

Masami Teraoka

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See the World Through the Eyes of Artists in Hawai‘i State Art Museum’s New Exhibit, “Altered States”

Masami Teraoka, Lauren Trangmar, Sally French and others contribute never-before-seen works for display alongside some from the state’s collection.

By: Lisa Shiroma

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Have you ever wondered what the heck goes on inside an artist’s head? Curator Elizabeth Baxter lets us take a peek with HiSAM’s new exhibit, *Altered States*. “Artists have always been known and renowned for their unique perspectives and alternative visions of the world,” she says. The way artists take in information and process it through their special filter opens up a creative gateway. “These artworks reflect transformations and changes—as well as critiques, questions and concerns—while delving into such themes as death, spirituality, global warming, politics and the COVID-19 pandemic.” Baxter hand-picked 23 works from the Art in Public Places collection, a mix of never-before-seen pieces as well as older ones, for this exhibition. The newer works were purchased virtually during the pandemic and with the help of Neighbor Island art consultants.



“2nd Ave. Ramen Stop/NY Governor and Pussy Riot” by Masami Teraoka. Photo: Lisa Shiroma

Displayed front and center is Masami Teraoka’s gold-leaved triptych “2nd Ave. Ramen Stop/NY Governor and Pussy Riot.” Created in response to the turbulent times of 2020, the painting features New York’s former Gov. Andrew Cuomo, a member of the punk group Pussy Riot, a geisha doing double duty as a nurse, and political commentator Anderson Cooper. The figures appear overwhelmed by the chaos happening around them, with Notre Dame burning in the background and an atomic bomb exploding in a bowl of ramen directly in front of them. The word “vote” in capital letters on the masks of the individuals sends an urgent plea to the viewer, loud and clear. Teraoka says: “In collapsing a wartime past with the calamities of the present day, I want the viewer to reflect on how our seemingly ordered world can be perilously thrown

out of balance by forces beyond our control—viruses, fires—as well as those firmly within it, namely our political and governmental institutions, as well as our collective public health response. The composition is meant to inspire humor, perhaps shock, but most importantly contemplation about our responsibility to one another within society.”



“States of Matter: Ice, Water, Air” by Michelle Schwengel-Regala. Photo: Lisa Shiroma

Michelle Schwengel-Regala brings the viewer's attention to climate change with a textile triptych titled "States of Matter: Ice, Water, Air." This series represents water in solid, liquid and gas forms in beautifully woven tapestries that are beginning to unravel. "The words spilling onto the floor were, and still are, prompts for people to use their voices," reads the accompanying description. "Speak up for the environment."



"The Princess Series: The Caribbean Princess" by Sally French. Photo: Lisa Shiroma
Sally French's "The Princess" series consists of monotype prints mounted onto wood, then collaged and drawn on top of, and finished with rhinestones and resin. If you take a closer look beyond the soft blues and sparkles, things start to feel amiss.



Details of “The Princess Series: The Diamond Princess,” left, and “The Princess Series: The Grand Princess” by Sally French. Photos: Lisa Shiroma

French explains that the start of the series coincides with the very beginning of the pandemic, a time when all eyes were on the stranded *Princess* cruise ships and coronavirus cases were beginning to multiply at an alarming rate. The pretty crowns continue to shine as coronavirus leaks out of them. Whimsical characters seem preoccupied while Pinocchio stands in as president. Eggs are scattered throughout, representing what is yet to come.



“Important Business Meetings #2020” by Lauren Trangmar. Photo: Lisa Shiroma

Lauren Trangmar’s “Important Business Meetings #2020” is a more lighthearted take on how our lives changed in 2020. In her surreal illustration, a frog attends a Zoom meeting from home and appears to be dressed in an aloha shirt from the waist up with no pants on. “People would not have been doing these things in 2019 but it is normal now,” she says.



“What Mostever” by Ryan Higa, left, and “Enlightenment” by Isami Doi. Photos: Lisa Shiroma

The artwork in “Altered States” also goes beyond the things we’ve experienced firsthand. Ryan Higa takes us into his fantastic “Gruntled Funk” universe with his painting “What Mostever.” Isami Doi imagines spirituality through ethereal colors and light in his painting “Enlightenment.” James Surls’ “Night Vision” is an abstract woodcut print full of mysterious shapes both familiar and foreign. He explains in the description: “Art should be read, like a book, and every line in my drawings or prints means something. You only have to look at it long enough and it’ll tell you.”



"Night Vision" by James Surls. Photo: Lisa Shiroma

Be sure to take your time with each piece of art so you can fully appreciate it. Imagine the countless hours artists invested to create each piece and then let them invite you into their world.

On view now until December 2021, Hawai'i State Art Museum, 250 S. Hotel St., second floor, open Monday to Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., free admission, hisam.hawaii.gov, [@hawaiistateartmuseum](https://twitter.com/hawaiistateartmuseum)

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