

Pacita Abad Art Estate / Interview with Jack Garrity

By **Brainard Carey** - May 29, 2014

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Pacita Abad (1946 – 2004) was an internationally renowned, Philippine-American painter who was born in Batanes, a small island in the South China Sea. Her 32 year painting career began when she traveled to the United States to study law, but later switched careers to dedicate her life to painting.

Pacita holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from the University of the Philippines and a Master of Arts degree in Asian History from the University of San Francisco, California. She then studied painting at the Corcoran School of Art, Washington, D.C. and The Art Students League in New York City. Since that time Pacita never stopped being a gypsy artist, and painted the globe while working on six different continents and traveling to more than 50 countries. During her career Pacita created over 4,500 artworks, and her paintings were exhibited in more than 200

museums and galleries around the world.

Pacita's artistic career, right up to her her early death at age 58, was a creative continuum exploring and expanding new mediums, techniques and materials. She incessantly pushed herself and her work forward year after year, never repeating any series or body of work no matter how successful. After her early years Pacita grew to reject the painterly emphasis on surface flatness, as she constantly sought ways to expand her painted canvases. She developed a unique, innovative painting style which she called trapunto painting, that fused spontaneous self-expression with hand-stitched painted surfaces covered with traditional materials, found objects and her signature vibrant colors.

It is a challenge to comprehend Pacita Abad's artistic career as one unit as her work traversed from her: initial socially conscious beginnings of displaced people, political violence, refugees and immigrants from countries like Bangladesh, Sudan Dominican Republic, Cambodia and the Philippines; to vibrantly colored, hand stitched trapunto paintings depicting masks and spirits from Oceania, Java, Islands Southeast Asia, Africa and the Americas; to nature inspirations with paintings including the undersea world of the South China Sea, Australian Outback and Asia's tropical flowers; to her most comprehensive and boldly colorful abstract paintings, prints, and mixed media collages on canvas, paper, bark cloth, glass and other mediums, that she focused on during the second half of her career. Pacita also did a number of noteworthy public art installations such as her "Masks from Six Continents" in the main Washington Metro Station, and just before she died the 55 meter long "Singapore Art Bridge" which she covered with 2,350 colorful circles at the same time she was undergoing treatment for cancer.

Pacita's paintings were featured in solo exhibitions at the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington D.C.; Hong Kong Arts Center, Hong Kong; Museum of Philippine Art and the Metropolitan Museum in Manila; Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art, Bangkok, Thailand; Altos de Chavon, Dominican Republic; Art Museum of Western Virginia, Roanoke; National Center of Afro-American Artists, Boston; National Museum and the National Gallery of Art, Jakarta, Indonesia and the Hadeland Museum in Norway, among others.

Her work also appeared in numerous group exhibitions including: Beyond the Border: Art by Recent Immigrants, Bronx Museum; Asia/America: Identities in Contemporary Asian American Art, Asia Society, New York; Olympiad of Art (in conjunction with the 24th Olympics), National Museum of Contemporary Art in Seoul, Korea; 2nd Asian Art Show, Fukuoka Art Museum, Japan; La Bienal de la Habana, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Habana, Cuba; Art for Africa, traveling exhibition to Oslo, Cologne, Algiers, London and Rome; UNESCO: 40 Years, 40 Countries, 40 Artists, traveling exhibition to 15 museums around the world; Filipino Artists Abroad, Metropolitan Museum of Manila; and At Home and Abroad: 21 Contemporary Filipino Artists, traveling exhibition to the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston and the Metropolitan Museum of Manila, among others.

Pacita's paintings are now held by museum, public, corporate and private art collections in over 70 countries, and are regularly auctioned at Sotheby's and Christie's. Among the museums that have collected Pacita's paintings are: the Fukuoka Art Museum in Japan, National Art Museum in Singapore, Taipei Fine Arts Museum, National Museum of Contemporary Art in Korea, National Museum of the Philippines, Metropolitan Museum of Manila, Museum Nasional in Indonesia, Smithsonian American Art Museum, National Museum for Women in the Arts in Washington, DC, the Bronx Museum in New York and the Zimmerli Art Museum in New Jersey.



Yield to adventure, 2002
94 x 71 inches
Oil, painted cloth stitched on canvas



To paint for you, 1992

83 x 59 inches

Oil, acrylic, buttons, beads, mirrors, painted handwoven cloth on silk screened, stitched and padded canvas