

Masami Teraoka



Hijinks, Hooliganism, and Hell

By Jonathan Curiel, Tuesday, Feb 2 2016

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In *The Wizard of Oz*, Judy Garland's pig-tailed character leads a perfectly normal life before everything goes haywire in a cinematic cyclone. Dorothy's brain goes haywire. The wind goes haywire. And so does her house, which — against a film score that jumps from one frenetic chord to the next — flies through the air as Dorothy encounters everything from trees and chickens to an old, seated woman and a cyclist-witch. It's a twisting, seething scene of a world gone mad that anchored one of America's truly great works of art. Seventy-seven years later, along comes an art video that has that same scene's innate freneticism — but ratchets it up about 1,000 percent.

Shalo P's *The Bedroom Suite* similarly marries indelible imagery with an utterly strange and wonderful musical orchestration, except that *The Bedroom Suite* — unlike *Oz* in the end — never carries viewers to a state of calm or the state of Kansas.

The Bedroom Suites 27 minutes of neurological hijinks — a trip into a heaven-and-hell vision of life that is both utterly familiar and altogether strange. Shalo P amalgamates film clips from the edges of Hollywood and pop culture — including Linda Blair's possession in *The Exorcist* — with his own drawings of fire and brimstone, and his own mashings of commercial songs from the likes of Beck, Pink Floyd, Justin Timberlake, and the London Philharmonic Orchestra. On top of that, *The Bedroom Suite* is littered with references to almost mythical unpleasantness. Ravens show up. Stakes get burned. Skulls heave here and there. Zombies appear.

"I think hell sounds pretty appropriate for the condition called 'living' — not as some theme park for masochists," Shalo P tells SF Weekly by email. "The world seems like it's fighting for it every day. While sadness always seemed like a cloud momentarily covering the sun, sorrow always seemed like a place to truly accept and understand innate despairs regarding the human condition."

The Bedroom Suite is part of Shalo P's ongoing "Television for Ghosts" series, which he's shown for more than five years online and in Bay Area spaces. Each few seconds of the series can incorporate hundreds of audio and visual elements that overlap and produce something that veers from wild abstraction to more recognizable scenes. In *The Bedroom Suite*, for instance, Shalo P connects 1970s video clips of David Bowie's eye-patch-wearing Ziggy Stardust with a 2004 poodle workout video in which a Japanese model with fake bulging arms and thighs exercises alongside human-like white poodles that — thanks to CGI — follow the model's every move. And then the

work unfolds in a completely different direction, with evolving drawings that borrow from graffiti and spray-painting styles. The video's title is a kind of double-entendre.

"*The Bedroom Suite* can be seen as a bedroom setting that you sink into in layers as 'suite' and cinema," says Shalo P, who lives in San Francisco. "It's the room itself with a spirit of its ecstasies haunting the space with its presence ... The patterns bring you into the fold as sheets are briskly uncovered."

Catharine Clark Gallery has paired *The Bedroom Suite* with a new exhibit by the Japanese-American painter Masami Teraoka, whose large-scale satires of priestly shenanigans and frolicking women are a commanding display in their own right. Teraoka takes an artistic symbol of classical cathedral art — the wooden-framed triptych — and scales it into Broadway theatrics, as in *Pussy Riot/Swan Lake*. In 2012, members of the Russian musical group Pussy Riot were jailed for "hooliganism" after performing protest songs at a famous Moscow church, Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, where they spewed against Vladimir Putin and church leaders. The church, which supported Putin in his widely derided bid for a fourth term in high office, is also associated with the great Russian composer Tchaikovsky (*The Nutcracker*, *Swan Lake*). Teraoka imagines a Pussy Riot member — naked, unmasked, and tied up — spewing blood from her breasts and mouth onto a demonic-looking cleric. In a top panel, the Pope and his minions investigate the flesh of an open-legged geisha. Pussy Riot and their feminist supporters are teaching the hypocritical clergy all about a subject they seem to fear: sex.

In Teraoka's exhibit, called "Masami Teraoka's Apocalyptic Theater/The Pope, Putin, Peach Boy and Pussy Riot Galore," Teraoka's other works are equally ribald and — for those who are religiously orthodox — risqué. Teraoka's exquisitely drawn figures, and his absurd re-imaginings of powerful people who are afraid of their shortcomings, are best seen in person, not just in the many books and documentaries that celebrate Teraoka's decades of work. At Catharine Clark Gallery, *Pussy Riot/Swan Lake*, measuring almost 12 by 12 feet, takes up an entire wall, enveloping the space and the outside light pouring in as if it were, well, a religious object in the Notre-Dame de Paris.

Where Teraoka's paintings are colorful and inviting, Shalo P's work is best seen not on the internet but where it is at Catharine Clark Gallery: In a darkened space, where the blackness accentuates the feeling of tumult and the occasional calm. There is calm in *The Bedroom Suite*, when Shalo P gives viewers a break in his artistic pyrotechnics. Instead of Linda Blair about to spin her head around, we get a kaleidoscope effect of beautiful, shifting patterns that are accompanied by what sound suspiciously like Gregorian chants — yes, the sort of godly echoes that are heard in cathedrals. Shalo P and Masami Teraoka are trying to bring art-goers to a higher place. But that place isn't a traditional perch to thank the almighty. That place is a perch to exalt in spectacle — to celebrate nonconformity and gender-bending and role-reversals, and to revel in a kind of make-believe counter-narrative. What they offer is not quite an antidote to real life. More like an escape from it.