



Installation view of “Pacita Abad: Door to Life” at Tina Kim Gallery, New York (April 30–June 20, 2026). All images courtesy of Pacita Abad Art Estate and Tina Kim Gallery. Photos by Hyunjung Rhee, shared with permission

In ‘Door to Life,’ Pacita Abad Evokes Traditional Yemeni Architecture

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Throughout her illustrious 32-year career, [Pacita Abad](#) (1946-2004) traveled to more than 60 countries. Myriad experiences ultimately introduced her to a wide range of techniques, materials, and relationships, shaping the artist’s practice over time. Movement provided an enduring source of new ideas and inspiration, and as she put it, “For me, traveling is my art school.”

In the spring of 1998, Abad visited Yemen. At the time, the country was still in recovery following the [Yemeni Civil War](#), which took place four years prior. Grounded in her rigorous political engagement and the instabilities experienced in her native Philippines, Abad reflected on the immutable significance of cultural practices and their value despite periods of upheaval.





“Door made of straw III” (1998), oil, acrylic, painted and dyed canvas, painted cloth stitched on canvas, 85 x 56 1/4 inches

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“Rather than positioning herself within a nameable lineage of artistic influences who moved in conventional gallery spaces,” [Tina Kim Gallery](#) notes, “Abad instead favored the inheritance of historically anonymous workers in craft, textiles, and the decorative arts, from locations outside of established Western institutional and market infrastructure.” This quote appears in a statement for the New York gallery’s third solo exhibition of Abad’s works, titled *Door to Life*.

The presentation highlights a body of work Abad completed in subsequent years, which takes inspiration from Yemen’s vibrant, ornate displays of [architecture and decoration](#). One particular focus was doors, which the gallery refers to as “portals.” Through countless photographs and numerous sketches of doorways she encountered on excursions, Abad created a prolific visual archive to take home and use as reference, adding “Everyday a new idea, everyday a new door.”





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Crafted in her [signature trapunto style](#), Abad's vertical, rectangular compositions layer meaning, memories, and material. Painted and appliquéd geometric patterns on canvas call to decorative elements found in traditional Yemeni architecture, like tessellations and botanical motifs.

The artist's series of never-before-seen *qamariya* paintings are evocative of the semicircular glass windows common in Sanaa, the nation's capital—another key element of Yemen's time-honored artisan practices. The Arabic term *qamariya* translates to "moon-like" or "of the moon," echoing the glass structures' half-moon shape and dynamic ability to transmit light.

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Door to Life continues through June 20 at Tina Kim Gallery in New York. You can also [flip through](#) more works, which were previously compiled into a small publication that supplemented Abad's initial *Door to Life* exhibition in 1999. ♦





"Door made of straw I" (1998), oil, acrylic, printed cloth, dyed canvas stitched on straw mat, 89 x 53 1/8 inches



Detail of "White Heightens the Awareness of the Senses" (1998)





"I Am By The Door in a Second" (1999), oil, painted cotton collaged and stitched on canvas, 61 1/2 x 38 1/8 inches





"White Heightens the Awareness of the Senses" (1998), oil, acrylic, oil pastel, dyed cotton, painted canvas, painted cloth stitched on canvas, 84 x 63 inches

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"Beside You" (2001), oil and painted canvas stitched on canvas, 18 1/2 x 18 1/2 x 2 inches framed





"Stained glass door in Sanaa" (1998), oil, printed cloth, painted canvas stitched on canvas 83 x 61 3/4 x 11/4 inches





"Rainbow door" (1998), oil, painted printed cloth stitched on canvas, 82 1/4 x 58 1/2 x 11/4 inches



"Gray Border" (2001), oil and painted canvas stitched on canvas, 18 1/2 x 18 1/2 x 2 inches framed



"Door Connects Me to the Greatest Happiness I Have" (1999), oil, painted cloth, buttons stitched on padded canvas, 59 3/4 x 38 5/8 inches



Qamariya Window (series) (2000), oil on paper, dimensions variable



Detail of "Door made of straw III" (1998)



Pacita Abad with "Door to Life" paintings in Jakarta (1999). Courtesy of the Pacita Abad Art Estate



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