

Miyoko Ito's oeuvre occupies an elusive, un-nameable space between abstraction and figuration. Her paintings posit an alternative world filled with objects and situations that feel familiar, yet whose appearance bears no obvious connection to the stuff of our "real" world. In these modestly-scaled canvases one enters a decidedly personal space that is nonetheless expansive and metaphysical. References abound in Ito's mysterious, enigmatic compositions: angled geometric shapes recall odd bits of furniture or architectural elements; gently undulating lines suggest wisps of hair or fragmented limbs, possibly human or vegetal. Her quietly vibrant hues, painted with a careful yet light touch, suggest rather than illustrate movement, space and volumetric mass. Ito's vocabulary of pictorial abstraction synthesizes the formal tenets of cubist abstraction and the fantasy-based approach of the Chicago Imagists. The result is a truly unique painterly style, developed without regard for the status quo and bearing no clear resemblance to the work of any other artist of her time.

Miyoko Ito was born in Berkeley, California, to Japanese parents in 1918. A combination of economic hardship, racial discrimination and the desire for their young daughter to receive a traditional Japanese education led the Ito family to move to Japan in 1923. They arrived in Tokyo in the midst of the devastation wrought by the great Kanto earthquake. Shortly thereafter, Ito's mother gave birth to a still-born son. These tragic events left a deep impression on Ito, who became extremely ill and for several months was totally incapacitated; by some accounts, much of Ito's five-year stay in Japan was spent in convalescence. During this time Ito studied calligraphy and developed an interest in art. Upon returning to Berkeley in 1928 Ito was enrolled in the local public school and eventually entered the University of California at Berkeley. There, she gained her first exposure to School of Paris painting, the synthetic cubism of Picasso and Braque and Hans Hoffmann's theories of form and color. Her studies were interrupted in 1941 when the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor drew the Pacific region into World War II and Ito, like most Japanese Americans at that time, found herself relocated to an internment camp. Thanks to the remarkable kindness and support of her professors and fellow artists, Ito managed eventually to receive not only her Berkeley diploma but also a scholarship to study art at Smith College in Massachusetts. A second scholarship, in 1944, allowed Ito to move to Chicago and enroll at the Art Institute. She would continue to live in Chicago for the rest of her life.

During the 1950s in Chicago Ito's mature painting style began to emerge. Her formative vocabulary of angular, geometric color planes, redolent of Picasso, gradually expanded to include organic, biomorphic forms and curvilinear shapes. Her paint handling evolved from thin washes of somber color to a more tactile surface emphasizing gesture and touch. In the 1960s Ito's palette grew increasingly vibrant and expressive. By this time one begins to see unexpected stylistic parallels

between Ito's painting and the work of the Chicago Imagists. Although ostensibly abstract, Ito's paintings are in a curious dialogue with the quasi-surrealist figuration the Imagists espoused. Notable correspondences are evident between Ito's paintings of the 1960s and 1970s and the works of her friends and peers Roger Brown, Ray Yoshida, Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson.

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