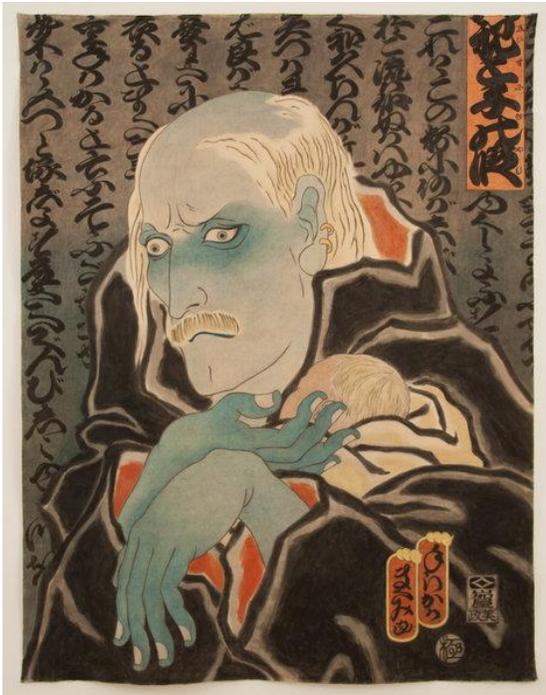




Review: Masami Teraoka draws on remembrance, faith at Samuel Freeman



Masami Teraoka, "AIDS Series/Father and Son," 1990, watercolor on unstretched canvas, 108-by-84 inches. (From the artist and Samuel Freeman Gallery)

By Holly Myers

September 28, 2012, 4:00 p.m.

Masami Teraoka's third exhibition with Samuel Freeman begins with three large, touchingly melancholy portraits painted in the style of traditional Japanese *ukiyo-e* prints. Rendered in watercolor on unstretched canvas, each roughly 9 by 7 feet in size, the paintings were made in 1990 in response to the AIDS crisis. The association isn't immediately obvious but resonates hauntingly in the stricken expressions of Teraoka's stylized subjects — a mother and child, a father and child, and a surgeon, respectively.

The show's recent works, drawn from a series titled "The Cloisters Last Supper," betray no such subtlety. Here, Teraoka tackles the Catholic Church. In three cathedral-scale, gilt-covered, quasi-medieval triptychs, he depicts a dissolute handful of priests and popes beset by swarms of fulsome females, eunuch clowns and giant squid across tables piled with body parts, cellphones and platters of ink-black spaghetti.

There's something quaint about the thought of church fathers falling prey to such self-possessed harlotry as these ladies appear to be wreaking, when the dark side of the church in modern reality is so comparatively unsavory (and sad). Framed as they are by the pristine architecture of the gallery's new location, these aren't paintings that are likely to change any minds in the Vatican. But they're regal, angry, thoroughly entertaining works that do pierce and agitate a crucial tender spot of most conservative religious institutions: the fear of sensuality, and feminine sensuality in particular.

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