

# Masami Teraoka: *Geisha in Ofuro*

Magnolia Editions is pleased to announce the first textile work by Masami Teraoka, a Japanese-born, Hawaii-based artist whose “narrative art theater” uses traditional Ukiyo-e iconography to consider contemporary issues including cultural collision, religious and political hypocrisy, and sexual taboos. Teraoka’s tapestry edition has been in the works for more than five years, and the image itself has even more history: *Geisha in Ofuro* began as a watercolor on canvas from the artist’s 1988 *AIDS Series*, described by Sarah Atlee as “an evocative mix of beauty and terror, sensual forms startled into abrupt mortality,” in which Teraoka grappled with the burgeoning AIDS crisis and the news in 1986 that a close friend’s child had received a blood transfusion contaminated with the virus. In 2008, Teraoka reworked the image as a woodblock print edition; now his *Geisha* takes on an especially monumental, heroic cast by virtue of the scale and haptic impact of the tapestry medium.

Teraoka’s reflection on the effect of AIDS on the vast sex industry in Japan (the *mizu-shobai*, or “water business”) suggests that even in a world of fantasy, awareness is paramount, and a simple act of self-protection can be a measure of strength. In a 2006 essay, Alison Bing sees empowerment in Teraoka’s *Geisha*, calling her “the safe-sex heroine of the hour” but noting that “she’s had a close call... her *kanzashi* [hair ornaments] appear singed by fire or blighted by Kaposi’s sarcoma.” The appealing colors and surface effects of Teraoka’s work host hidden meanings in the form of nineteenth-century



Masami Teraoka - *Geisha in Ofuro*, 2011  
Jacquard tapestry  
115 x 78 in. Edition of 8

*jōruri* calligraphy that even contemporary Japanese can rarely decipher; in this case, the script transcribes our heroine’s droll internal monologue. “A saint or angel doesn’t have to be a priest, a high-achieving person, or anyone particularly special,” says Teraoka in Bing’s essay, “anyone who is decent and civilized and a good person, we should be celebrating.” ■