

# The New York Times

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## Galleries



ESTATE OF MIYOKO ITO, VIA MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

“Untitled,” 1970, by Miyoko Ito. Our critic writes that her art has that speechless beauty that emerges only when, as Friedrich Schiller had it, “sensuality and reason, duty and inclination, are harmonized.”

### Miyoko Ito

Through April 15. Matthew Marks Gallery, 522 West 22 Street, Manhattan; 212-243-0200, matthewmarks.com

In 2018, the nonprofit Artists Space reacquainted New Yorkers with the Chicago painter

Miyoko Ito (1918-1983), whose singular abstractions had mostly been held in Midwestern confidence. Five years after that rediscovery, her paintings are back in New York, at Matthew Marks, where 16 beautiful exercises of restrained carnality call

for a silent pilgrimage.

Born in Berkeley, Calif., Ito had to abandon her education in 1942, when she was interned with other Japanese Americans at the Tanforan Assembly Center. She recommenced her studies after her release, but health troubles and family obligations prevented her from painting full-time until the 1970s. What she then made were structured abstractions of gently curved solids, pinstriped bands and rectangles rounded off at the top like gravestones.

Each painting is built up, layer by contrasting layer, and most suggest receding spaces, even classical landscapes, wholly unlike the flat forms of postwar American abstraction. Irregularly, Ito stopped short when hammering some canvases to the stretcher bars, letting the nails protrude like a marquee. Also irregular is her palette, a twilight, sublimely weird range whose best description might be adult. Muffled green.

Muted magenta. Amber, but a little softer. Apricot, but a little darker.

Ito's colors are erotic, but also modest; they draw from Giorgio Morandi's dampened tones, they prefigure the ugly-chic palette of Miuccia Prada; but what on earth are their proper names? The green-gray of goose droppings. The fuchsia of the sky 10 minutes before sunset .... Ito's art has that speechless beauty that emerges only when, as Friedrich Schiller had it, "sensuality and reason, duty and inclination, are harmonized." *JASON FARAGO*