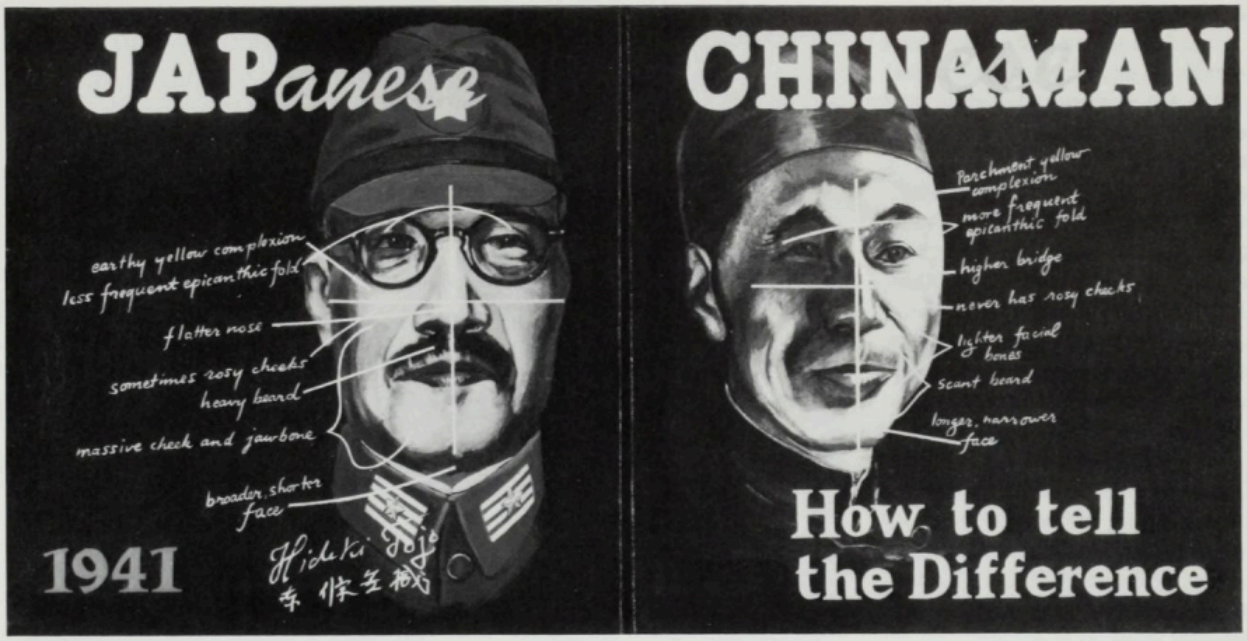

AIDS through a transfusion. Then he embarked on a chilling, but also humorous, series of paintings starring the condom, geishas, samurai, Western women, a gigantic serpent representing the disease, and an even uglier toad (the traditional symbol of evil)—with worse to come if safer sex practices are not adopted immediately. AIDS is seen as yet another form of imported pollution. The serpent is conquered only when it is trapped in a gigantic condom, and packages of condoms float through the pictures like butterflies. Surgeon General Koop appears in oval insets as an Asian saint or stern patriarch; "condom trade wars" take place between Japanese and American businessmen on board old sailing ships. Geishas tear open packets of condoms with their teeth. Perversely imitating in watercolor the woodcut styles of yore, Teraoka balances wittily between the "handmade" and the mass-reproduceable, low and high arts, lust and caution.

The broad humor and raunchy subjects of Teraoka's panoramas give way on scrutiny to a host of visual puns, sexual innuendos, and hidden nuances, many of which are made accessible (to those who read Japanese) in the calligraphic captions, which read in English translation like comics or *fotonovelas*. "The message and the beauty go hand in hand. The balance of the two is of the utmost importance. . . . 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."[24]

Ben Sakoguchi's satire is rougher and angrier. Interned as a child with his Japanese American family during World War II, he became permanently disaffected with the American Dream. In the '70s, in small, taut paintings,

Fig. 13: Ben Sakoguchi, *How to Tell the Difference*, mid-1980s, acrylic on canvas, 10" x 20", private collection. Sakoguchi's source was a propaganda layout from a 1941 *Life* magazine. The beneficent Chinese, with twinkling eyes and old-fashioned headwear, is juxtaposed against the evilly glaring and uniformed Prime Minister Tojo, "Jap" against "Chinaman." Prejudice is evident even in the language: Japanese features, such as "earthy yellow complexion, flatter nose, sometimes rosy cheeks, heavy beard, and broader shorter face" are contrasted with Chinese features: "parchment yellow complexion, higher [nose] bridge, never has rosy cheeks, lighter facial bones, and longer narrower face." Today the ironies and the profound double prejudice are clear, but the image is still as shocking as Sakoguchi found it. In his "Bananas" series, Sakoguchi reviews stereotypical Asians from American movies: Mr. Moto, Fu Manchu, and Charlie Chan, who, like most Asian characters, were played by white actors.

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. . . the disavowal of the Other always exacerbates the "edge" of identification, reveals that dangerous place where identity and aggressivity are twinned. For denial is always a retroactive process; a *half*-acknowledgement of that Otherness that has left its traumatic mark. In that uncertainty lurks the white masked black man; and from such ambivalent identification—black skin, white masks—it is possible, I believe, to redeem the pathos of cultural confusion into a strategy of political subversion. . . . It is a mode of negation that seeks not to unveil the fullness of Man but to manipulate his representation. It is a form of power that is exercised at the very limits of identity and authority, in the mocking spirit of mask and image.
—Homi K. Bhabha, in *Remaking History*, edited by Barbara Kruger and Phil Mariani (pp. 144, 145)

Sakoguchi mercilessly lampooned patriotism in series on the atom bomb, the Vietnam war, and racism in America, using jolly orange crate labels and brand names as the incongruous vehicle for his brutal commentary. (In *World Upside Down*, for instance, a white teenager in overalls is hanging from a tree while a group of black people stare up at him.) Later he extended his attention to the collision of class needs (in *Less Is More*, named after the Minimalist credo, Ellsworth Kelly's monochrome panels hang behind a group of poor, depressed, elderly women) and to the commodification of the art object, naming the names of specific museums and collectors, and pointing out the often questionable symbiosis between corporations and art institutions. In the "Banana" series of the mid-'80s, he burlesqued the "they-all-look-alike" syndrome, using various Asian stereotypes to confuse the issue. (This subject is also taken on by Valerie Soe in her recent video *All Orientals Look the Same*, which celebrates "difference" by dissolving face into face of different Asian nationalities.)

An ambivalent attitude toward alienation marks much "turning-around" work. Alienation is a source, but also a byproduct of the ironic project. The mirrors held up in much contemporary art by visual ironists reflect and reverse not only the images of the oppressor or the unworthy idol, but those of the artist's own self and/or community. Artists of color in a white world looking for new means of empowerment must confront the double edges of self-mockery, and the possibility that their work will be co-opted by those who mocked them in the first place. Lorraine O'Grady's 1980 guerrilla performance of *Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire* 1955, for instance, enhanced the event it protested, even as her message came across. She intervened at the opening of an all-white "Persona" exhibition at New York's New Museum turned out in a tiara and debutante's gown made entirely of long white gloves, flagellating herself with a white-glove cat-o'-nine-tails, and protesting, "That's Enough! No more boot-licking, No more ass-kissing, No more buttering-up. . . . BLACK ART MUST TAKE MORE RISKS!"

On the other hand, O'Grady's piece also demonstrated that alienation can be viewed as a positive force that resists the melting pot and offers a motive for differentiating between diverse cultural experiences, presenting what Jamake Highwater describes as the

> **paradox that the real humanity of people is understood through cultural differences rather than cultural similarities. . . . Children of the dominant culture are rarely given the opportunity to know the world as others know it. Therefore they come to believe that there is only one world, one reality, one truth—the one they personally know; and they are inclined to dismiss all other worlds as illusions.[25]**

An existential alienation is the basis of one of the most unusual bodies of work, even within a realm in which novelty is valued both esthetically and commercially—the uncategorizable (unsalable, usually unshowable, and cur-