

# Confined artist

By ABDULLAH M. HASAN

The heartwarming-red Chagallesque bird in "Fly me to the moon" seems to fly out of the canvas; the canvas seems to be too confining for it.

Indeed, Pacita Abad likes to work for big canvases, but even those seem to be too small for her. Take the bigger size 'Bataanes' which she painted in 1976 depicting the white sandy beaches, lush green rice fields, palm trees, bright houses to withstand typhoons, and the blue mountains—it seems she would have liked a still larger canvas to work on.

You can feel the color and noise of Old Dacca in her 'Old Dacca'. The roads are depicted spilling over with pedestrians, vehicles and wandering animals. Giant hoardings of the cinema houses coexist with beggars. The canvas is crammed with people and objects, and the need for a bigger canvas is felt yet





again.

The Filipino painter has been in Bangladesh for over eight months and has travelled to almost all parts of the country. Her first impression were of the nor'wester—'After the-Northwester'. It reminded her of her village Batanes, she said.

Pacita held her exhibition in Dacca recently. But she did not part with most of the paintings she did here. She will be holding an exhibition in February at the Asian Art Center at Manila Garden Hotel, Makati, and she hopes to display mainly Bangladeshi paintings there.

When Pacita went to Batanes to attend her (pre-Martial Law) Congressman father's funeral her Congresswoman mother wondered what her daughter was doing in Bangladesh of all places! Her mother's idea of Bangladesh was all hunger, famine, flood, cyclones and refugees. That's why Pacita decided to show only the paintings she had done in this country instead showing other works (done in the US, Guatemala, France, etc.) so that the Filipinos get to know Bangladesh better.

Pacita is a prolific painter. In Sylhet she painted the Keane Bridge, the local town fool, the teapickers; in Rangpur she did the destitute woman, the woman

### *Pacita Abad (above & below) with her paintings*

day laborer and the local Circuit House. The deformed brother-and-sister beggars at the Science Laboratory intersection are already her friends.

Pacita often waves to them when she passes by them. She has seen only one female fruit vendor so far, and, of course, she painted her. 'Durga Puja' is very oriental. In 'Show some emotion' she depicts an aged, sad Bangladeshi grim with the vicissitudes of life.

After her university studies and a two-year stint in local politics Pacita went to the US in 1970. At the famous Corcoran School of Art in Washington DC she was fortunate to have John Heliker, Berthold Schmutzhart and Blaine Larson guide, encourage and make her bloom. In Washington

DC Pacita had a very successful one-woman exhibition. She also participated in numerous group shows in Washington, New York and other places in the US.

Another young but extremely successful painter like Pacita, Natalia Himmirski liked Pacita's "Christmas in Guatemala" so much the latter is going to swap the picture with five she (Natalia) has done after she got to know Pacita.

Pacita is fortunate to have a very understanding husband in Jack Garrity. Just think of him picking up 'Show some emotion,' 'Fly me to the moon,' 'Self-portrait' from the garbage can where she had thrown them when she was blue, and framing them. Jack is an economist with a consulting firm.

