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BOMB Magazine | Change is in the Air I-V

9–12 minutes

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The Filipino artist used abstraction in her quilted, layered paintings to evade political repression under Suharto's authoritarian regime.

March 15, 2024



Change is in the Air III, 1995, oil, alkyd, dyed cloth, and painted cloth stitched on canvas, 47 x 30 inches.

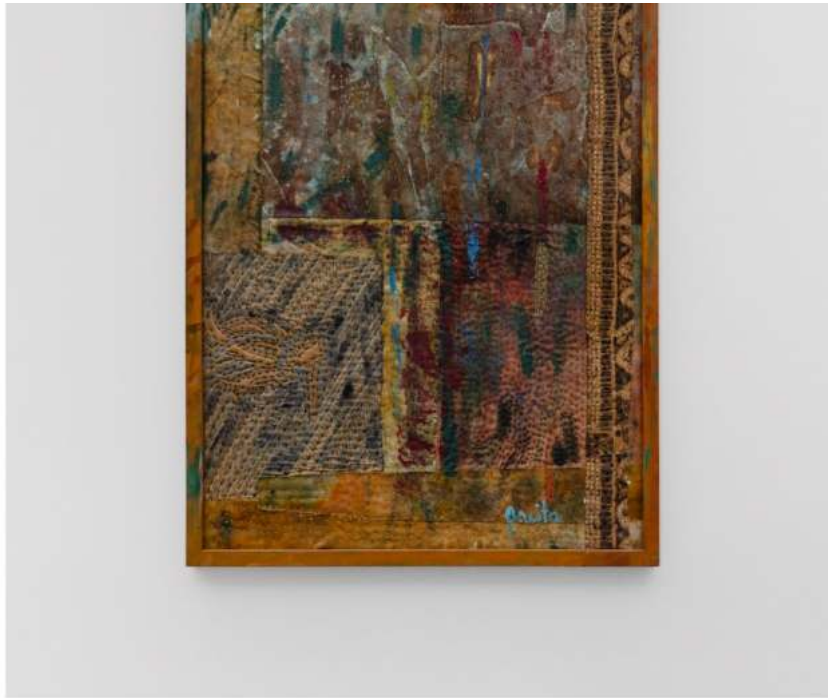
Pacita Abad created the series *Change is in the Air* while living in Indonesia in 1995, twenty-five years after fleeing the Philippines and the oppression of Ferdinand Marcos's dictatorial regime. Made during the twilight of Suharto's similarly violent authoritarian rule, the works serve as both historical record and cultural display, one in which Abad made use of local materials and textiles, including Indonesian *batik* fabric.

Change is in the Air demonstrates many of the artist's signature techniques: layered textures, intricate stitching, and painted cloth. And though stretched and framed, the works in the series can be experienced from the front and the back like the artist's large quilted paintings that are hung from the ceiling. Many of these paintings are exhibited in Abad's first major retrospective in North America, which began at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and travels to [MoMA PS1](#) in New York City this spring, but *Change is in the Air* has never been previously published or exhibited. These versos map the journeys of Abad's stitched lines, and from this side, the bones of each work become visible as if exposing a hidden history.

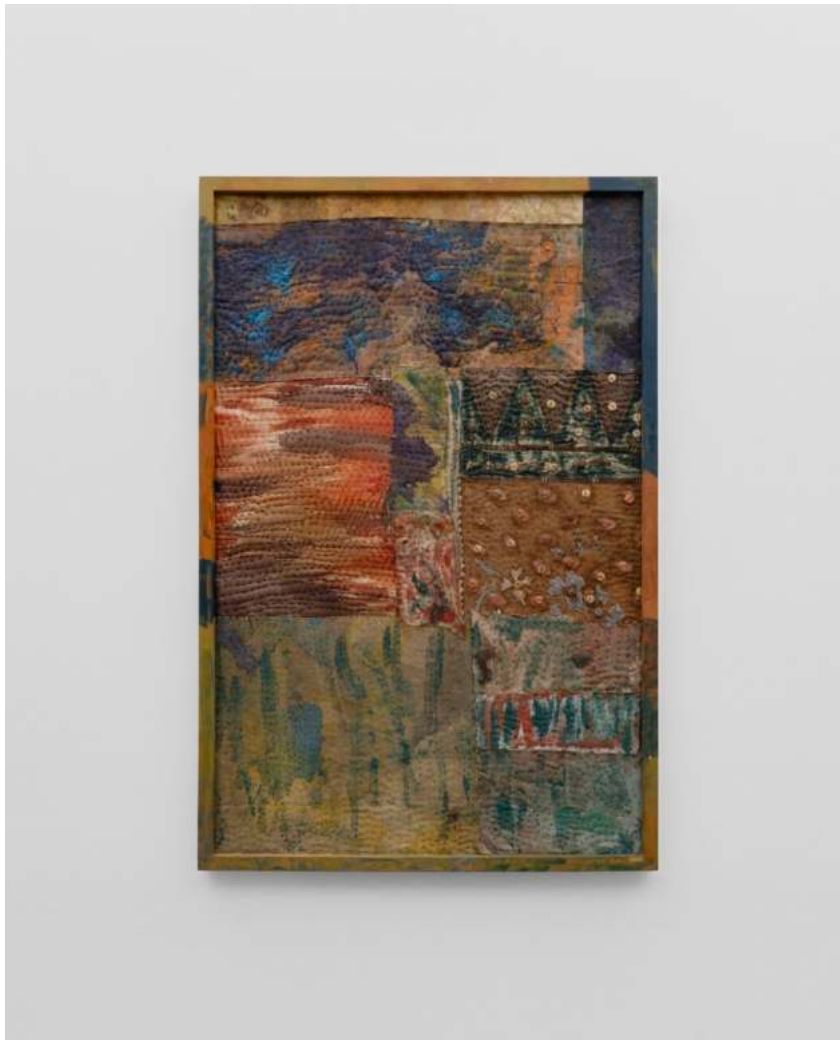
For *Change is in the Air*, Abad eschews figuration in favor of abstraction and exchanges bright hues for muddied browns. Deeply familiar with political repression, she turned to abstraction to navigate the rampant censorship of Suharto's regime but still articulate dissent. Amid the works' gloomy, muted color palette, flashes of blue, orange, and pink emerge like morning light on the horizon after a long, stormy night. *Change is in the Air* signals realms of possibility beyond the disquiet. The series echoes the political and ethical concerns found throughout the artist's oeuvre, making clear her steadfast beliefs in the need to fight against oppression across countries and cultures and that revolution can be both quiet and powerful.

—Carina Santos

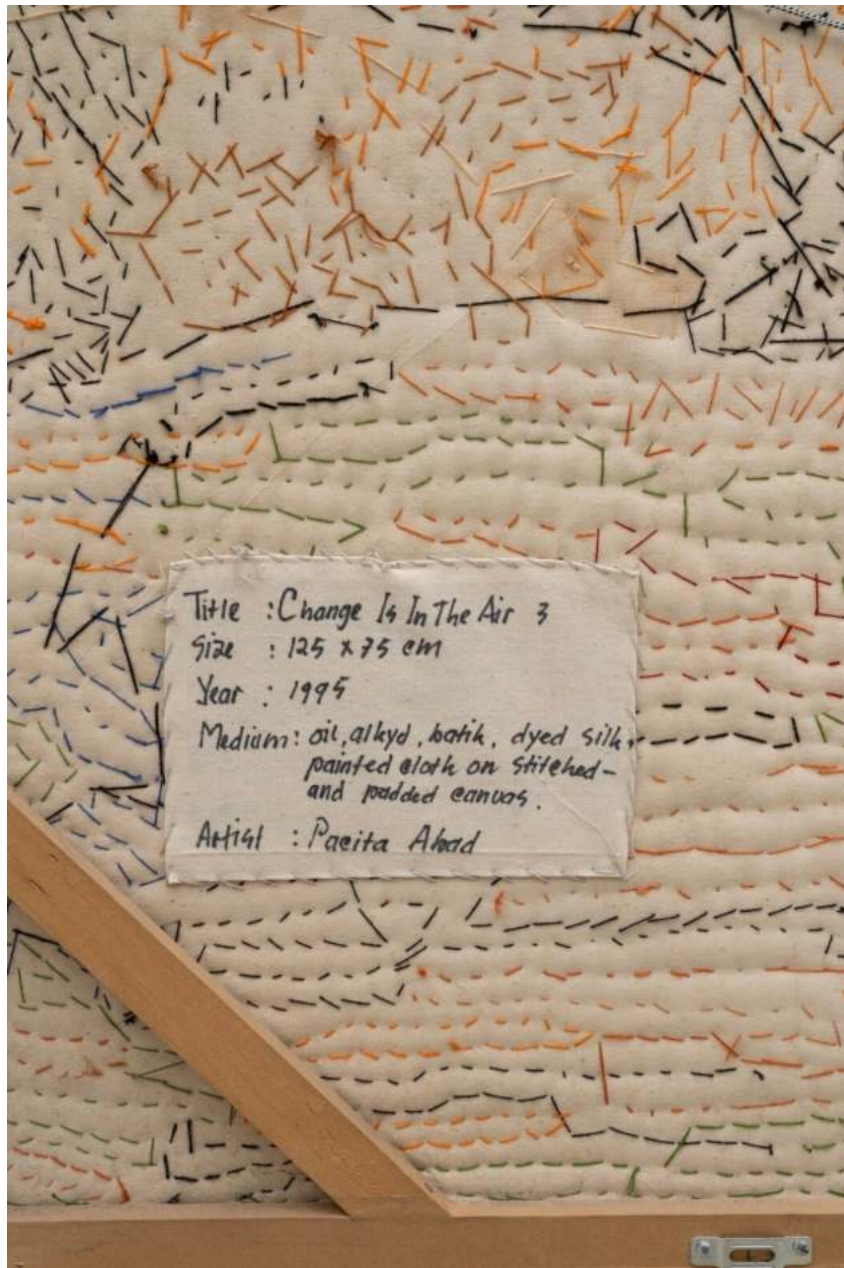




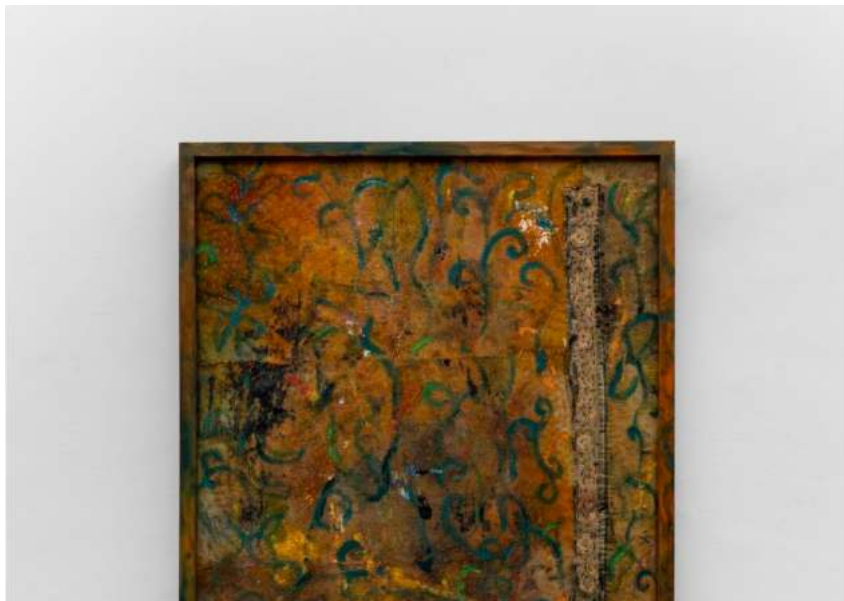
Change is in the Air I, 1995, oil, alkyd, dyed cloth, and painted cloth stitched on canvas, 47 x 30 inches. Photos by Hyunjung Rhee. Images courtesy of Pacita Abad Art Estate and Tina Kim Gallery, New York City.



Change is in the Air II, 1995, oil, alkyd, dyed cloth, painted cloth, mirrors, and buttons stitched on canvas, 47 x 30 inches.



Detail of Change is in the Air III, 1995, oil, alkyd, dyed cloth, and painted cloth stitched on canvas, 47 x 30 inches.





Change is in the Air IV, 1995, oil, alkyd, dyed cloth, and painted cloth stitched on canvas, 47 x 30 inches.



Change is in the Air V, 1995, oil, alkyd, and painted cloth stitched on canvas, 47 x 30 inches.

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Carina Santos is an artist, writer, and designer from Quezon City, Philippines. She is currently based between London and Manila.