

*Pacita Abad at the MET***'Thinking Big' comes like an understatement**

**E**ASILY the biggest art exhibit to unfurl this season is Pacita Abad's show at the Metropolitan Museum. Pacita has virtually succeeded in transforming a huge slice of the Met into some kind of a mill of textile art, an art form she is widely recognized for as an exponent of.

The works in exhibition are colossal that the title, *Thinking Big*, comes like an understatement. The works are not only huge, but more importantly, they raise questions on a gamut of issues and concerns, both artistic and social, that are far-reaching as they are wide-ranging.

Serving as a standard bearer, a flag carrier of sort, is her 20 feet high "Marcos and His Cronies", a.k.a. "Medicine Man", greeting the viewer at the museum lobby. The highly vertical composition alludes to the single panel altarpieces popular during the Renaissance. A central figure, which is Marcos, dominates the pictorial field. It is surrounded by 18 other portraits representing the vicious men in the President's cabinet, and who are all perceived to contribute to the malaise the country is suffering from. Right below Marcos is a caricature of a woman studded with costume jewelry to depict his lady. The monumental work lays bare the corruption and social ills of the dictatorial regime, an experience Pacita personally knows since she comes from a very politicized family in Batanes.

From a political dissertation, Pacita ransacks her closet of clothes to put across a fashion commentary in *Cross Cultural Dressing*, a trapunto painting that is almost quadriptych in format. It happily shows how traditions can blend with contemporary trends where clothing is concerned. One only has to look at Pacita, herself a convincing clotheshanger of such a fashion dictum, to realize that Pacita practices what she preaches.

The interaction of these two forces makes up for a dynamic interpretation of life, compared when they stand separate from each other, where one simply observes the other.



Ruben Defeo

**The works are not only huge, but more importantly, they raise questions on a gamut of issues and concerns, both artistic and social, that are far-reaching as they are wide-ranging**

Pacita puts across a succinct statement that traditions, to become part of everyday life, need not be static nor unchanging. They should in fact grow and respond to the changing tempo and tenor of the times.

The works in the collection are impressions from Pacita's extensive living, painting, and traveling in more than 50 developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The experience, confesses Pacita, has allowed her to synthesize her artistic, ethnic, and political feelings and beliefs. Expressed in varied colorful and personal paintings, Pacita believes that her works reflect where she is "coming from" in the total sense of the phrase.

Her concern for pure abstraction is amply revealed

in many works included in the exhibition. When viewed from a distance, they simulate stained glass windows as they glow in their iridescent and rich colors. Swirling shapes and curvilinear freely interact with generous dabs and dashes of paint. To disturb the rigid planar quality of the pictorial field, Pacita either sews or glues found objects to the surface. The ordinariness and banality of these ready-mades are potent reminders of everyday life, and thereby add visual interest to the compositions. The viewer delights to recognize that a button here or a mirror there has found its way to the vast compositions, rescued from the waste bin.

It is this very spontaneity that sits well in her works employing the trapunto technique. The term trapunto comes from the Italian trapungere, meaning to sew and

stuff. The technique allows Pacita to paint without constraints, as she can incorporate various media and processes, including paper mache, stitching, collage, silk-screen, tie-dye and embroidery into a single work.

Pacita was born in Basco, Batanes, the northernmost island of the Philippines. She earned her BA degree from the University of the Philippines and MA degree from the University of San Francisco.

One of the truly international artists the Philippines has produced, Pacita has recently received the Excellence 2000 Award for the Arts. Presented by the US Pan Asian American Chamber of Commerce, the award is given to honor Asian Americans for their achievements and ongoing commitment to inspiring other Asians. She is the only

Filipino artist to be so recognized. With the award, she shares stellar billing with the likes of other big names in the art similarly honored before her like I.M. Pei for architecture, Yo Yo Ma for music, David Hwang for M. Butterfly.

Pacita has been living in Indonesia for the last eighteen months and recently had a solo exhibition at the National Museum in Jakarta of her Wayang, Indonesian shadow puppet paintings.

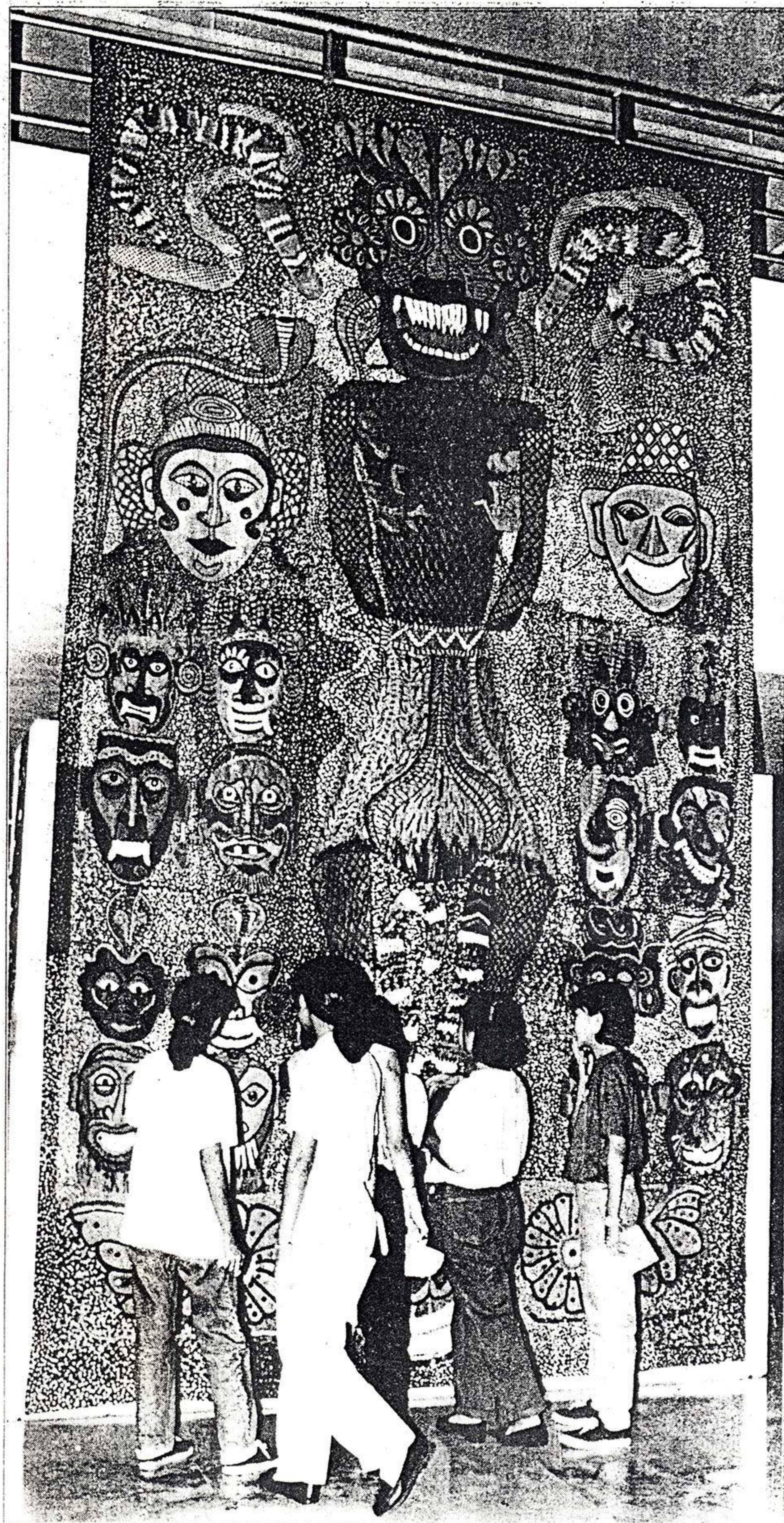
She has won numerous awards for her work, including: the Ten Outstanding Young Men (TOYM) for the Arts (1984); the National Endowment for the Arts Visual Artist Fellowship (1989); the Grant-in-Aid awards for the Washington DC Commission of the Arts (1988, 1989 and 1991); and the New York State Council on the Arts (1989).



ONE of the truly international artists the Philippines has produced, Pacita Abad has recently received the Excellence 2000 Award for

the Arts honoring Asian Americans for their achievements and ongoing commitment to inspiring other Asians.





TWENTY-foot high "Marcos and His Cronies", a.k.a. "Medicine Man," at the museum lobby M. De Juan