to social justice, and belief in the transformational power of creativity.

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After Hours Party: *Pacita Abad*. Photo by Kam Herndon. Courtesy Walker Art Center.