

## FRONT COVER

The cover is a photographic reproduction of a painting entitled "Makiki Heights Disaster" from the AIDS Series of the Japanese artist, Masami Teraoka, who now resides in Hawaii. This 1988 watercolor on paper is mounted as a four-panel screen, 77 1/2 x 155 inches.<sup>1</sup> Teraoka's series utilizes the symbolism of the Kabuki stage to comment on the disease.

### THE STORY BEHIND "MAKIKI HEIGHTS DISASTER"<sup>2</sup>

The latest realization of *Makiki Heights Disaster* is this tour-de-force four-panel screen, done in watercolor using the broad calligraphic line of the traditional Japanese brush (*fude*). The painting is identified to the far right in cartouche as 'Snake and Toad'. The narrative reads from right to left in the traditional manner of a handscroll and opens with a scene of two lovers resting on the veranda of a temple structure. The man is grimacing, for the woman has just announced that they will have to use a condom. Around them are crumpled tissues, a traditional symbol for sexual activity. The woman holds a huge condom package, on which is written, 'giant-size model, newly improved, special sale (30% discount)'. Her male counterpart holds an illustrated book entitled 'On the Use of Condoms', which reads in part: 'Try not to be bitten by poisonous snakes; you must use a condom...' Behind the amorous partners is a lattice window, on which a number of shinto fortune-telling papers (*omikujii*) have been tied, suggesting perhaps the ominousness of predicting the future.

The scene is placed in Makiki Heights, and in the distance, a glimpse of Diamond Head can be seen. Both Makiki Heights and Diamond Head are identified in cartouche to the left. The lushness of the Hawaiian setting is given a Gothic heaviness. Vampire bats hover throughout the scene; lightning streaks signify the awesome power of nature. Weaving in and out of the composition are the luminous trails of two disembodied ghost heads.

The main focus of the right half of the screen is a huge coiled snake, symbol of the AIDS virus and its means of transmission, being eaten by a giant grotesque toad. This theme, identified in cartouche as the title of the screen, offers one of the main messages of the work. Traditionally, the toad is a fearsome animal who, within the *ukiyo-e* world, is always depicted as a bad ghost. Teraoka's iconography suggests that an even fiercer virus than AIDS awaits us—the ecological nightmares caused by man have come full circle, and nature now revolts against man himself.

The second focus of the complex composition, in the left half of the screen, features a samurai and a Caucasian woman, identified in cartouche as Lynda Hess, attempting to open a huge condom package. A monstrous snake is shedding a torn condom and spitting sperm-like venom at the samurai. To protect himself, the warrior has covered his head with his umbrella-like *kasa* hat. Overseeing this bizarre scene is U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, carefully delineated so that his face is recognizable. He is dressed in white robes decorated with calligraphy, an attire reminiscent of garments worn by a *yamabushi*, or mountain priest, but also associated with death (white robes are used in ritual suicide, *seppuku*). The characters on the white field of the robe translate 'Condom Master'.

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<sup>1</sup> Reproduced with permission from Masami Teraoka. Submitted by Dru Gladney, Visiting Member, the Institute For Advanced Study, Princeton, NJ.

<sup>2</sup> Howard A. Link, *Waves and Plagues: The Art of Masami Teraoka* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1988), pp. 76-77.