

The Manila Times

LIVING

FRIDAY, JUNE 6, 1986



CRITIC-AT-LARGE

By ISAGANI R. CRUZ

Assaulting the viewer

ASSAULTING THE DEEP SEA, installation art show by Pacita Abad, Ayala Museum, May 29 to June 29 (FOUR STARS)

The first thing you notice as you enter the gallery housing "Assaulting the Deep Sea" is the sand on your feet. The entrance already smells of the sea, with beach sand on the steps and a fishing net ready to catch you as you walk through the door.

The second thing you notice is that you don't know what to notice when you finally step into the exhibit area. The whole gallery is covered with artwork — nets on the ceiling, nets and broken glass and other sea stuff on the floor, tapestries or more precisely *trapuntos* on every wall, plus some paintings conventionally mounted, plus stand-up art pieces, not to mention hanging squids.

Hang on: you're in the inner world of Pacita Abad.

Pacita Abad became a household word for the wrong reason — she was the first woman to become an Outstanding Young Man. Within art circles, however, her name was not unknown before that. Both her detractors and her admirers were agreed that she was a name to reckon with, either to react against or to advocate.

The best interview article I have read about Abad was done by Corazon C. Fiel for *San Juan*, the art magazine that is impossible to buy because it is free. Somehow, the issues of this magazine — published in San Juan, where else? — enter your mailbox in some mysterious manner (usually through the mail, and that's mysterious).

The article, published August of last year, quotes Abad liberally, particularly on her artistic intentions: "The shows at Pinaglabanan and at the CCP, for that matter, were very important. In both shows, I was making a statement. Like that CCP show on Batanes."

On her show at MOPA,

Abad is quoted as saying that "it said plenty of the kind of work I did. There were 15 paintings of the Kampuchean refugees, seven works on the people of Sto. Domingo, works on the people of Bangladesh and twenty 3x6 meters of *trapuntos*, abstract works, silkscreens, and a huge mural, 18 feet long, of the Kampuchean refugees."

The Pinaglabanan show had political subject matter, such as the Aquino assassination. "With the Pinaglabanan show, I wanted to do a social commentary on the Philippines today," continues Abad in Fiel's article.

In the Ayala Museum exhibit, you no longer have the political Abad. Instead, you have an imagination that recreates the deep sea, as the title of the show promises, but as the artist conceives of the depths of both sea and world. Sea life fills the space in the gallery, overwhelming your senses, making you sea sick even, as you flounder around, avoiding the broken glass and the tentacles of both squids and artist.

It's an installation show, which simply means that the show itself is a work of art, not only the separate items exhibited in the show. You experience the exhibit, not only the exhibited. In fact, you become a part of the exhibit, being thrust right into the middle of the sea of art.

I don't want to describe the exhibit in any greater detail, or I might spoil the very experience the exhibit wants to evoke in the viewer. I should, however, explain that a *trapunto* is a kind of painted tapestry with things sewn on it, a kind of overflowing canvas where the artist can throw everything she conceives of (or doesn't conceive of).

This is one exhibit where you can get your feet wet without touching water. Or more precisely, where you can get your mind to touch water without your body getting wet.