



ART

In 'Door to Life,' Pacita Abad Evokes Traditional Yemeni Architecture



Written by Seth Sebastian

2026-05-15

Throughout her 32-year career, artist **Pacita Abad** (1946-2004) traveled extensively, visiting over 60 countries. This extensive traveling introduced her to numerous techniques and materials, profoundly influencing her artistic practice. She famously stated, "For me, traveling is my art school."

Yemeni influence and cultural significance

In the spring of 1998, Abad visited **Yemen**, a country then recovering from the **civil war** that occurred four years earlier. Deeply engaged in political issues and **drawing** from her experiences in the **Philippines**, she reflected on the lasting importance of cultural practices during times of upheaval.

Tina Kim Gallery notes that instead of aligning herself with traditional Western art influences, Abad drew **inspiration** from the work of anonymous craftspeople and **textile** artists found in places outside conventional Western structures. This approach is evident in "Door to Life," her third solo **exhibition** at the **New York** gallery, which focuses on the **architecture and decoration of Yemen**.



Installation view of "Pacita Abad: Door to Life"

Artistic techniques and themes

In Yemen, Abad focused on doors, which she referred to as "portals." She documented these through numerous photographs and sketches, creating a rich visual archive from which to draw upon back home. "Everyday a new idea, everyday a new door," she said.

Her work, crafted in a distinctive trapunto style, layers meaning, memory, and material. **Geometric** patterns painted and appliquéd on canvas recall Yemeni architectural elements like tessellations and botanical motifs. Additionally, her qamariya **paintings** reflect the semicircular glass windows typical in Sanaa, Yemen's capital, known for their artistic blend of light and form. The term "qamariya," meaning "moon-like," speaks to this shape and its illuminating properties.



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

Exhibition details

"[Door to Life](#)" is on display at the Tina Kim Gallery in New York until June 20. The exhibition includes works compiled into a small publication supplementing Abad's original 1999 exhibition. For those interested in exploring more of Abad's work, the exhibition offers a

thoughtful insight into her artistic journey and the impact of her travels on her creative expression.



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

Inspiration from Yemen in Pacita Abad's "Door to Life"



"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



Installation view of "Pacita Abad: Door to Life"



"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 1 1/4 inches



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



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