

Block Club Chicago

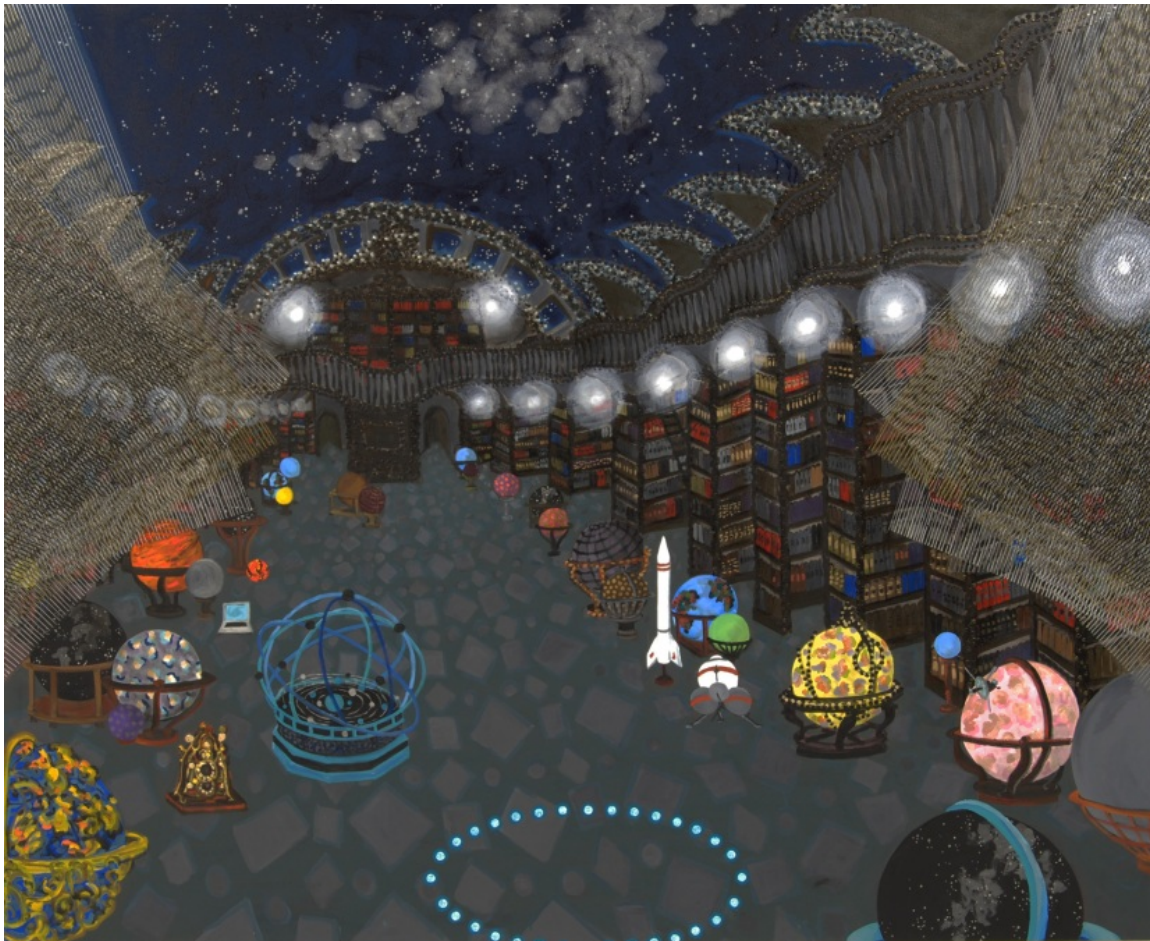
LINCOLN PARK, OLD TOWN

Chicago-Based Artist Michiko Itatani Explores Efforts To Understand The Universe In New Wrightwood 659 Exhibition

The gallery features more than 60 paintings and drawings by Michiko Itatani. It juxtaposes her large-scale paintings with drawings the size of typing paper.

Jake Wittich

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Michiko Itatani's "Cosmic Wanderlust" painting on oil canvas.

LINCOLN PARK — More than 60 paintings and drawings showing local artist Michiko Itatani's efforts to understand the universe are now on display at Wrightwood 659.

The "[Michiko Itatani: Celestial Stage](#)" exhibition features dozens of Itatani's signature oversized paintings juxtaposed with her drawings the size of typing paper. It's on display through Dec. 17 at [Wrightwood 659](#), 659 W. Wrightwood Ave.

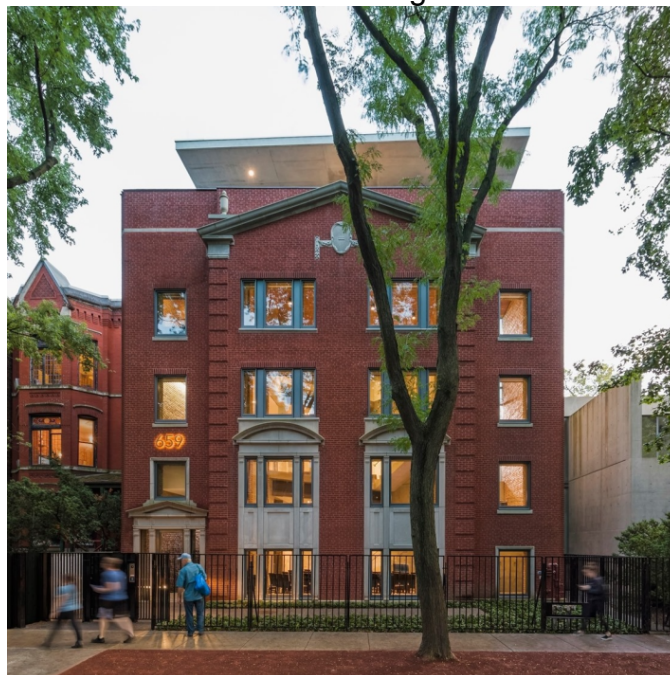
Alphawood Foundation Chicago is presenting the exhibit through Alphawood Exhibitions. Tickets are \$15 and available [online](#).

Itatani is professor emeritus at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where she's taught for 40 years. She was born and raised in Japan, where she discovered her fascination for patterns and structures of science, learned traditional brush painting and wrote poetry.

Itatani's work is known for engaging the mysteries of science and the cosmos and pairing those images with cultural symbols. Some works might link baroque bookcases and rockets or grand pianos with Japanese tea rooms, depicting Itatani's sense of wonder and awe at the world.

"One sees Michiko's work a thirst to understand human life in relation to the cosmos," said Ashley Janke, assistant curator at Wrightwood 659 and organizer of the exhibition.

"In pursuing this vast, open-ended inquiry as a visual artist, she found ways to condense and express the human experience in coded terms and visual systems of her own devising."



Credit: Facebook/Wrightwood 659 Wrightwood 659, 659 W. Wrightwood Ave.



Credit: Provided/Michiko Itatani Michiko Itatani's "Codebreaker" painting in oil on canvas.

The exhibition starts in Wrightwood's entrance atrium with "Still Life (2022)" from Itatani's "Astroarchaeologist" series, which was her own take on the still-life genre. The painting is large, bright and eccentric, depicting scientific items such as globes, a miniature James Webb telescope, a laptop, a rocket and a toy alien space craft in front of a traditional bookcase.

The painting is one of 12 recent works featured in the exhibition and an example of Itatani's oversized paintings, which are often 7-by-8 feet or larger.

From there, the exhibition heads upstairs and is split into three sections, according to Wrightwood 659.

The first section is installed in the Main Gallery of the third floor and highlights the artist's fascination with juxtaposing scientific and cultural artifacts to create a dream-like feeling.

In the first section, visitors will find "Cosmic Wanderlust (2011)" and "Astroarchaeologist (2022)." Both are large, vividly hued paintings with bold blues, golds and oranges. They depict architectural spaces filled with devices, glowing chandeliers and tiny, shiny orbital rings.

The second section is also on the third floor and brings together macro- and micro-symbols from the universe and atoms in dreamlike settings that distort the dimensions of space.

Visitors will find a group of gray monochrome paintings that depict celestial forms and stars in movement. In "Codebreaker (2020)," guests will find planets, rings, spheres and glowing lights whipping around an energy-filled solar expanse.

The third section, on the fourth floor, features Itatani's more abstract work, including paintings of geometric forms of woven lines, polyhedrons and rings of floating orbs.

"Personal Codes (2019)," a grayscale painting, features an enormous swath of near-blacks where a polyhedron seems to spring from a dark sphere. It's etched in delicate cross-hatched lines, and the background features distant stars and planets the size of pinheads.

When guests return to the main gallery, they'll see "Cosmic Wanderlust (2012)," which depicts a corridor lined with colorful, misshapen globes and sinuously stylized trees. It's painted in a spectrum of grays, and the only color is a crown of golden orbs that shower black and white dots down upon the picture.

Also running at Wrightwood 659 is ["The First Homosexuals: Global Depictions of a New Identity," an exhibition that explores early understandings of same-sex desire](#), and ["We Shall Defy," which tells the story of renowned Bangladeshi photographer and activist](#) Shahidul Alam, who was imprisoned for 107 days after criticizing his government.

Wrightwood 659 is a private, non-collecting exhibition space dedicated to socially engaged art and architecture. It opened in 2018 and hosts public exhibitions during its Fall/Winter and Spring/Summer seasons.

Wrightwood 659 is open noon-7 p.m. Fridays and 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturdays.