

Cal State Hayward Curator Presents Work of 'Global Spirit'

By Maitland Zane
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

Lanier Graham, the new director of the university art gallery at Cal State Hayward, makes a strong debut with his first show, a "mini-retrospective" of works by Masami Teraoka.

"He's the most important Japanese American artist alive today," Graham said. "He's a global spirit who teaches with smiles and surprises. And a crusader for sexual sanity."

Teraoka has one foot very much in the past, using classic "floating world" woodblock techniques to comment on urgent issues such as censorship, sexuality and AIDS.

The 62-year-old artist has an amusing quirk — he seems fascinated with pointy-tongued women licking ice cream cones. In fact, one watercolor in the show is titled "31 Flavors Ready to Lick."

Another recurrent image is the condom, which Teraoka refuses to regard as taboo.

Graham, who visited Teraoka recently at his home near Honolulu, thought his sexuality was relevant to his art, and asked him if he was gay or bisexual. Recounting the conversation, Graham said, "He told me, 'No, I'm not, but I care about everybody. I don't want to preach. I just want to teach. Love is wonderful, but let's be sensible about it; for god's sake, wear a condom.'"

A cultured, gray-bearded man in his mid-50s, Graham has lectured on modern and tribal art at Hayward since 1992. Last month, he took on additional duties as director of the gallery, succeeding Lou Carson, who has returned to teaching. Married, with a grown daughter, Graham lives in Antioch.

The catalog Graham prepared for the show notes Teraoka's "intense spirituality."

"His work urges us to celebrate life, but also to remember that we can kill each other unless we stop being selfish and thoughtless," Graham wrote.

TERAOKA SHOW

"Life, Death and Laughter: Paintings & Prints by Masami Teraoka" on display through December 4 in the University Art Gallery at California State University at Hayward. The gallery is on the ground floor of the Art and Education building, 25800 Carlos Bee Blvd. Hours are noon to 4 p.m. Tuesday-Thursday and noon to 2 p.m. Saturday. Admission is free. Parking free on Saturdays. Call (510) 885-3299.

One of Teraoka's most unsettling, even scary works is "Miyajima Torii Gate," an eight-foot-tall watercolor showing a frightened woman enveloped in flames and holding a melting ice cream cone.

"The Shinto religion is very important to Masami," Graham said. "The red torii gate demarcates the realm of the finite from the infinite. And the ice cream means the seductive sweetness of materialism. She's caught in a dilemma; she's scared to death."

Teraoka borrows freely from classic painters such as Kunisada and Utamaro, who used the catfish and fox as mythic and sexual symbols. Updating the 19th-century images, he shows a woman in scuba gear in an amorous embrace with an octopus.

Another series is called "McDonald's Hamburgers Invading Japan," a chance for Teraoka to poke fun at the Americanization — many would say cheapening — of Japanese cuisine and culture.

One sly watercolor shows two figures, a young Japanese woman in Western clothes eating noodles with chopsticks; she's being served a hamburger by an older woman wearing the elaborate hairstyle and garb of a geisha.

Born and reared in Japan, Teraoka, son of a kimono shop owner, came to Los Angeles as a young art student. Now an American citizen,



CARLOS AVILA GONZALEZ / The Chronicle

CURATOR WITH VISION: Cal State Hayward Art Gallery curator Lanier Graham is not afraid to take on provocative subjects, such as Claudia Willits' breast cancer survivor work and a retrospective by Japanese American artist Masami Teraoka.

he has lived in Hawaii since 1980, and with his wife, Lynda Hess, helped Graham "conceptualize" the present show.

"Teraoka" literally means "temple on a hill," and as a world-class artist, he gets big money for his works, \$50,000 or more for his large paintings. Last year he had a show at San Francisco's Asian Art Museum, the only contemporary artist to be so honored.

Son of an Air Force colonel, Gra-

ham said he was named after his ancestor Sidney Lanier, a famed Southern poet who fought for the Confederacy in the Civil War both as an infantryman and sailor.

Graham has a doctorate in art history from UC Berkeley. He has worked as a curator at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Norton Simon Museum in Los Angeles, and the Fine Arts Museums in San Francisco, and has written several books, most recently "Goddess-

es in Art," published last year by the Abbeville Press. His hobby is printmaking.

He has big plans for the gallery. "I want to show as much world-class painting as we can afford. Fortunately, the university is giving a new level of financial support to art, which is the second most popular major on this campus after English."

Working with the school's multimedia department, he plans a show of "electronic art," which sounds

like an oxymoron but which he takes quite seriously.

And to make the gallery more accessible to the public, he has opened it on Saturday afternoons. "Parking is impossible around here on weekdays," he said.

In addition to courses in modern and tribal art, he teaches a freshman survey course on world art. "Think of it!" he said laughing. "Ten weeks from the Stone Age to the Space Age!"