

# The Personal Archives of the Trailblazing Artist Pacita Abad Find a Permanent Home

Stanford University is acquiring the career-spanning materials. It is a poignant homecoming.



Pacita Abad in her Jakarta studio, around 1994. Courtesy Pacita Abad Art Estate.

by Andrew Russeth (<https://news.artnet.com/about/andrew-russeth-39227>)

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Twenty years after the artist Pacita Abad's death, in 2004, of cancer, at 58, her astonishing achievements are finally reaching a wide audience.

A rip-roaring retrospective

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/08/01/arts/design/stitch-by-stitch-pacita-abad-crossed-continents-and-cultures.html>) began at the

Walker Art Center in Minneapolis in 2023 and ended its travels at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto earlier this year, winning acclaim all along the way. Meanwhile, museums have been snapping up her works—her ingenious quilted *trapunto* pictures, her dazzlingly colorful paintings of masks, her candid depictions of women and immigrants. She was prolific, seemingly indefatigable. Now the Filipina American's voluminous archives have been acquired by Stanford University's libraries and its Cantor Arts Center.

The material, which measures a cool 120 feet long, includes Abad's correspondence with fellow artists, like Faith Ringgold, photographs that go back to her childhood in 1960s Manila, sundry keepsakes, and a great deal more. It is a gift from her estate, which is run by her second husband, Jack Garrity, and it comes with a donation to Stanford that will help the archives be processed. "We're so excited to be thinking about her legacy now," the Cantor's director, Veronica Roberts, said in a video interview. While Abad has become better known, with her work entering many key collections, she said, "we've only just begun to scratch the surface. There's still a lot more to say and learn."

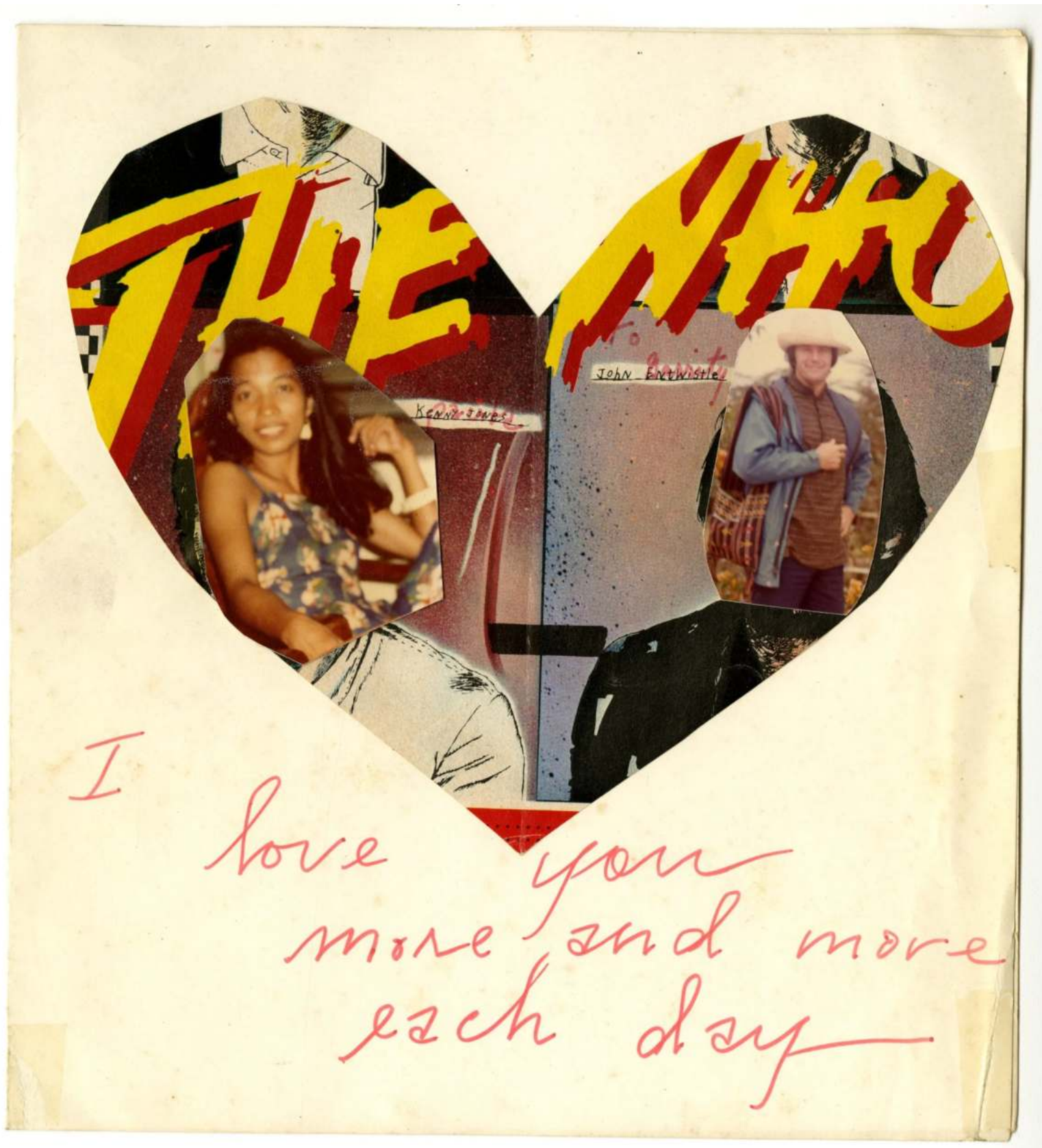
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The acquisition is a kind of homecoming. Abad left the Philippines in 1969 after being involved in student protests against the regime of Ferdinand Marcos, and planned to study law in Spain. She stopped in the Bay Area to see an aunt and decided to stay, enrolling in a history master's program at what is now the University of San Francisco. (At a moment when the U.S. president muses about barring international students, her story has extra poignancy.) In 1971, she married a San Francisco artist, George Kleiman, but they soon separated. Two years later, she met Garrity, a Stanford graduate student, and they proceeded to hitchhike across Asia for a year. When they got back in 1974, he continued at Stanford, while she worked at its medical center and took up art.



Collage made by Pacita Abad, around 1980–81. Courtesy Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford Libraries, Stanford, Calif.

There are revealing items in the trove, like a speech that Abad gave in Manila in 1985 when she was named one of the Ten Outstanding Young Men in the Philippines. (That's not a typo. She was the first woman to win that honor in its 26-year history, and posed at the awards ceremony

alongside First Lady Imelda Marcos.) Lindsay King, the head librarian of Stanford's Bowes Art and Architecture Library (which will house the collection), said on the call with Roberts that the speech is "very carefully calibrated. She typed it out and underlined certain words. She was very careful. It gives you a sense of who she was in the best way that archives can give you."

The many files relating to Abad's shows reveal her "hustle—she had so many exhibitions all around the world," King said. The artist lived and traveled throughout the globe, often with Garrity, who was an economist for the World Bank. She collected textiles, which she sometimes integrated into her own works, and picked up techniques from far-flung peers.

"What is so interesting about Pacita's work," said Aleesa Pitchamarn Alexander, a Cantor curator, "is that she has a kind of broad worldview that transcends national borders, particular ethnicities or identities, that's really grounded in a shared humanity and interest in global aesthetic traditions that pushes against any kind of limited perception of what would constitute an Asian American artist."



Pacita Abad, *Foothill Cabin* (1976). The work was inspired by a cabin near Stanford where the artist lived with her partner, Jack Garrity. Cantor Arts Center, Stanford University. © Pacita Abad Art Estate LLC

"I really fell in love with their dinner-party menus" in the archives, Roberts said, describing some that Abad decorated with elegant textiles. "You could tell that they were such good cooks. There were incredible dishes that reflect their peripatetic travels. You could just tell that they were living so fully." One that is pictured in the Walker survey's catalogue opens with a Filipino greeting—"Mabuhay!" ("Long live!" in Tagalog)—for a meal that promised shrimp toasts, *laswa* (a Filipino

vegetable soup), and coconut pie, among other delights. (One more archival surprise: a vanity license plate Abad used while living in Boston in the 1980s that reads "PACITA.")

The archive's arrival at Stanford is a win for the Cantor's Asian American Art Initiative (AAAI, "triple A, I" when said aloud), which was founded in 2018 by Alexander, and Marci Kwon, a Stanford art history professor, to bolster the museum's, and the university's, commitment to that field.

"Both Marcy and I, in our graduate work, did not have an opportunity to study Asian American art history. There was no one to train us," Alexander said in a video call. "There was nobody who had expertise in our programs in this area. And so when we got into these roles, which we feel very privileged to hold, we were thinking about: What can we do to fill that gap in the field, and how can we help provide opportunities that we didn't have?"



Pacita Abad, *100 Years of Freedom: From Batanes to Jolo* (1998). Cantor Arts Center, Stanford University. Photo courtesy of Pacita Abad Art Estate.

The Cantor has 40,000 works in its collection, Roberts said. “Before the AAPI was started, there were 33 works by Asian American artists out of the 40,000. We have 800 now.” They include three major works by Abad, one of which is a massive and important wall-hung piece, *100 Years of Freedom: From Batanes to Jolo* (1998), that the artist stitched together using fabric from throughout the Philippines. In a remarkable coincidence, the Cantor holds examples of many of the textiles that Abad integrated into the work.

As for the archival materials, they are currently being processed and should be available to students and researchers in the next year. In making the acquisition, “you’re thinking about the people who are going

to come in and write dissertations, or do original research, or someone who's going to curate the next great Pacita show," Alexander said. "Just being able to have a home for that helps us sleep at night."



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