

Hyperallegic

Wrightwood 659's Fall Exhibitions Highlight the Expansive Cosmos and Same-Sex Desire

Discover works by Michiko Itatani in *Celestial Stage* and the history of queer identity in art in *The First Homosexuals*, now on view at the Chicago art space.



Michiko Itatani: Celestial Stage

For the past 45 years, Michiko Itatani (b. 1948) has grappled with the mysteries of the universe. Her immense, layered paintings are intended to inspire a sense of grandeur, capturing a complex and curious civilization floating in the expansive cosmos. *Celestial Stage* surveys the carefully cultivated language of Itatani's

pictorial narratives through a selection of works produced over the course of her prolific career. Prop-filled paintings — populated with encrypted forms and familiar devices — aim to illustrate the human desire to reach beyond one’s capacity to “know the unknown,” a central theme in Itatani’s work. Patterns and structures fascinated her from a young age, first in the study of hard science and then through writing. She then transferred these interests to painting, developing a visual lexicon of geometric elements ranging from compilations of woven lines to smooth black polyhedrons which, depending on the context of each work, draw on references ranging from the art historical canon to the metaphysical world.

The First Homosexuals: Global Depictions of a New Identity, 1869–1930

This is an exhibition about what art can do — and what language cannot. Prior descriptors of same-sex sexuality had found their basis in acts performed rather than in the designation of a distinct class of persons with a shared identity. The artworks in this exhibit attempt to chart how “homosexuality” — as a term, as an identity, as a same-sex sexual act — emerged as a historical construct, subject (like all of history) to ceaseless, clashing change as determined by society, and as expressed by individuals among ever-evolving visual art forms. The works on view seem to reject these binary categories as mutually exclusive or as inherently permanent. While “homosexual” has more recently come to be defined as signifying a mostly male world, *The First Homosexuals* reveals how central female same-sex sexuality was

during this period — along with gender queerness and other identity categories we might assume to be exclusive to our contemporary world.

For more information, visit wrightwood659.org and follow them on Instagram.