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## Artist Pacita Abad Archives Going To Stanford University

The Pacita Abad Archives joins Stanford's growing collection of archives of Asian American artists, including those of Ruth Asawa (1926–2013) and Bernice Bing (1936–1998).

By Chadd Scott



Pacita Abad in her Jakarta studio circa 1994. Courtesy Pacita Abad Art Estate

The Cantor Arts Center and the Department of Special Collections at Stanford University Libraries today announced the acquisition of the Pacita Abad Archives. The vast collection of archival materials and ephemera spans over 30 years of the Filipina artist's career, from her time in the Bay Area during the mid-70s through her passing in 2004. Gifted by the Pacita Abad Art Estate, the Archives share intimate insights into the artist's globetrotting life and artistic production.

Due to her political activism against the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos as a student, Abad (1946–2004) left the Philippines in 1969 and traveled to the Bay Area to study law. There, she met future husband Jack Garrity.

“She walked into the room and everybody noticed her and gravitated towards her,” Garrity told Forbes.com. “She was vivacious, outgoing, and had a big belly laugh.”

Garrity was representing Stanford University, where he went to business school, at a world affairs conference in 1973 in Monterey, CA when he was first introduced to Abad. She was there representing San Francisco’s Lone Mountain College.

“A world affairs conference turned into a worldwide journey,” Garrity remembers.

The couple would go on to travel and live in more than 60 countries throughout the course of their marriage as a result of Garrity’s work in international development. Bangladesh, Sudan, South Sudan, Dominican Republic, Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore.

But first, back to San Francisco.

“After we met, we spent a year hitchhiking from Istanbul to the Philippines. She had been accepted to Berkeley Law School with a full scholarship and over that journey, she decided that she didn’t really want to become a lawyer, she wanted to become an artist,” Garrity said. “So we went back to Stanford to finish up my last year, and we did a deal. I said, ‘Okay, if you work and help us get through business school this last year, I’ll support you for art school.’”

The couple lived together rent-free in a cabin on a small ranch while Garrity finished up at Stanford. He took care of the horses, she babysat and worked at the Stanford Medical School.

This period of their life was captured by Abad in an early work depicting Garrity at the home. *Foothill Cabin* (1976) was acquired by the Cantor in 2023 and is currently on view there. The museum recently acquired two other major works by Abad, *If My Friends Could See Me Now* (1993), and *100 years of freedom: From Batanes to Jolo* (1998).

## **A Perfect Fit**



Pacita Abad and Jack Garrity, c.1975-1976, Pacita Abad archives (M3075). Dept. of Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, Calif

Abad was a diligent self-archivist, holding on to letters and photographs and fabric pieces acquired around the world throughout her career. Garrity has cared for this material since her death. When he moved to his current residence in Los Angeles, he sought out a home with a three-car garage to store all the boxes. They now go to Stanford.

Garrity's selection of the school goes beyond his having attended there and the couple's time in San Francisco, although those connections didn't hurt.

"She had a very strong connection to the Bay Area," Garrity said. "That was where she first landed (and) fell in love with San Francisco during the Haight Ashbury days and summers of love and lots of music and diversity. She fit right in."

The Pacita Abad Archives joins the Libraries' growing collection of archives of Asian American artists, including those of Ruth Asawa (1926–2013) and Bernice Bing (1936–1998). At the same time, the Cantor is committed to building one of the most significant collections of Asian American art through its Asian American Art Initiative, a cross-departmental, institutional project dedicated to the preservation, collection, exhibition, and study of work made by Asian American artists.

For Abad to be fully recognized as one of the greatest Asian American artists, and for the Cantor's Asian American Art Initiative to fully achieve its mission, the two needed each other. Their paths crossed at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis where Abad's first retrospective was presented in 2023. Garrity attended the opening. So did the Cantor Arts Center's director Veronica Roberts.

Despite growing up in the Bay Area and committing her life to the study of art, Roberts had been unaware of Abad.

"I randomly happened to be sick and in bed one day," Roberts told Forbes.com. "I was on Tina Kim's gallery website and I saw a little thumbnail image. Who's Pacita Abad? I love this work. I kept clicking and clicking, and was like, 'Oh my God, how do I not know who this artist is!?'"

Roberts went down a rabbit hole investigating Abad, learning about her connection to San Francisco, discovering the Walker was organizing her retrospective. Having just been hired as director at the Cantor, attracted to the position in part because of the Asian American Art Initiative, her wheels began turning. Fortunately for Roberts, Aleesa Pitchamarn Alexander and Marci Kwon, co-founders of AAPI, were a step ahead of her. They'd already made contact with Garrity.

"I think we should try to bring the archives here in addition to making an important purchase, and we better do it now, because there's a retrospective, and it's going to be harder to as soon as that opens and more people figure out how great she is," Roberts remembers telling her colleagues.

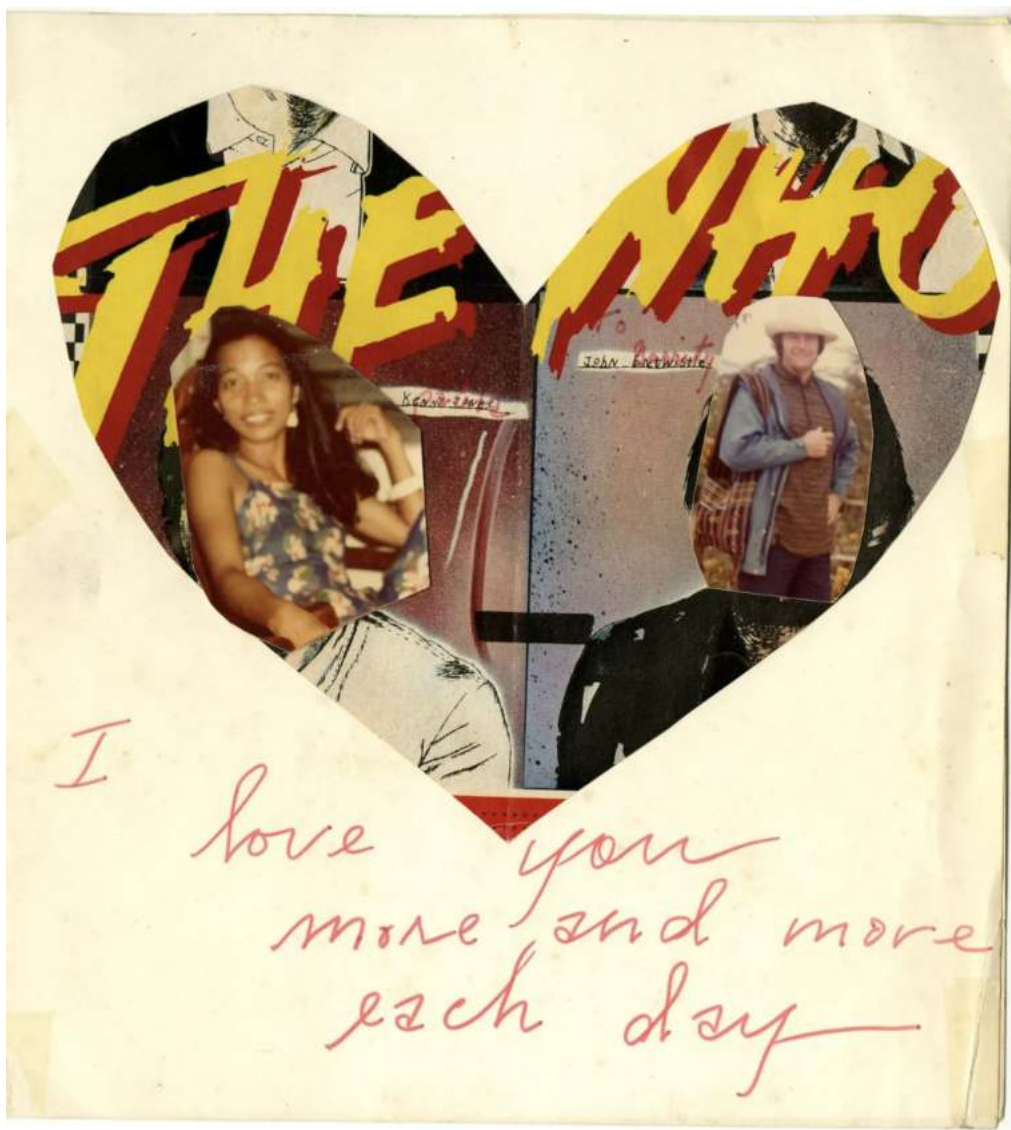
Abad's retrospective would travel to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, MoMA PS1 in New York, and the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto. As Roberts predicted, interest in and demand for Abad's work soared following the critically acclaimed exhibition.



At the Walker opening, Roberts met Garrity and introduced the possibility of his gifting the archives to Stanford.

"It was meant to be," Roberts said. "(Pitchamarn Alexander and Kwon) already knew about the work. I was interested. We had a brand new archivist; she was interested. We all got it. Everyone was on board. Jack Garrity had gone to Stanford. He was trying to find a home for (the archive) and was so committed to her legacy and understood (San Francisco) was a key part of it. It was as good a match as you could ever have."

### Menus And Scuba Gear



Collage made by Pacita Abad, c.1980-81. Pacita Abad archives (M3075). Dept. of Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford Libraries, Stanford, California

The archive includes photographs, unpublished works, sketches, exhibition records, correspondence, and personal artifacts. As part of the gift, the Pacita Abad Art Estate has allocated funds to the Libraries to support a dedicated archivist who will catalog and digitize the materials, ensuring their long-term accessibility. All materials will be accessible to the public free of charge with an appointment made through the Libraries.

Notable highlights from the Archives include the first textile Abad ever acquired, a Turkish needlepoint made using red, green, purple, and metallic threads, and various menus that she created for social gatherings at her home—a hub of cultural exchange.

The menus.

“We constantly were entertaining,” Garrity said. “Luckily, being overseas, we were able to have help, and so we would have dinners for 10 people, 15 people. People would be coming into town, and they’d say, ‘I’m staying with some friends; can I bring them over?’ Sure, no problem. We had dinner plates that she made in Indonesia. We’d have candles and flowers—she really did it up. Then she would make these menus and back them with Batik, just small ones, and say what we’re going to eat.”

Both Roberts and Lindsay King, Head Librarian of Bowes Art and Architecture Library at Stanford University, who got sneak peeks at the Archive materials, signaled out the menus among the items they saw.

“She was a great cook too, so you get a sense of who she was as a person,” King told Forbes.com. “There’s a lot of pictures of Pacita (in the archive). I never got a chance to meet her in person, but you get a sense of her personality coming through the images. Oftentimes she seems kind of in mid-sentence, or she’s doing some crazy thing. There’s images of her in scuba gear because one of the series (“Underwater Wilderness”). A lot of us saw that picture and thought it would have been so cool to talk to her. That vitality comes through.”

The scuba picture came from a gallery opening.

“To see a photo of her in the 90s at an opening in the Philippines of her underwater fish paintings and she shows up to her opening in her bikini and full scuba gear—she had the flippers, the tank on. I’ve seen a lot of artists in their studio photos or artists at openings and I will never forget this one,” Roberts said. “It tells me so much about her personality, the way she embraced life. That really comes across in the work, but even more so in the papers, in the Archives, and photos.”

The Archives also feature images documenting her worldwide travels, as well as the schematic for her final public art installation in Singapore—a vibrant bridge ornamented with over 2,000 concentric circles

completed shortly before her passing. Together, it offers unparalleled insight into Abad's connection with the diverse artist and artisan communities around the world that she engaged with and championed.

"She clearly recognized that she mattered and that her work was meaningful because she saved so much. She saved everything," Roberts explained. "That's going to help us help people understand how fully she led her life and the extent of the impact and influence of her work."

## Finally



Pacita Abad in San Francisco, c. 1970-73, Pacita Abad archives (M3075). Dept. of Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, Calif

Abad was not a well-known artist during her lifetime. Not unknown, but not well-known. The art world in 1985, or 1995, wasn't interested in Filipina artists working in fabrics, sharing Indigenous crafting traditions from Africa and Southeast Asia. Her international travels made her acutely aware of the difficult lives that

most women lead around the globe and heightened her sensitivity to the severe political, social, economic and environmental challenges she encountered across Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Also subjects she incorporated into her work. Also subjects previous generations of fine art tastemakers weren't interested in.

The Walker retrospective coinciding with the art world's broadening interests catapulted her recognition to the stratosphere.

What would she think of this?

Garrity, a Bostonian and Boston sports fan, and Abad, a Boston sports fan through marriage, shared this story from Abad's final months as an analogy.

"She's in and out of a coma, and she came out one time, and I said, 'The Red Sox beat the Yankees in the (2004) playoffs.' She said, 'It's about time,'" Garrity recalls. "A couple weeks later, when they beat the Cardinals, I said they won the World Series. And she said, 'finally.' That's how she would have felt about her work. She was always very confident in her work, and she believed her work should be in museums and should be widely collected."

So confident, the couple held onto work they could have sold during her lifetime knowing that her moment had yet to come. The art was what mattered, not the money.

"Artists never have any money, but they always seem to have a good time," Garrity said.