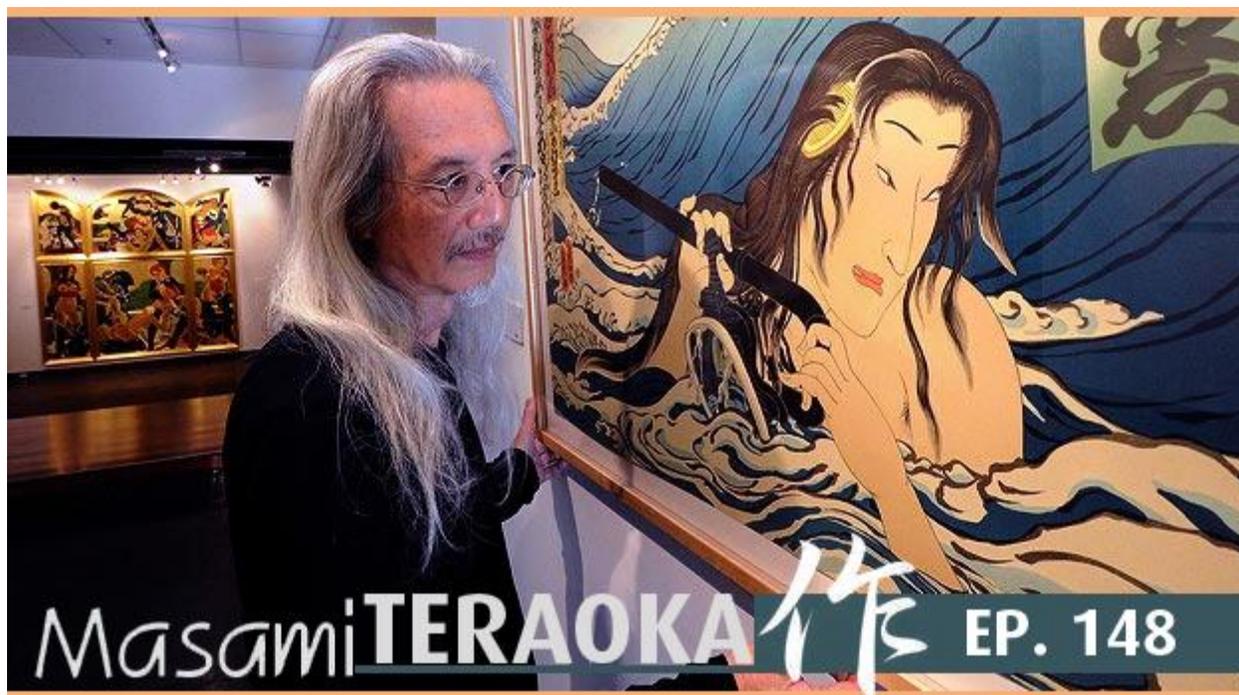




## Creative Spotlight: Episode #148 – Masami Teraoka

by [Marcello](#) on August 14, 2012



Masami Teraoka may just very well be the most experienced artist we have had the privilege of showcasing in the Creative Spotlight. He was born in 1936 in Onomichi, Hiroshima-ken, Japan on the inland sea. His father Masao inherited his grandfather's kimono store and because of this experience, his father dreamed that his only son should become a creative artist someday rather than succeeding him in "oldest son" tradition. Integrating reality with fantasy, humor with commentary, and history with the present became his challenge. His early watercolor paintings were inspired by Ukiyo-e woodblock prints and these paintings often focused on the clash of my two cultures- East and West. Having been the

subject of more than 70 solo exhibitions, and being in over 50 public collections worldwide, I knew he would be an excellent artist to share with everyone. Read below for the full interview...

**Your early work seemed to mimic the flat, bold qualities of ukiyo-e woodblock prints, and as your career has progressed, your work has inspired many artist such as Hiroshi Hirakawa. Do you feel a style of art passed down to subsequent generations is inevitable?**

**Masami:** Perhaps so. Visual vocabulary such as Ukiyo-e prints and Renaissance art seem to me just like any language: you inherit it and pass it down to the next generation.

**Tell me about your working space and your creative process? Has it changed at all over the years?**

**Masami:** Creativity challenges and motivates me, I paint to be alive. We had run out of the space to paint large work and eventually had to build the new studio. I have worked in various spaces previously. Creative process has evolved into an all time passion. My studio life started early, perhaps when I was in junior high. The third floor of my parent's house used to be my studio.



**After participating in over 70 exhibits across the world, what could you tell us a bit about your latest, The Last Supper Series at Samuel Freeman Gallery, which is set to open this Fall?**

**Masami:** Since I started my Confessional Series in the early 90's, it had evolved into a major triptych series. There are more than a few things that have come into the focus. I have thought about the Catholic Church's morality recently, as the clergy's sex abuse issues had spread globally. The secretive aspect of the Catholic Church as such an influential institution seems to stand out, especially in the current transparent cultural environment. While the Vatican tries to maintain their tradition of secrecy, the world demands transparency.

I create a humanitarian vision – individual rights are asserted in the most obvious way, I explore how that world might look. Expressing this vision in poetic way inspires me. When I try to articulate those issues at a dinner table, that's where the Last Supper Series has emerged. Archaic institutions in the current world will have to change, to adopt a culture of transparency and secularism, with sexuality and basic human rights as a guideline.

**Man is obviously a rather foolish creature. Plagues, AIDS, indulgence of sin, the list goes on and on. These are topics, mainly consisting of man's shortsightedness, that you love to explore in your work. Is the aim to bring awareness to such topics or to leave your audience with a feeling of vulnerability?**

**Masami:** Bringing awareness seems to be the mission for me. I try to see things the other way around; where women assert their rights and be respected as women.

**Do you work from one reference photo and begin building thumbnails?**

**Masami:** The conceptual aspect evolves first. Composition follows next. While I paint and get stuck, sometime I may need to study related images, materials or text. My early watercolors demanded elaborate study drawings.



**Do you design in your head and then move directly onto the paper?**

**Masami:** I have a vision “conceptually” before making the composition or basic structure. This reverses the entire process that I was so familiar with in my watercolor painting process. I have broken out from my own old and familiar mold, a process I have done several times in my career. It requires a lot of guts when you have a certain established aesthetic palate and then move on to the next one it is always a gut wrenching challenge.

**Looking back on your career, and fast forwarding to present day, has their been any real change concerning your ‘double and triple fears” that you face in today’s post-industrial life?**

**Masami:** What kind of fears are you referring to? Do you mean where our culture is going?

**Yes, have we as a society gotten smarter?**

**Masami:** I feel that society has gotten much better in the States, especially regarding racism, equal rights, and gay rights. We have made huge progress in recent decades.



**What is the biggest challenge following the guidelines of traditional Japanese art, but making the subject matter relevant to today's issues?**

**Masami:** It comes to stylistic difference. Ukiyo-e printmaking has such an edge where an artist can talk about a story pictorially. The strength that Ukiyo-e has can help to articulate cultural issues and narratives. I am fascinated with the jump between flatly painted surfaces and the three dimensional rendered forms of Renaissance painting. They seem to be two incongruous styles. Conceptually I preserve the Ukiyo-e narrative structure, incorporating that language into culturally mixed forms and aesthetics.

**Great art can be produced of completely fictional or imaginary subject matter; however, in your opinion, which is the most powerful?**

**Masami:** I focus heavily on art work which is based on humanity and real life, is that what you mean by imaginary subject matter? Whatever I create, how I arrive at that vision does not matter, but the goal of creativity should be focused on a visually poetic expression, rather than a literal visual report. If the work does not resonate, it will fail to inspire. A lot depends on a metaphorical approach. If an art work cannot inspire a poetic vision, it ends up as a mere technical exercise, conceptually less powerful or in the worst scenario is just a meaningless, shallow view of the world. Profound or provocative work demands poetry in all forms of art.

**I recognize you have given some lectures from time to time in your career. What is the single most important piece of advice you try to instill in those that listen to your words?**

**Masami:** Follow your passion is guidance you can always depend on, but you really need to listen to yourself to nurture that passion.

**Lastly, what lies ahead of you?**

**Masami:** Inspiring life and art.



**Want to stay up to date on Mr. Teraoka's works? Visit his official site below and please view the dates for his upcoming shows:**