



## SOME WEIRD SIN

HE'S MADE CYBORGS SEXY, WOMEN IN BONDAGE LIBERATED, AND MICKEY MOUSE LOOK LIKE A HORNY YOUNG STUD. MASTER ILLUSTRATOR HAJIME SORAYAMA CUTS THROUGH THE TABOOS AND GOES BACK TO THE CLASSIC PINUP TEAMING UP WITH V TO SHOW SOME OF THIS SEASON'S SEXIEST ACCESSORIES

From the beginning, Hajime Sorayama was considered the *Blade Runner* version of Vargas. The Japanese illustrator made it his mission to create pinups so larger-than-life amazing that they couldn't possibly exist. The futuristic beauties of his mercilessly twisted imagination came to life in the form of insect women, animal women, and industrial babes with mechanical parts, bizarre tastes in fashion, and dangerous piercings. His landmark series "Sexy Robots," released at the end of the '70s, synthesized traditional pinup art with chrome body robots. In the '80s and '90s, his provocative explorations of bondage, fetishism, cyber ideas, and genetic manipulations culminated in his series "Gynoids." His superwomen creatures have found fans in everyone from conservative company heads to Aerosmith (on a CD jacket) to Tokyo entrepreneur Nigo (who exhibited Sorayama in his gallery). His work for Sony is the electronic dog Aibo (1999), housed in the permanent collections of the Smithsonian and MoMA.

Challenging taboos and the shock of the new are what keep the 58-year-old Sorayama drawing thousands of versions of these futuristic femmes fatales in his cluttered Tokyo studio. In what seems to be a reverse in direction, he has recently turned to traditional pinups more than their cyborg counterparts. Not that the self-proclaimed "savior of eroticism" has gone, er, soft, it is the rest of the world that has gotten a bit...anal. In an age when mass media bombards the world with imagery of sex, sex, sex, it is conventionality and not creativity that sells. Can this explain why his latest obsession is a middle-aged mouse by the name of Mickey? **Tiffany Godoy**

**TIFFANY GODOY** Do you think there's an underground culture of eroticism in our current culture?  
**HAJIME SORAYAMA** Taboo goes beyond underground, and taboo is powerful. When Japanese people are taboo, I think Americans and Europeans can take it. But because Western culture is based on Christian ideals, if a sensible Christian dealt with the same themes like the Lolita complex, animation, and so on, he or she would get crucified because it is so taboo, don't you think? But if it's a heathen—I mean us Japanese—they manage to accept it [laughs]. At first they are uncomfortable but then they are like, "we don't mind because they are the Orientals."

**TG** Do you draw any boundaries for yourself? Is anything taboo for you?

**HS** No matter how upgraded, how noble and elegant it becomes, a taboo is a taboo. It will never change because it's a physical rejection. It's imprinted in your sense, in your culture, or in the environment where you grow up. You reject physical pain, don't you? Like when something hurts or when you know you'd die if you did this and that, you reject it instinctively, don't you? I'm interested in that. I want my work to be chewed softly and processed so it is understandable for everyone.

**TG** What is your type of woman?

**HS** I like women, but grown-up women—those who can take responsibility for themselves. It is similar to drug and alcohol use, there are those who are addicted to pleasures. My theme is to draw grown-up women who can go to prison or even die for their pleasures. Children can't do that. I express adults, and they are responsible for what they do. There is a kind of muse inside of me, and she wanders off to various places. She makes me imagine. If I do this, it gets interesting. It might mean she stands on the verge of death but she doesn't care.

**TG** So your theme will always be the same. Will you be obsessed with drawing naked women until you die?

**HS** I don't have a theme. But I do become bored with myself easily. I think I will continue doing this as long as I can be a professional creator. I need the media. Magazines are my only medium. I did *Penthouse* for over ten years and now that is gone.

**TG** You call yourself an illustrator, not an artist. In Japan, many visual creators start out in the commercial field—at an advertising company, like yourself—and work mostly with magazines rather than exhibit in art galleries.

**HS** I don't define myself as an artist. Americans often do. I think of myself as an entertainer, the muse is an entertainer as well. I serve my fans. I'm also a big fan of my own work, and because of that the hurdle is really high. I don't like flattery. I can't stand it. I have to make work that clears the hurdles I set, then my fans follow me and if I can make my living that's good. And if I can make a lot of money, that's good too. But I come first. I draw for myself. I'm my own biggest fan and critic.

**TG** Looking at your work, it is easy to imagine someone who lives an "alternative" lifestyle. But you have strict office hours: eight-thirty a.m. to six o'clock p.m.

**HS** You know, when I'm in my office, I can imagine anything. My hobby is to fantasize [laughs]. But once I'm out of my office, I become a normal person in society, a family person or someone's friend.

**TG** Why—after creating such a new type of eroticism—are you now interested in pinup girls?

**HS** There is no media for this anymore. I hide in the shadows, the wet and dark underground parts in the pinups, you know behind the images where the sun doesn't hit—like a convicted criminal. Motifs change, but the concept is the same. I wanted to offer my work to *Playboy* but they said I was too radical. But I am not only about sex. I worked on Aibo, and on a sculpture of Mickey Mouse—Future Mickey—for Disney. In me, there are no distinctions. I am working on my second version of chrome Mickey, a director's cut, for Disney Japan. All of the joints move, so when you bring it home, no rules!

**TG** How long does it take you to draw one picture?

**HS** Fifteen to thirty hours.

**TG** Are you interested in computers and technology? Your early works, the robot women and the cyborg women, were very futuristic. You were ahead of your time.

**HS** I just want to express erotic elements in women, that's all. Basically, my technique is the same as that of photographers and the Impressionists. If you want to express light, you have to express shadow, right? You can't paint light. I depict both what is interesting in photographs and what is interesting to the eye and put them together. That's where my identity lies. And the stainless steel or chrome helped to express it. So people say it's futuristic or robotic or computeristic, but for me, it could be anything as long as no one has done it before and the contrast is beautiful.

**TG** Is there anything left that can surprise an audience?

**HS** Yes! The most important thing is for art to surprise. To copy someone is easy. Pioneers need a lot of energy and should risk their lives, you know. But people have stopped investing in creativity because we don't have enough money and time. In museums in Munich or Cologne you can see hunting rifles with really high-quality sculptures on them; the kings and the aristocrats were patrons of artists so they could make masterpieces. In Japan today, someone like Nigo cares about quality.

**TG** Someone who has everything needs surprises?

**HS** Yes, and he pays for cars and girls' diamonds. And you know he collects *Star Wars*' goods? I am sure he's not satisfied with what he can buy. Collectors who collect what is available are laughed at! But if a collector wants something special, like Nigo, who has his own image of what *Star Wars* could be and when he can't find it anywhere, he will have to make it, right? I am the same. I create something because I can't find it anywhere. I want to make a robot Mickey and I want to find someone who will pay for it! I am sure if Disney were still alive, he'd make the most of the computer. The Bible even says that not to make the most of inventions is a sin.

**TG** Interesting, the gap between your girls and Mickey Mouse.

**HS** There are no gaps [laughs]. Their playful eyes—well, Mickey is horny and naughty as well, but...

**TG** How do you know that?

**HS** In the films he always wants to kiss Minny. Of course, that's only natural. The important thing is to look cool or feel good. These girls I draw will do anything. So the same thing goes for Mickey and for me.

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Art direction Carol Pierre Consorti  
Photography Billy Jim  
Stylist assistants Daniel Alonso  
and Maddalena Ambrosoli  
Lighting Tech Payam  
Printing Pascal Dangin for Box Ltd.  
Special thanks Miharū Yamamoto

*Saguna*  
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Godoy, Tiffany. "Some Weird Sin," *V Magazine*, Spring 2006.

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NEW YORK NY 10019  
TEL 646 336 7183  
FAX 646 336 7185  
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