

## Pacita Abad to stage solo exhibition

JAKARTA (JP): Following her husband around the globe was a blessing in disguise for Philippine artist Pacita Abad. It enabled her to widen her creative breadth and form a bridge between traditional art and the present with her work.

Abad immersed herself in the ancient and primitive art during her time in Bangladesh, the US, the Philippines, Thailand, Africa and presently Indonesia. Inspired by primitive art, she reflects this in her work very much like the past great maestros Picasso and Mogdigliani.

Abad strongly believes that artists have a strong social responsibility. Also drawing

inspiration from her present surroundings, she expresses concern for the current struggles and issues confronting women. Focusing on Indonesia's Year of Women in Development, Abad comments on the recognition that must be given to the many women who have excelled in society.

She herself is quite accomplished. Her curriculum vitae overflows with the many awards she has won and the many prestigious solo and group exhibitions she has done. Her works are included in many major collections including the Bronx Museum of the Arts in New York, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Seoul, The Museum of Philippine Art, Fukuoka Art Museum, Chase Manhattan Bank, The First National Bank of Chicago, as

important to me," explained Abad.

Her creations are all larger than life. She sees size as very important. *A Fear of Night Diving* from her *Underwater series* measures 232 inches by 173 inches and was painted in nine segments over a span of two years. It is staggering that this mammoth piece is so uniform in color that it is impossible to detect that it was indeed done in sections. Abad never frames her works, explaining that it seems more natural and is quite practical when she is invited to exhibit. Her works are rolled up in the loft of her studio.

Abad was influenced by Zaenal Abedin from Bangladesh, Tagore from India, Lucien Freud from Britain and Gauguin. There is an inkling of German expressionism, folk art and abstraction, but to categorize her work is misleading. She explains that all these have influenced her but she has moved further to her own interpretation of art.

Abad first came to Indonesia for only six months in 1983 whereupon she immersed herself entirely in Indonesian traditional art. She challenged herself to see what she could do in only six months and was instantly attracted to the distinctive shapes and bold colors of *wayang*. They inspired her to start a new creative series called *Wayang, Irian and Sumba* which is made up of over 70 paintings. This traditional puppet is an art form which has carried Indonesian folklore through the generations and over the seas. *Wayang's* mystical quality is digested in her work. Comparing her early 1980s works to her present works, one can see a different interpretation of the *wayang*. Her earlier works are more stiff, carried out by strong brushwork - giving an almost blunt impression. Her

current works exude a much more delicate, more figurative work with a play of emotions. The *Wayang Golek* piece which is a mix of oil on canvas, embroidery and sequins produces a harmonious interpretation of the subject matter.

She presently spends five hours a day painting and alternates each month between the United States and Indonesia. She throws herself into a hectic existence of seminars, workshops, teaching, exhibitions and trapunto painting. Since 1973, Abad has amassed more than 10 series, each with an average of 20 trapuntos. She averages 15 mammoth paintings a year, 10 of which are trapuntos. Given her international reputation, trapunto paintings sell from US\$5,000 to \$50,000 while her smaller paintings are sold for between \$2,000 and \$10,000.

Abad's merciless quest to push herself to the limit, to let her heart take reign comes from her mother. Her mother clearly ingrained the need for women to learn how to "sew, type and cook", but most of all the need to be independent.

Her mentor is none other than the irrepressible Leni Riefenstahl — the 1940's eccentric German belle of the silver screen and better known as Hitler's personal photographer. Riefenstahl constantly struggled to surpass her limitations.

Success has in no way exhausted Abad's creative mind. She is constantly inspired by her own existence and people. Only 46 years old, she feels she has just begun. Abad likes using Jakarta as her present base because she can explore things that are important to her work, like batik. Abad's accomplishments are hard-earned.

Tomorrow she opens her solo exhibition at the National Museum. The show, entitled *Wayang, Irian and Sumba*, will run through Nov. 16.

By Lela Pello

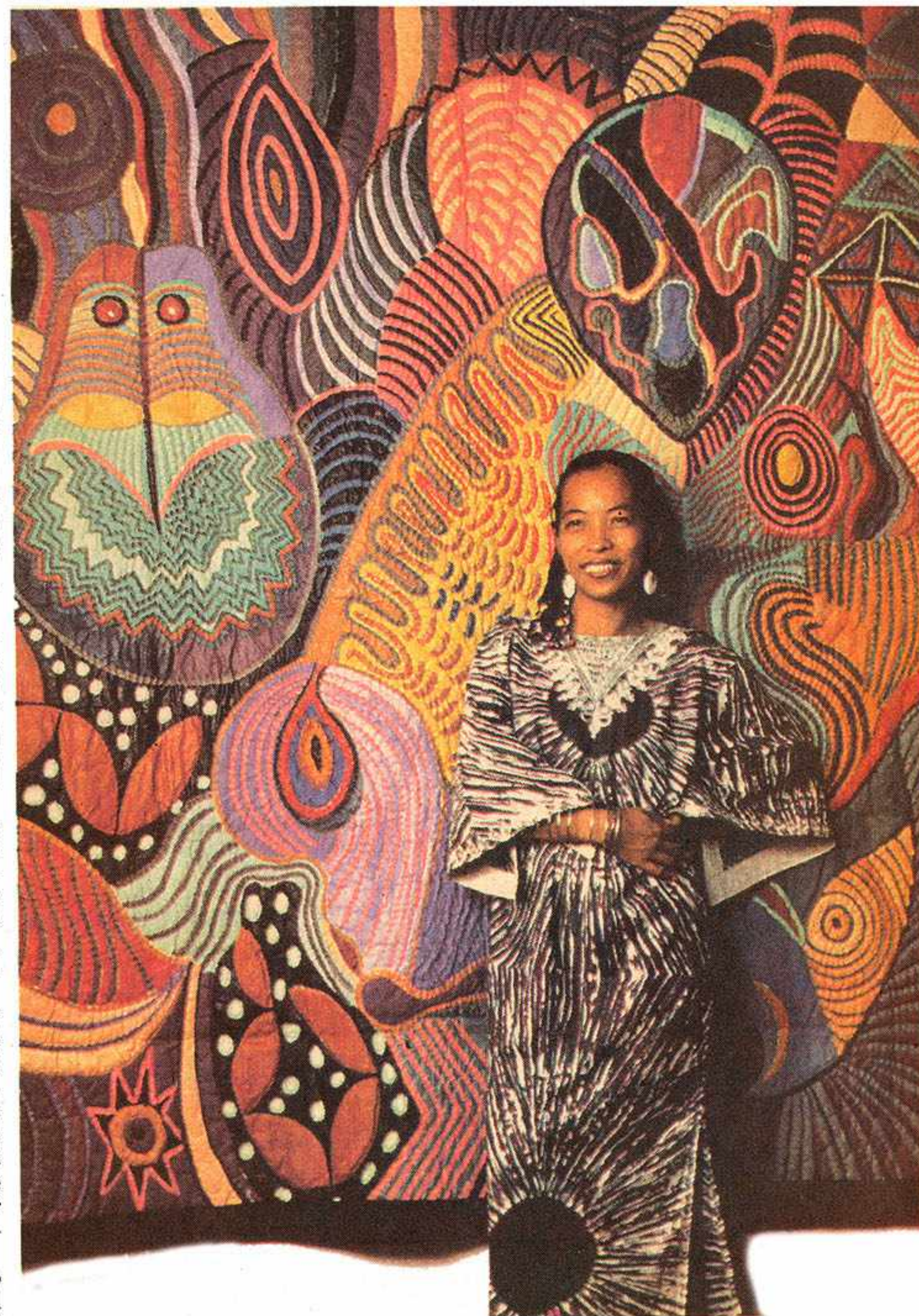
well as the Museum of National Afro Art in Boston. In 1984 she was awarded The Most Outstanding Artist in the Philippines.

Her works mix painting, collage, embroidery, decorative buttons, Indian mirrors and cowrie shells. When asked to give a name to her style, she explains there is really no contemporary word to explain it. Therefore, she created a term to describe her individual style, "trapunto painting". Trapunto comes from the Italian word *trapungere*, meaning to embroider.

In her airy studio on the first floor of her Jakarta house, one sees an array of paints everywhere. She staples large masses of canvases to the walls, sometimes four at a time. "It's quicker," she claims.

Abad starts early in the morning on a new series but admits inspiration does not come easily. She often forlornly fronts her canvases from early morning until noon without result. By late afternoon she bursts upon an idea. Once the idea has evolved she paints quickly as the adrenaline builds till she finishes.

On the following day she decides how to "finish off" the painting. She might build it up with polyurethane and sew material over it to give the creation a sense of shape. This makes her work flirt between two and three dimensional imagery, giving the admirer a sense of uncertainty. The finishing touches, embroidery, beads, shells, mirrors and sequins, excite her. "Using different indigenous items is very



Pacita Abad standing in front of her enormous painting called *Ati-Atihan*.