MASAMI TERAOKA

Geisha and Ghost Cat, 1989-2002
From the AIDS Series
Publisher: Tokugenji Press; Printer: Paul Mullowney
Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire; Purchased through a gift from William Sleznick, by exchange.

Masami Teraoka’s print, Geisha and Ghost Cat, depicts a popular allegory of the mysterious and mischievous feline, conjuring the modern myth that AIDS spares women and heterosexuals. Adopting the Edo-period spirit of ukiyo-e that exposed truths through visual puns, Teraoka censures misconceptions surrounding the epidemic and prejudices against victims, and warns geishas (sex-workers) to use protection such as condoms and diaphragms. Geisha and Ghost Cat depicts a Japanese woman making love with a Caucasian man, a foreigner (virus) in Japan. They watch in horror a projected image of a Ghost Cat snatching a geisha out of a contraceptive pillbox. Since the 1970s, before the notion of “cultural globalization” existed, Teraoka has challenged the negative aspects of globalization that threaten not only public health but also the loss of individual cultural identities. He perceives fast food chain stores as an epidemic spreading without regard to race, gender, or nationality. His AIDS Series and Fast Food Series reveal the threat of homogenizing the contemporary world due to globalization.

—Ikumi Kaminishi, Associate Professor of Asian Art and Architecture, Tufts University