

Pacita Abad Celebrated at Her First Retrospective at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

By Paul John Caña | 3 days ago

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Pacita Abad was a force of nature and a giant in Philippine contemporary art, but she's not that well-known internationally outside of enthusiasts and art circles. But an exhibit of her work currently touring in the United States is bringing the genius of her creativity to a wider audience.

For the first time ever, Abad's incredible breadth of work is being featured in an exhaustive retrospective at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SF MOMA) called simply *Pacita Abad*. The exhibit, which was first unveiled at the Walker Art Center Museum in Minneapolis, Minnesota earlier this year, features over 40 of the artist's works throughout her career—from traditional paintings that shone a light on social issues, to trapunto paintings, or textured canvases that she painted and embellished with buttons, shells, beads, and mirrors, that became her signature.

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"Abad's ease in moving through distant geographies and connecting with different peoples afforded her a uniquely transnational perspective," says Victoria Sung, former curator of visual arts at the Walker Art Center and organizer of this retrospective in a release about the exhibition. "She found community and built relationships with artists, exchanging ways of making and incorporating new materials and methods into her art. In the eighties and nineties, few artists were truly global in the sense that she was."

Museum-goers reading about the Pacita Abad retrospective at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art





Photo by PJ Cana.

“When curator Nancy Lim and I learned that this exhibition was being planned, we knew that it had to come to San Francisco—the city that inspired Pacita Abad to commit her life to artistic expression,” said Eungie Joo, curator and head of contemporary art at SFMOMA. “While some of the works gathered here were shown locally during Abad’s lifetime, this is the first exhibition to reveal the profundity of her prolific practice.”

Born in Basco, Batanes in 1946 and died in Singapore in 2004, Abad was a prolific artist who created art from a diverse array of subjects throughout her life. The works featured in the retrospective showcase “the energetic interplay between abstraction and figuration in Abad’s practice and illuminate her engagement with people, places and critical issues of her time.

Flight to Freedom



Photo by PJ Cana.

“When asked in 1991 what she had contributed to American art, Abad answered, ‘Color! I have given it color!’”

Esquire Philippines visited SF MOMA in the first week of November. It was an emotional experience, particularly for Abad’s kababayans from the Philippines, to see her larger-than-life work given so much prominence at an important artistic and cultural institution as the SF MOMA. Here are some of our favorite pieces from the *Pacita Abad* exhibition:

View of Pacita Abad's works featuring her Masks series



Photo by PJ Cana.

L.A. Liberty





Photo by PJ Cana.

Caught at the Border



Photo by PJ Cana.

Haitians Waiting at Guantanamo Bay

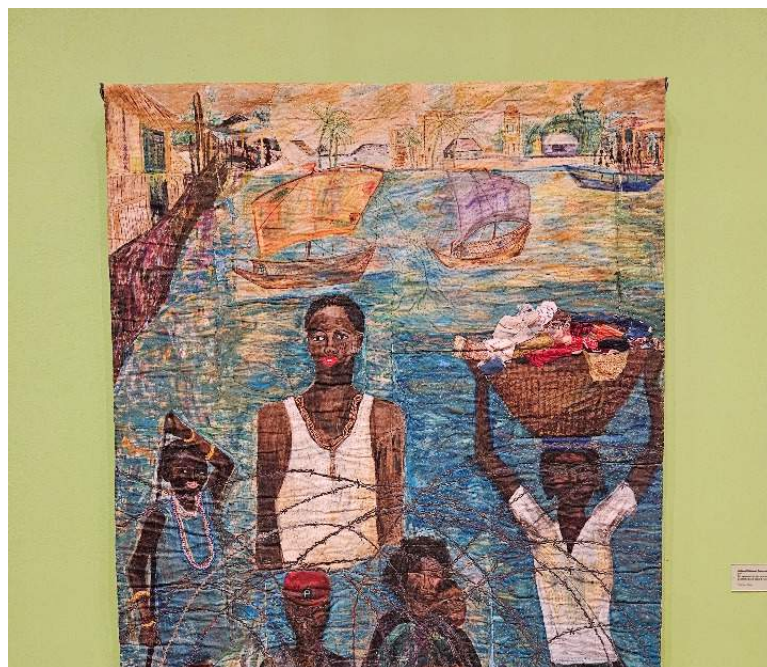




Photo by PJ Cana.

If My Friends Could See Me Now



Photo by PJ Cana.

Marcos and His Cronies





Photo by PJ Cana.

Girls in Ermita



Photo by PJ Cana.

Freedom from Illusion

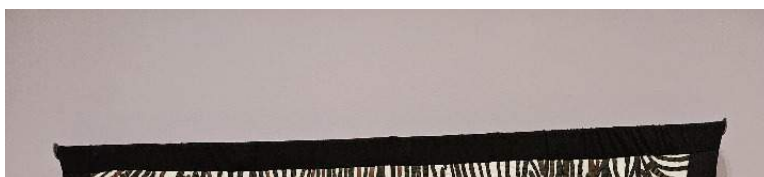




Photo by PJ Cana.

Spring is Coming



Photo by PJ Cana.

Breast-feeding Mother



Photo by PJ Cana.





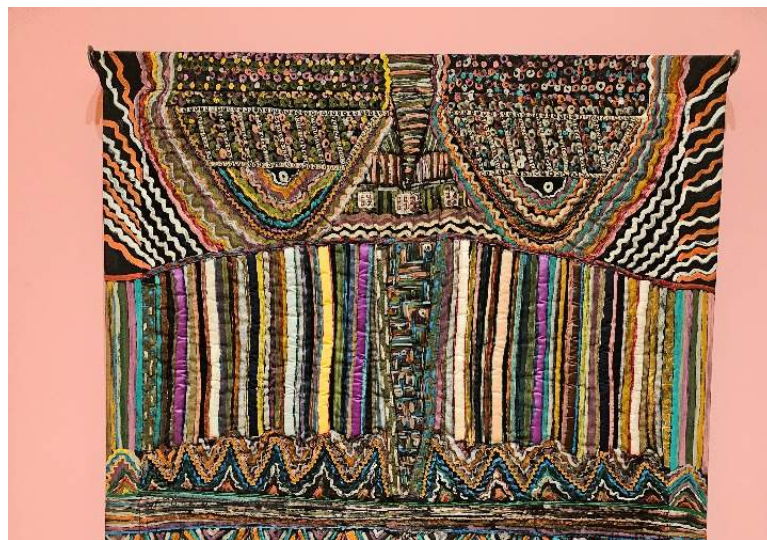
Photo by PJ Cana.

Water of Life



Photo by PJ Cana.

Masai Man



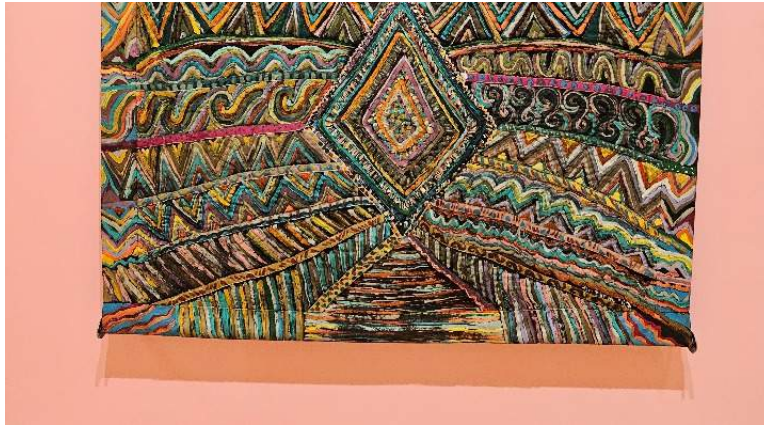


Photo by PJ Cana.

Puerto Galera IV



Photo by PJ Cana.

My Fear of Night DivingL Assaulting the Deep Sea





Photo by PJ Cana.

The Far Side of Apo Island

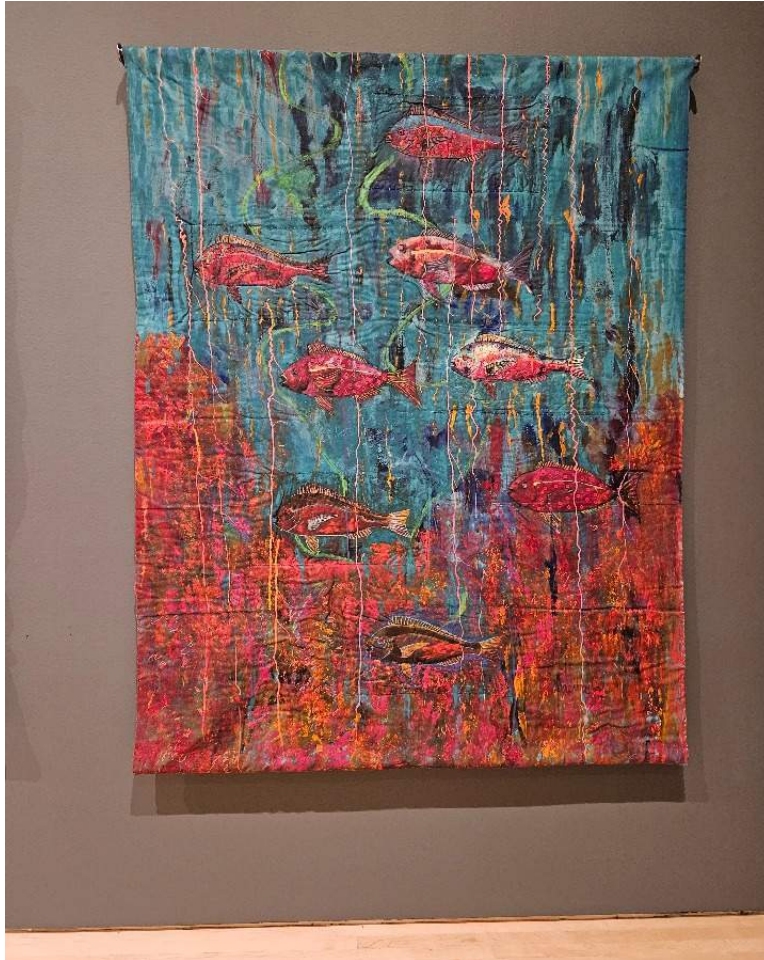


Photo by PJ Cana.

Anilao at Its Best

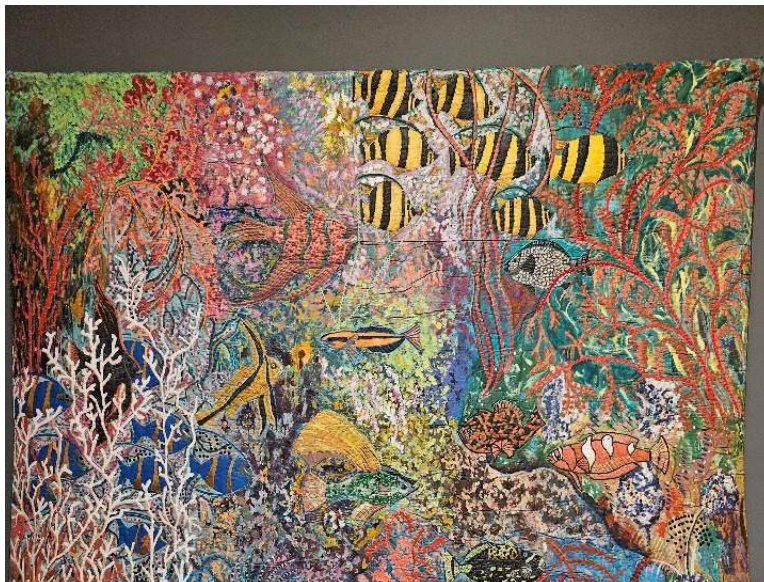




Photo by PJ Cana.

The **Pacita Abad** retrospective can be viewed at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) until January 28, 2024. United Airlines flies nonstop flights daily between San Francisco and Manila.

Throughout her 32-year career from the 1970s to the early 2000s, Abad centered the triumphs and adversities of people on the periphery of power, as seen in her *Social Realist*, *Immigrant Experience* and *Masks and Spirits* series. This exhibition celebrates an artist whose vibrant and inventive practice generated thousands of daring artworks—from intricately constructed underwater scenes to abstract compositions—and whose themes are as urgent today as they were two decades ago.