Guide to the Hisako Hibi Collection

Processed by The Japanese American National Museum staff; machine-readable finding aid created by Cameron Trowbridge
Japanese American National Museum
Manabi & Sumi Hirasaki National Resource Center
100 North Central Avenue
Los Angeles, California, 90012
Phone: (213) 830-5615
Fax: (213) 830-5697
Email: collections@janm.org
URL: http://www.janm.org
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Los Angeles, California

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Date Completed:
11/13/2000
Encoded by:
Cameron Trowbridge

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Descriptive Summary
Title: Hisako Hibi Collection
Origination: Hibi, Hisako
Repository: Japanese American National Museum (Los Angeles, Calif.)
Los Angeles, California 90012
Language: English.
Provenance
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee.
Access
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Publication Rights
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Preferred Citation
[Identification of item], Hisako Hibi Collection, Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum (96.201).

Biography
Hisako Hibi (1907-1991) Artist
Born Hisako Shimizu in Fukui, Japan in 1907, Hibi came to the United States in 1920 with her parents. When her father decided to move the family back to Japan in 1925, she boldly chose to remain on her own in San Francisco. Hibi enrolled at the California School of Fine Arts, now the San Francisco Art Institute, to pursue her aspirations to become a painter. Among the influential students and teachers at the school was another Issei artist, George Matsusaburo Hibi (1886-1947). Their mutual commitment to art fostered a profound relationship, and they were married in the fall of 1930. During the next decade the Hibis individually exhibited in a variety of significant venues throughout the Bay Area, including the important annual exhibitions of the San Francisco Art Association.

Like most Japanese Americans, the Hibis were forever altered by the circumstances of World War II. Along with over 8,000 other Japanese Americans from the Bay Area, the Hibis along with their two young children, were sent first to Tanforan race track in San Bruno, California. Later they were transferred to Topaz Concentration Camp in Utah. At both Tanforan and
Topaz the Hibis became involved in the art school, founded by their friend and fellow artist, Chiura Obata. In addition to teaching classes in the art school, the Hibis continued to paint. Hisako Hibi created at least seventy oil paintings during her incarceration, not to mention numerous sketches. Her works range from landscape scenes to portrait images. Overall, Hisako Hibi's paintings from this period reveal the personal experiences of a young woman, mother and artist. After the war the Hibis relocated to New York City. Tragically, George Hibi died in 1947, shortly after the family had settled into their new life. Hisako Hibi worked as a dressmaker to support herself and her two young children, all the while continuing to paint. In 1953 Hibi became a U.S. citizen. The following year she moved back to San Francisco where she remained until her death in 1991. Hibi exhibited widely in the Bay Area in the postwar years. In 1985 the San Francisco Arts Council selected her as Artist of the Year.

**Scope and Content**

Sixty-three oil paintings painted by Hibi at Tanforan Assembly Center in California and Topaz concentration camp in Utah from 1942 to 1945. Subjects include various daily activities, still lifes, and landscapes.

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**Tanforan Assembly Center 8/24/1942 96.601.1**

http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf796nb281

Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako  
Physical Description: painting oil on canvas  
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum  
Custodial History

**Description**

Unframed, stretched canvas. Image of dark barracks in and around dirt racetrack, mountains in background.

**Historical Note**

This painting is one of only eight known works done by Hisako Hibi at the Tanforan Assembly Center located in San Bruno, California. It is an important visual expression of Hibi's initial impressions of Tanforan and the circumstances of the incarceration. The perspective of the painting offers a panoramic, bird's-eye view of the camp and hence, Hibi's imagined vision of the camp grounds from such a distance. The barracks, which formerly housed race horses, are depicted as rows of buildings closely huddled into the narrow race track enclosure. The shallow space of the painting and the use of a high horizon contribute to the cramped feeling of the work. The bird flying in the top right corner is the only sign of movement and life in the otherwise quiet and somber canvas.

Assembly Centers, Tanforan | barracks | racetrack | mountains
**Tanforan Race Track 8/1/1942 96.601.2**

*Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako*

*Physical Description: painting oil on canvas*

*Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum*

*Custodial History*

Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum

*Description*

Unframed, stretched canvas. Image of dark barracks in center of racetrack, trees circling track and more buildings and mountains in background.

*Historical Note*

This painting is another view of Tanforan from a bird's-eye perspective. It represents what Hibi probably imagined this scene to look like from a relatively high vantage point, a position beyond the confines of the race track. Hibi entitled this work "Tanforan Race Track" but further added the commentary that "The horse stalls were behind the eucalyptus trees." The scene that Hibi provides the viewer, however, situates the trees behind the horse stalls and not vice versa. Perhaps this reversal of orientation in Hibi's description of the painting suggests the artist's perspective from outside of the camp grounds. The emphasis is on the isolation of the camp, hidden behind a wall of trees. The high horizon line and shallow space of the painting contribute to the cramped feeling of the work.

Assembly Centers, Tanforan | barracks | trees | racetrack | mountains

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**Barrack 9, Apt. 6, San Bruno, CA 6/25/1942 96.601.3**

*Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako*

*Physical Description: painting oil on canvas*

*Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum*

*Custodial History*

Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum

*Description*

Unframed, stretched canvas. Image of barracks and two people walking between buildings. Mountains in the distance.

*Historical Note*

The title of this painting refers to the new quarters for the Hibi family at the Tanforan Assembly Center. However, it is not clear whether Hibi included their barrack in this painting or whether she was painting the view from their new home. There is nothing to suggest that either the barrack at the left or the one further away in the distance was barrack number nine. The viewer's eye follows the woman with the bucket in the foreground to the sketchy figure at the left, and finally diagonally recedes into the space of the mountains in the background. The guard tower is unmistakably central in the background of the work. The figures are not painted in detail, instead they are sketched with broad shapes and modeled with patches of color. It was typical of Hibi to paint people with a lack of specificity. They often appear as lone, anonymous figures in the landscape.

Assembly Centers, Tanforan | barracks | mountains | people
Horse stables 8/1/1942 96.601.4 http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf509nb0gk
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: painting oil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Unframed, stretched canvas. Image of person walking in foreground, buildings and other people in middle and mountains in the background.
Historical Note
Perhaps one of the most profound challenges brought about by Executive Order 9066 was the abrupt change in lifestyle forced onto Japanese Americans. Life in camp meant that families no longer had a private space reserved for certain social rituals, such as eating dinner together. Life became completely institutionalized and all sense of order and custom that people knew before the evacuation was abandoned to the parameters set by the government. Among the changes was the fact that internees had to become accustomed to having separate buildings for doing laundry and taking showers. There was often a short supply of hot water, as well as long waiting lines to use these facilities. The mundane task of washing the family laundry, thus, became a relatively monumental task for many women. In this painting Hibi notes that she has painted a woman in the foreground carrying her washing. Yet, in this scene there is no reference to the circumstances of camp life which totally altered this and other simple everyday tasks. Instead, Hibi has decided to portray this figure against the backdrop of a quiet and deserted portrait of camp. The viewer does not get any sense of the difficulties involved in this chore, partially because the woman is so small in relation to the larger landscape and buildings. Perhaps the isolation of the larger camp experience is being implied. The barracks clearly identify it as a camp scene but the mountain range and trees in the background assert the presence of something beyond the confines of the camp grounds.

Assembly Centers, Tanforan | barracks | mountain

A few renovated horse stables 8/1/1942 96.601.5 http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf8779n99t
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: painting oil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of woman carrying 2 buckets walking with child in foreground, barracks and buildings to either side and in the background.
Historical Note
In the foreground of this painting is a woman carrying two buckets with a toddler following close behind. They are walking between two barracks along the dirt pathway. In the distance are three children and what appears to be laundry drying on a clothesline. It is unclear what these buckets may have been used for, perhaps to carry water back to the barracks from the latrine and shower building. It is known that in most of the assembly centers and concentration camps water, in particular hot water was a precious commodity. There were often long lines to use the shower and laundry facilities, so that it is possible that this woman was taking a private supply to her barrack.

Assembly Centers, Tanforan | woman | child | barracks | mountains
Hibi Collection

still life 8/1/1942 96.601.6  http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf4p3003nk
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: painting oil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of corn and flowers in vase on cloth-covered table.
Historical Note
Hisako Hibi was fond of painting still life works made up of the vegetables and flowers that were grown by other internees. In her writing Hibi often noted her deep appreciation of those who cultivated the land to grow these items. Many internees also worked to improve the landscape by planting flowers in front of their individual barrack apartments. In this work flowers are arranged in a vase which sit on a mustard-colored tablecloth around which are fruits and some corn. These items were all highly prized in Tanforan, especially considering the army ration meals that the government served in the assembly center. In the first few weeks at Tanforan many residents experienced digestive problems because of the inadequate meals being served. Fresh vegetables were a luxury in such a situation. In this painting Hibi displays these treasured items which did much to improve the standard of living in camp and helped beautify the otherwise somber environment.
Assembly Centers, Tanforan | still life | corn | flowers

Flowers 8/1/1942 96.601.7v  http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf5j49n7rm
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: painting oil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of flowers in vase on table, round fruit on tabletop, dark drapery in background.
Assembly Center, Tanforan | flowers
**Flowers 8/1/1942** 96.601.7r [http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf4k4003md]

**Creator/Collector:** Hibi, Hisako  
**Physical Description:** paintingoil on canvas  
**Contributing Institution:** Japanese American National Museum  
**Custodial History**  
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum

**Description**
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of flowers in vase on table, round fruit on tabletop, dark drapery in background.

**Historical Note**
In addition to painting, Hibi also wrote quite a lot about her life and work. In many instances Hibi wrote about her experiences in camp and specifically expressed her admiration of the flowers that were planted at the Tanforan Assembly Center and the Topaz Concentration Camp. With regard to this particular painting Hibi remarked that "Their beautiful flowers were cultivated in a vacant lot near the stables by the evacuees since they were interned."  
In this painting Hibi depicts an array of flowers against the background of some blue-gray drapery. This work was submitted for inclusion in the Relocation Center Art Exhibit which was organized in 1943 in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Hibi won the award for the best flower painting in that exhibition for which she received a $20 prize. Attached to the back of this work is Hibi's letter of award dated May 19, 1943 from Katherine Seeler who is identified as the Chairman of the Committee for the Relocation Center Art Exhibit.

Assembly Centers, Tanforan | flowers

**Morning 9/1/1942** 96.601.8 [http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf4m3nb062]

**Creator/Collector:** Hibi, Hisako  
**Physical Description:** paintingoil on canvas  
**Contributing Institution:** Japanese American National Museum  
**Custodial History**  
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum

**Description**
Red and brown painting with a mountain and barracks in the background. In the foreground is a water tower and rows of workers walking down a road.

**Historical Note**
Only two paintings appear to have been made by Hisako Hibi during the first few months at the Topaz concentration camp. This painting and "Topaz, Utah" were done in the fall of 1942 while the next painting completed by Hibi was not until March of the following year. Thus, they serve as important works representing her initial period at Topaz. The mountain range in the background becomes an important framing motif in many of Hibi's later landscapes and outdoor camp scenes. Here it appears against the backdrop of a bright red and orange sky. When the internees began being transported from Tanforan to Topaz many of the makeshift quarters were still being constructed by US army soldiers. Internees were also made to help in the construction of buildings and even the barbed wire fence which surrounded the camp. In this painting Hibi appears to focus on the daily routine of the soldiers, and not the internees, who worked on the construction of Topaz. In particular, the focus is on the regimented manner in which the soldiers marched into camp every morning. An adult and child stand to the side observing the men in their symmetrical formation and appearance. The figures are diminished in size in relation to the camp grounds and mountain range, emphasizing the landscape and conditions of camp. The barracks and water tower also serve as markers in locating this painting as a camp scene.

Concentration Camps, Topaz | barracks | water tower | mountain
Topaz, Utah 11/1/1942 96.601.9  http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf200001q0
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: paintingoil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of grey, black, brown barracks, plume of smoke at left, a mountain peak in the background.

Historical Note
This painting is the second of only two works completed by Hibi in the initial period at Topaz. The living quarters at the Topaz concentration camp were not the renovated horse stalls of the Tanforan assembly center but were, nevertheless, dormitory-style barracks. Families were assigned a room within the buildings which were constructed in rows and separated into blocks. There was little privacy in these small rooms heated only by the pot-belly stoves installed in each cubicle. Any noise could be heard between the thin walls and the severe winds carried the dust through every crevice of the barracks which were sealed only with tar paper. In this painting Hibi depicts the rows of barracks in a stark and somber tone. The mountain peak looms in the background while a tornado-like cloud of smoke or dust rises at the far left edge of the canvas. The paint has been applied with brief brush strokes in a light wash of color for the ground but a more sharply delineated line has been used for the barracks and the shadows that they cast. The horizontal planes of shadow along with the swirling black cloud give an ominous quality to the painting. There is only a hint of blue in the sky in an otherwise barren depiction of Topaz.

Concentration Camps, Topaz | mountain | barracks | snow

White heat 6/1/1943 96.601.10  http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf2d5n98zx
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: paintingoil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of white, black, grey of a snow covered barracks with a utility pole and a couple people walking.

Historical Note
Entitled "White Heat" this painting is the first snow-filled landscape painted by Hibi while incarcerated at Topaz concentration camp. The internees were used to the mild weather of the San Francisco Bay Area, thus, the harsh Utah winters were especially difficult. In addition, the facilities of the concentration camps did not provide much comfort from the snow and extreme cold temperatures. In this painting Hibi portrays a row of barracks from a distance with two sketchy figures dotting the landscape. A single electrical pole stands at the left, while some smoke from a chimney rises in the distance. The white expanses of snow and sky border the thin row of barracks. Instead of offering a pristine white land and sky, Hibi utilizes yellow, blue and grey patches of color throughout this landscape scene.

Concentration Camps, Topaz | snow | barracks | pole
**Topaz Hospital 6/1/1943 96.601.11**  http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf8v19n9wj

Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako

Physical Description: paintingoil on canvas

Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum

Custodial History

Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum

Description

Unframed stretched canvas. Image of an elderly man watching children playing inside a fenced area. There are barracks and a mountain in the background.

Historical Note

This painting is slightly ambiguous in its composition and meaning. It is entitled “Topaz Hospital” yet there is nothing within the painting that makes explicit reference to such a building. Presumably the structure in the background is the hospital. Thus, despite the title of this painting what takes precedence are the figures in the foreground. A man stands stiffly at the left, clasping his hands behind him looking towards a huddled trio of figures seated at the right. They appear to be sitting on something within a space enclosed by a few short poles and wire or rope. Who these figures are meant to be and what they might be doing is unclear. The building in the distance seems to have a tall chimney. Behind that is the mountain range which frames many of Hibi’s landscapes.

Concentration Camps, Topaz | man | children | playground | barracks | mountain

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**Stormy 6/1/1943 96.601.12**  http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf5j49n7s4

Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako

Physical Description: paintingoil on canvas

Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum

Custodial History

Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum

Description

Unframed stretched canvas. Image in brown and gray colors of two men talking between two telephone poles. There are barracks and a mountain in the background.

Historical Note

This work provides a partial view of Topaz concentration camp from an elevated vantage point. Hibi positions the viewer looking down upon this open space bordered by rows of barracks. Two figures walk together in the foreground while a large bird appears in the far right corner. The mountain range stretches across the background below the billowing dark clouds in the sky. This landscape is typical of Hibi’s camp paintings in that it provides a view onto the camp which is depicted as empty and stark. Only two small figures appear in the scene, quietly making their way across this muddied area.

Concentration Camps, Topaz | barracks | mountain | truck | field
Coal 9/1/1943 96.601.13  http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf787005j9
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: painting oil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of a red truck in a field with a fence around it. In the background are barracks and smoke.

Historical Note
At the Topaz concentration camp each barrack was divided into separate spaces, or "apartments" as they were called. In actuality they were small, cramped quarters where families or groups of single men were housed. Each space was approximately sixteen by twenty feet. They were furnished with a pot-bellied stove which the internees used to heat their living quarters. For most internees it was a new experience to use a coal-burning stove. There were sometimes coal shortages which was yet another difficulty of camp life. Internees relied on the coal-burning stoves to provide the necessary warmth in the barracks during the severe winters in Utah. In this painting Hibi depicts a truck making a delivery of this precious commodity. The pile of coal appears as a large mass in front of a building, although it was not always in such great supply. Internees had to gather and haul their own supply of coal from a central place back to their barrack.

Concentration Camps, Topaz | barracks | mountain | truck | field

In March 3/1/1943 96.601.14  http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf2k4002fq
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: painting oil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of a man and child, three woman and another child by a tree in the snow. There are barracks and smoke and mountains in the background.

Historical Note
This is another of Hisako Hibi's winter landscapes in which she depicts an open space inhabited by a few figures, bordered by rows of barracks in the background. The snow-covered mountain peak rises quite dramatically behind the barracks. Three girls appear at the left, while a man grasping the hand of a small child walks ahead of them. Another solitary figure stands in the distance. Perhaps they are all walking to or from the camp school, a system that employed both internees as well as teachers and administrators from the outside.

Concentration Camps, Topaz | barracks | mountain | people | tree
Laundry Room 4/26/1945 96.601.15 http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf8m3nb357
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: paintingoil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Framed, stretched canvas. Women in slacks bathing children in long wash basins.
Historical Note
Daily life in Topaz concentration camp included having to cope with the inadequate laundry and latrine facilities. These spaces were designed to be completely communal, for example, individual stalls were not even equipped with doors. This resulted in a lack of privacy and embarassing situations for internees. In addition, there were often long lines to use these facilities. Hibi herself noted in her writing that the bath tubs seemed to be almost always occupied. As a result, many mothers remedied the situation by bathing their children in the sinks built for washing laundry. On the back of this painting Hibi wrote, "We only had four bath tubs. Mothers bathed children in the laundry room." Three women and nine children are depicted in this painting. As was typical for Hibi, her figures lack specificity and detail. In the background an open doorway reveals a row of barracks so that the setting is unmistakably that of the concentration camp.
Concentration Camps, Topaz | women | children | laundry | bathing

A Stormy Day 6/1/1943 96.601.16 http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf496n99zc
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: paintingoil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of two children and one man between barracks with a pile on the LR.
Historical Note
This painting entitled "Stormy Day" appears to be a portrait of camp either during a break in a storm or just prior to its beginning. In the foreground is a pile of what appears to be coal. Three solitary figures are also present in this space enclosed by barracks. Hibi portrays the sky dramatically with white and black clouds, with a hint of orange on the horizon. In this painting Hibi was most likely referring to the numerous dust storms that plagued the internees of Topaz. The dusty, dry soil of the area was often swept up into blinding dust storms that seeped into the barracks and engulfed anyone unlucky enough to be caught outside. Hibi remarked in her writing that "Once in awhile the ominously shaped clouds started to move rapidly toward the north, while the western sky became dark...The residents had learned from bitter experiences what it all meant. They ran into their barracks, sealed all the openings and cracks between the front door and windows with old cloths and papers. Cyclones of sand in a dust storm with twigs and sage brush roots violently swept over the vast desert floor as if the earth and sky became one fierce dust ball in madness."
Concentration Camps, Topaz | barracks | people
A Summer Day 6/1/1943 96.601.17 http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf467nb04d
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: painting oil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of two girls/women walking, wearing hats. They are heading towards barracks and there is a guard tower in the distance. There is also a mountain in the background.

Historical Note
Two figures in orange hats and white tops stand together, situated within a landscape. Hibi depicts the figures with their skirts and hair billowing behind them as they appear to make their way towards a barrack at the right. In the background stands a guard tower and a row of poles which form a diagonal recession into space. The mountain in the distance is painted in a smooth, sloping shape with a minute peak that falls in the center of the canvas. Hibi uses purple and grey tones to create a muted and soft effect for the mountain. This is in opposition to her other paintings which depict the mountains of Topaz with a great deal of modeling and highlighting.

Concentration Camps, Topaz | barracks | mountain | women | guard tower | landscape

Topaz High Under Construction Autumn 1943 96.601.18 http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf0779n44b
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: painting oil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of a truck with wood in the lower right corner and a man with a wheelbarrow full of wood. They are building a building and there is a mountain and bare trees in the background.

Historical Note
Tanforan Assembly Center closed in September of 1942 as the approximately 8,000 internees were moved to the Topaz Concentration Camp in Utah. When the internees arrived they found the new camp still under construction. Aside from additional housing barracks and other facilities, buildings for the elementary and high schools remained incomplete. The barracks that were allotted for the schools were unbearable. There was a general lack of furnishings and proper equipment, as well as inadequate lighting; moreover, the buildings did not even have stoves for heating as did the barracks which housed the internees. Thus, as winter approached in the first few months at Topaz, it became clear that it was too cold to conduct classes in these buildings. By December the problems were resolved and classes resumed. The education system as a whole, however, was plagued with difficulties. In particular, finding qualified and able teachers both from outside of Topaz and among the internees became a major problem. This painting by Hisako Hibi makes reference to the construction work on the Topaz High School which Hibi and other internees must have witnessed in the initial weeks at Topaz. The dusty, desert landscape is depicted offering a sense of the barren and drab space that the internees were forced to inhabit. The usual visual landmarks, such as rows of barracks or guard towers do not appear in this painting. Instead, Hibi includes only a small section of the barbed wire fence which surrounded the camp.

Concentration Camps, Topaz | barracks | mountain | building | truck | construction | Topaz High School
Shopping to Delta 9/1/1943 96.601.19r [Online]. Available: http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf7w100651
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: painting o n canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of a compartment full of people with bags. The colors are yellow, black and red.

Historical Note
Delta was the nearest town to the Topaz Concentration Camp. Camp administrators eventually allowed internees restricted access to Delta in order to go shopping. A pass was issued to one person from each block per week, thus, internees had to negotiate amongst themselves who would be able to take advantage of this unique privilege. These opportunities were special for a number of reasons. First, the evacuation orders restricted Japanese Americans from taking most of their belongings. All they could take with them into camp was what they could carry, limiting what they could take to the bare essentials. In addition, the majority of the internees at Topaz were from the bay area and were unaware that they would need to be prepared for the harsh weather conditions of the Utah desert. There was a camp store but there was little variety in the items available and its supply was unreliable. The trips also allowed internees some exposure, though limited, to the world outside of camp. Thus, these shopping excursions were valued highly by many internees.

The internees were transported in a US army truck on these trips. Hibi offers a depiction of the inside of the truck with several Japanese Americans huddled on one end, while two men appear to be arranging some of the boxes filled with goods. According to Hibi’s inscription on the back of the painting the truck itself was covered so that no one could see in and the passengers could not see out. In her painting, however, Hibi ignores proper perspective in her composition in order to show the camp barracks and guard towers in the distance through the back opening of the truck. Therefore, Hibi insists on situating her work within the context of her camp experience.

Concentration Camps, Topaz | barracks | mountain | people | bags | truck | shopping

Shopping to Delta 9/1/1943 96.601.19v [Online]. Available: http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf3w10037c
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: painting on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of a compartment full of people with bags. The colors are yellow, black and red.

Inscription
Signed in caps, LL: Hisako Hibi / Sept 1942 ; (Back) A Happy Day to go outside the Camp Delta--a nearest town when the restriction was eased and we were allowed to go out in an army truck but The permission was one person from one block once a week "Shopping to Delta" in an army truck wish to be free to free to liberate body and spirit-- but an army truck No sight seeing because the truck was fully covered. A covered wagon truck!
**Sunflowers and Milky-Weeds 7/1/1943** 96.601.20 [Link]

http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf3s20033n

**Creator/Collector:** Hibi, Hisako

**Physical Description:** painting, oil on canvas

**Contributing Institution:** Japanese American National Museum

**Custodial History**

Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum

**Description**

Unframed stretched canvas. Image of a still life with sunflowers and milky-weeds wrapped with a cloth. The colors are green and yellow.

**Historical Note**

Hibi was fond of using the flowers and vegetables grown in camp to paint still life works. In this particular painting she depicts sunflowers and milky-weeds, which she refers to in the inscription on the back of the canvas as the "Flowers of Topaz." In other documents Hibi writes that the sunflower was one of the only plants that could endure the harsh weather conditions at Topaz, where temperatures ranged between 106 degrees to 30 degrees below zero in winter. Thus, while appearing to be composed of ordinary still life subject matter, this painting had special significance for Hibi who thought of these flowers as representative of life in Topaz. This still life then, resonates with its references to the location and historical context of its making.

Concentration Camps, Topaz | still life | sunflower | milky-weed | cloth | table
**Still life 4/26/1945** 96.601.21  [http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf0489n3zm](http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf0489n3zm)

Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako

Physical Description: paintingoil on canvas

Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum

Custodial History

Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum

Description

Unframed stretched canvas. Image of still life with a fishbowl, vase, cylinder, piece of fruit and cloth. The colors are yellow, green and red

Historical Note

This painting is significantly different from the other paintings in this collection. Instead of using a light wash of paint and sharp delineations of form, this work exhibits a departure from this technique. Thick patches of paint have been applied to create patterns of color. This still life appears to be inspired heavily by Cubism, a painting style developed in the early twentieth century by European artists such as Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque. Besides the manner in which the paint is handled, other elements of the painting mark it as different from Hibi's other work from this period. Although Hibi painted many still life images, this is the only one that does not focus on an arrangement of flowers or vegetables. The geometric shapes which form the background is also unusual for Hibi. The signature, as well, stands out as different because it is much larger than any of her other signatures and is printed, rather than done in cursive. These differences are not fully accounted for in the documentation. There are several possible explanations, the most obvious being that Hisako Hibi was experimenting with composition, style and technique. The inscription on the back also suggests an additional reason for this unique work. The inscription describes it as "a sketch" and notes that "with the reddish clay, earth dirt of Topaz, M. Hibi made these forms and painted with the oil paints. I sketched them." The M. Hibi referred to is Hisako Hibi's husband, George Matsusaburo Hibi, also an artist. However, it is unclear whether Hisako Hibi meant that she made a sketch of these objects, which her husband then painted, or whether she considered this work a painted sketch. Nevertheless, it is an interesting example of the range of styles and techniques that Hisako Hibi was interested in and experimented with at this time.

Concentration Camps, Topaz | still life | fishbowl | fruit | cloth | vase

**A Night 1/1/1944** 96.601.22  [http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf2f59n5p1](http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf2f59n5p1)

Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako

Physical Description: paintingoil on canvas

Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum

Custodial History

Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum

Description

Unframed stretched canvas. Image of very dark barracks with a mountain in the background.

Historical Note

This painting is the only known night scene Hisako Hibi painted while at Topaz concentration camp. A few barracks are visible in the distance, discernible in the darkness only by the glow of lights from the barrack interiors. The structures are framed by the sharp geometric outline of the mountain range in the background. The darkness overwhelms and smothers the image of camp. Even the yellow lights of the buildings are only dim suggestions of activity in this otherwise somber scene. Hibi most likely completely imagined this scene given the restrictions that prohibited internees from roaming the camp grounds at night.

Concentration Camps, Topaz | barracks | mountain
In front of the auditorium 1/1/1944 96.601.23 http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf7n39n9qg
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: paintingoil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of a winter scene with barracks on the right and left. There is only one on each side. There are also snow covered barracks in the background.

Historical Note
Winters in Topaz concentration camp were difficult because of the severe temperatures and lack of insulation for most buildings. The only positive aspect of the winters was the fact that the dust storms subsided. However, instead of the dust storms the snow and alkaline dirt turned into a sticky mud. Hisako Hibi suggests that environment with her painting of a winter scene in which the snowy ground appears tinged with a yellow and beige cast. A lone figure stands in the distance near the only other sign of life in the painting, a barren tree. The composition of the work is interesting, with the corner of a building at the far left making its way into the picture plane. It is unclear whether Hibi took some factual liberties in painting this work by inserting a section of the barbed wire fence in the foreground. The fence seems to run in front of the building on the left, suggesting that it stood outside of the confines of camp. It is possible that this building was used by the Caucasian administration of Topaz, since some of their facilities were located beyond the barbed wire fence. If this is the case, it is interesting to note that Hibi positions herself outside the confines of the fence, along with that structure at the left. In the artist’s imagination she composed her view of camp from a slight distance, in the space beyond the enclosure.

Concentration Camps, Topaz | barracks | snow | fence

Snow 3/1/1944 96.601.24 http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf6n39n8bv
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: paintingoil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of a winter scene with barracks. There are also snow covered barracks in the background. Snow is piled high against the barracks.

Historical Note
Unlike many of her other paintings of the barracks at Topaz concentration camp, in this work Hisako Hibi does not paint straight rows of buildings as seen from a distance. Here she takes us into a closer view of an alley space between two barracks. The camp layout was systematic in that barracks were equally spaced and arranged into blocks. That formalized division of space is not betrayed in this particular painting. The horizontal view of the barrack in the background cuts off a scene of the rest of the camp. Other buildings and the low rise of the mountain range are visible at the right in the far distance. Hibi positions our view of camp trapped between the matrix of these three structures. The snow covers almost the entire ground, as well as the rooftops. The snow is piled up against the sides of the barracks, except for the strip of clearing at the left. The snow is not pure white but tinged with yellows, greys and blacks, again suggesting the sticky mud created by the mixture of melted snow with the alkaline dirt. A figure stands at the right, solitary and anonymous.

Concentration Camps, Topaz | barracks | snow
A Stroll 3/1/1944 96.601.25 http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf9b69p08c
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: paintingoil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of a man and woman standing in a field with a watch tower in the background. There is a mountain in the background.
Historical Note
All of the World War II concentration camps in the United States were located in remote, deserted areas often with severe weather conditions. Topaz was especially characterized by its drab, lifeless landscape. The alkaline soil of the desert could sustain few types of plants and flowers. In this portrait of a couple taking a stroll Hisako Hibi underlines the empty, barren environment of the area. A man and woman stand together in a clearing. The gem-like mountain range rises behind them. Although Hibi’s palette appears brighter than in some of her other works, the landscape remains relatively lifeless. The guard tower at the left functions as a reminder that the context of the work is still that of Topaz concentration camp. The couple stands a few feet from a single shoot that has sprouted in the desert soil. They almost appear to be paying their respects to this tiny plant, due to their posture and bowed heads.
Concentration Camps, Topaz | mountain | guard tower | people

Prayer 5/1/1944 96.601.26 http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf9b69p09w
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: paintingoil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of two people, a woman and girl, praying in a field with a mountain and guard tower in the background. The colors are gray, brown and green.
Historical Note
The desert location of the Topaz concentration camp meant that the landscape had little vegetation. Among the only kinds of plants that the alkaline soil could sustain was greasewood, a small gray shrub. In this painting Hisako Hibi portrays a woman and a girl standing in a green field. It appears rather lush in comparison to the written descriptions of Topaz. Clearly it is meant to be a scene within camp because of the barbed wire fence discernible in the distance. Also visible is a small red square on the fence. Although it is too far for the viewer to read the sign, we know from historical documentation that it is a warning to internees to stay away from the edge of the perimeter. Although diminished in size, the inclusion of the sign in the painting is significant. At Topaz in particular, the barbed wire fence became a point of tension when one resident was shot and killed for walking too close to the fence. Hibi paints this woman and girl facing the mountain range, looking beyond the fence and sign. In the inscription on the painting Hibi writes that the prayer was for “relatives, friends, the young men in the battle ground front.” Thus, despite the subtlety of the painting and the lush field, the sentiment behind this work is a sober one.
Concentration Camps, Topaz | mountain | field | guard tower | barbed-wire fence
**Limitation 6/1/1944 96.601.27**  
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako  
Physical Description: painting oil on canvas  
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum  
Custodial History  
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum  
Description  
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of a guard tower with a mountain to the right and a field with rabbits on the left. The colors are gray, brown and green.  
Historical Note  
Entitled “Limitation” this painting seems to refer directly to the fact that the camp perimeters were delineated by a barbed-wire fence. Internees were forbidden to go beyond the fence and were monitored by armed guards who surveyed the area from guard towers. There were times when internees were allowed beyond the fence, but this was only under special circumstances. The fences were superfluous because the camp itself was located a far distance from any town so that there was no real chance of escape. In fact, there are no cases of attempted escape at any of the concentration camps. In this work, Hisako Hibi paints a corner of one end of the camp grounds. In the distance, the low barbed-wire fence is visible with a guard tower at the left. One of the red signs which were placed along the wire fence is present in this painting as well. The signs were warnings, not to people who might approach the camp from the outside, but to the internees themselves. They warned against staying too close to the fence and arousing the suspicion of the guards. One of the most tragic events at Topaz was the killing of an internee for walking too close to the fence. A guard supposedly warned the man, who did not follow his order probably because he was hard of hearing. The guard shot the elderly man who later died. This painting does not directly reference this event, but it is concerned with the confinement of camp and the role of the fence and guard towers. A flight of birds in the left corner is perhaps also a symbol for the desire to be free, to go beyond the camp grounds.  
Concentration Camps, Topaz | mountain | guard tower | rabbit

**Sunset 7/1/1944 96.601.28**  
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako  
Physical Description: painting oil on canvas  
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum  
Custodial History  
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum  
Description  
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of a sunset with barracks and mountains in the background. The colors are yellow, red and black.  
Historical Note  
Despite its lack of greenery and vegetation, the desert where Topaz concentration camp was located did offer moments of beauty. The sunsets, in particular, were noted for their amazing colors and brilliance. Hisako Hibi was especially taken with the sunsets at Topaz. In this painting she tries to capture the intensity of that event. In her writing Hibi often remarked upon the amazing sunsets. Even with the focus on the beauty of nature, Hibi did not avoid including two barracks in the painting. In this way she insists on reminding the viewer of the situation and that this was created in the context of the concentration camps.  
Concentration Camps, Topaz | barracks | mountain | snow
Water tank 9/1/1944 96.601.29  http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf709nb1zx
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: paintingoil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of a child walking down a sidewalk with barracks and sunflowers. There is a water tank in the background.
Historical Note
Topaz concentration camp received its water through a hastily constructed plumbing system. The water tanks located just beyond the confines of the camp were the major supply source. Despite the centrality of the water tank in this painting and the reference to it in the title, the tank itself does not catch the viewer's eye. Instead, the brightly colored sunflowers which line the outside of the two barracks portrayed here draw the viewer's attention. Hibi often remarked on the fact that sunflowers were among the few plants that could be grown in the desert climate. As a way to try and beautify the otherwise drab landscape of Topaz, internees began to plant vegetables, trees and flowers around their barracks. A child appears to walk alone along the gravel paths also created by the internees.
Concentration Camps, Topaz | barracks | sunflower | child

Autumn Leaves, Melons and Vegetables 9/1/1944 96.601.30  http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf4489n6xs
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: paintingoil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of still life with melons and turnips and leaves. The colors are red, and green and blue.
Historical Note
Hisako Hibi was fond of painting the vegetables and flowers grown in Topaz concentration camp. This still life work incorporates autumn leaves, turnips, and other vegetables. According to the inscription on the back the leaves were given to Hibi by a friend. These kind of leaves were most likely not available in Topaz itself and was possibly sent to Hibi by a friend outside of camp. The arrangement of vegetables and leaves seem to be on top of a grey table; however, the lack of depth makes the table edge ambiguous. The vegetables, thus, seem to be almost sliding off the picture plane. This is possibly due to the heavy influence that Cezanne had on Hibi at this point in her career. Cezanne's still life paintings intentionally depicted the perspective slightly askew, so that objects often appeared as though about to fall off the surface. Hibi's painting seems to be an experimentation with the kind of still life works created by Cezanne.
Concentration Camps, Topaz | still life | melon | leaves | vegetables
A young mother 9/1/1944 96.601.31 http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf9c6006w7
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: paintingoil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of a woman walking towards barracks with sunflowers. There is a small area where a mountain can be seen between barracks. The colors are brown, white and green.
Historical Note
The everyday living conditions of Topaz concentration camp were difficult considering the poor facilities made available to internees. The hospital and medical staff also were known to have administrative problems, as well as a lack of supplies. There were many young mothers in camp and for those who gave birth at Tanforan assembly center or Topaz there was the added stress of the situation. Internees did not know what their future held so that the happiness of a birth was often mixed with great anxiety. For young mothers the responsibility of taking care of an infant was especially burdensome, given the cramped quarters and lack of amenities. Hisako Hibi portrays a woman and her baby, making their way alone through the camp grounds. The water tower stands in the distance as she walks between a cluster of barracks. The sunflowers planted to brighten the drab atmosphere of the desert can be seen along the side of one barrack. Hibi was especially sympathetic to the young women with babies. She herself had two children, ages ten and five at the start of the war. While not saddled with trying to take care of an infant under the conditions of camp, Hibi was attuned to the issues of the women and mothers at Topaz.
Concentration Camps, Topaz | barracks | mountain | sunflowers

Topaz Farm Products 4/27/1945 96.601.32 http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf0b69n41f
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: paintingoil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Framed, stretched canvas. Lush, green still life with orange colored fruit at BC. Framed for exhibition.
Historical Note
The Topaz agricultural department was created for a few different reasons. It was one way to pass the time during the otherwise boring days. There were also quite a few professional gardeners in the Japanese American community who put their expertise to work for the betterment of their fellow internees. The products of the agricultural department provided vegetables and flowers to the internees. The vegetables were important in supplementing the often mediocre army ration meals served in the mess halls. The fresh vegetables were thus highly prized by the internees. The plants and flowers also helped beautify the camp surroundings which lifted the spirits of at least some of those at Topaz. Hibi repeatedly remarked on her admiration for those who cultivated the alkaline soil of the desert.
Concentration Camps, Topaz | still life | agriculture
**Treasure hunting 7/1/1944 96.601.33**

- **Creator/Collector:** Hibi, Hisako
- **Physical Description:** painting oil on canvas
- **Contributing Institution:** Japanese American National Museum
- **Custodial History**
  - Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum

**Description**

Unframed stretched canvas. Image of two men walking in a field with a guard tower in the background. There are signs on a fence and mountains beyond the field.

**Historical Note**

After some time camp administrators decided to allow internees outside the barbed wire fence into restricted areas. Many internees took advantage of these opportunities to take little excursions. Parents and children often went in search of arrowheads, evidence of the former Native American civilization that occupied the area. The area where Topaz was located was also rich with fossil remains and actual semi-precious Topaz stones. Internees often gathered the small bits of Topaz to fashion into jewelry and crafts. Hibi wrote about going on this kind of "treasure hunt" with her family and the need to be covered virtually from head to toe, in order to protect themselves from the mosquitoes. In this painting Hibi depicts two internees going out on their "treasure hunt", appropriately dressed according to Hibi's description. Red and yellow warning signs dot the barbed wire fence that remained around the camp perimeter. Despite the taste of freedom offered by this rare opportunity, the guard tower and fence remain as reminders that the freedom offered was still limited.

Concentration Camps, Topaz | mountain | field | men | guard tower

**A man in contemplation 7/1/1944 96.601.34**

- **Creator/Collector:** Hibi, Hisako
- **Physical Description:** painting oil on canvas
- **Contributing Institution:** Japanese American National Museum
- **Custodial History**
  - Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum

**Description**

Unframed stretched canvas. Image of a man sitting on the ground by a rock. On the left is a barbed wire fence and a guard tower in the upper corner. There are mountains in the distance.

**Historical Note**

Most of Hisako Hibi's camp paintings are characterized by an experimentation with perspective and a focus on the landscape of the camp where she and her family were incarcerated. This painting is no exception to this, with its high horizon line and outdoor setting. A figure sits slumped against a grassy mound near the barbed-wire fence which outlined the perimeter of the Topaz concentration camp. A guard tower can be seen in the distance against the backdrop of the mountain range. The perspective is slightly askew, making the landscape slightly unreadable. The fence, in this case, appears to be much taller than it seems in Hibi's other paintings. The presence of the fence and guard tower disrupts the beautiful lushness of the field and the repose of the figure.

Concentration Camps, Topaz | mountain | fence | barbed wire | man | rock
With mother 2/1/1944 96.601.35  http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf700005c9
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: paintingoil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of a woman and child walking with barracks and snow covered mountains. There is a tree in the middle ground.
Historical Note
The title of this painting by Hisako Hibi is "With Mother" emphasizing the perspective of the young child in the image. Hibi was particularly attuned to the effect of camp life on the children and mothers. In this painting she situates the figures in the foreground with the barracks and mountain range a far distance behind them. They appear somewhat separated from the rest of camp because of the distance and their focus on the path before them. The ground is a slushy white and brown, reflecting the sticky mud which was created by the mixture of melting snow with the Topaz soil. An almost lifeless tree stands in the background, echoing the solitariness of the child and mother within the landscape.
Concentration Camps, Topaz | barracks | mountain | child | woman | snow

A puddle 4/1/1944 96.601.36  http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf2v19n60s
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: paintingoil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of four children playing near a puddle. The puddle is in between barracks. There are snow covered mountains in the background.
Historical Note
In this work Hisako Hibi uses a large puddle of water in order to experiment with perspective and reflection. The barracks depicted appear identical against the backdrop of the snow-covered mountain range. Three children stand at the far left on the edge of the pool of water. Another child at the right waves at them as he walks in their direction. Hibi seems to be concerned with how to depict the reflection of the barrack in the puddle. It is slightly odd that this puddle would exist while the rest of the area appears to be dry. Clearly it is a winter scene because the children are all in coats, hats and boots. The puddle itself is also unusual in the sharp and angular delineation of its borders.
Concentration Camps, Topaz | barracks | mountain | snow | children | puddle
### The 3rd winter in Topaz 1/1/1944 96.601.37

**Creator/Collector:** Hibi, Hisako  
**Physical Description:** paintingoil on canvas  
**Contributing Institution:** Japanese American National Museum  
**Custodial History**  
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum  
**Description**  
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of barracks which are snow covered with smoke coming from the chimneys. There is one man walking and utility poles line the snow covered street.  
**Historical Note**  
In this painting Hisako Hibi seems to have resolved some of the compositional and perspectival issues she was grappling with in other works. She gives us a view of the barracks from a sharp profile, so that the edges of the roofs recede into space. The electrical poles echo the row of barracks providing a kind of pathway between the poles and buildings. Snow covers the rooftops and ground completely. The scene is a quiet one with only three lone figures dotting the landscape. Smoke rises from the chimneys of buildings at the right, perhaps hinting at the unseen activity within the barracks.

Concentration Camps, Topaz | barracks | mountain | man | snow

### A cold day 2/1/1944 96.601.38

**Creator/Collector:** Hibi, Hisako  
**Physical Description:** paintingoil on canvas  
**Contributing Institution:** Japanese American National Museum  
**Custodial History**  
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum  
**Description**  
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of a person is in the foreground sweeping a snow covered area. There are piles of rocks and barracks in the background.  
**Historical Note**  
Central to this painting is the figure in the foreground who seems to be shoveling snow or coal. Like most of the people in Hibi's camp paintings, the figure is anonymous and generally unidentifiable. The piles at the right and left are probably coal which was needed for the pot-bellied stoves. Every "apartment" had such a stove that served as the only source of heat during the severely cold winters at Topaz. Coal supplies were unpredictable and internees were responsible for gathering what coal they could from a central location to their living quarters. This figure is probably in the midst of collecting more coal for the barracks. Thick black smoke rises from the chimney in the background, referencing the burning coal in one of the pot-bellied stoves. Absent from this painting are many of the usual signifiers that this is a camp setting. The typical rows of barracks has been replaced by a small cluster of buildings. The barbed-wire fence and guard towers are also missing. It is a serene scene of a cold and snowy landscape.

Concentration Camps, Topaz | barracks | snow | broom | woman
April 16, 1944-A midnight storm 4/1/1944 96.601.39 http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf5z09n7w9
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: painting oil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of a child carrying an umbrella walking towards barracks. There are piles of snow off to the side of them. Smoke comes from a stack in the distance.

Historical Note
In this painting Hisako Hibi portrays a scene of Topaz concentration camp after a storm. Much of the snow has already melted, creating puddles and a slushy mud ground. A child with an umbrella walks along a plank laid over the slush, presumably to get back to one of the barracks at the left of the painting. The work of shoveling the snow and slush away from the barracks has already been accomplished. In the center of the canvas is a mound of snow and slush as evidence of this work. Hibi creates the sense of muddy ground with a layering of light washes of color. Beneath the plank is a puddle of water, discernible mostly by the reflection of the barrack rooftop on the surface. A large chimney in the background spews a chain of black smoke into the hazy sky.

Concentration Camps, Topaz | barracks | person | bag | snow

In the evening 3/1/1944 96.601.40 http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf3b69n6g2
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: painting oil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of a person by barracks. The door of the barrack is white in color. The person is wearing red. There is a mountain and moon in the background.

Historical Note
A tiny figure in red darts across the landscape of this painting, about to disappear behind a barrack at the left. Hibi focuses our attention on the figure by the use of bright red within an otherwise drab scene. The buildings are clustered together but the viewer is allowed access to the pathways between them. The diagonal recession leads the viewer’s eye back to the mountain peak in the background. The large cloud formation overwhelms the hazy sky which partially obscures the yellow moon. The usual signifiers of camp, the barbed-wire fence and guard towers, are absent from this work.

Concentration Camps, Topaz | barracks | mountain | moon | person | door
In front of my apt. 8/1/1944 96.601.41  http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf4z09n754
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: paintingoil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of a young man by a barrack with a pail in his hand. There are sunflowers that are planted in front of the barracks. The door to the barrack is open.

Historical Note
This is the only known painting to portray the specific barrack apartment occupied by the Hibis at Topaz concentration camp. Most of Hisako Hibi's works do not provide details of individuals or buildings. In this work Hibi focuses on the exterior of her particular living quarters. The small garden of flowers is in full bloom adding a spark of color to the drab barrack walls. A young boy, possibly meant to be Hibi's son, appears at the far right carrying a bucket. The viewer imagines that he is probably going to water the plants. In the doorway is a seated figure who is slightly obscured by the tall plants. The little gravel pathway further adds to the appearance of a tidy, cheerful home. In fact, the individual spaces allotted to families was a room only about 16 feet by 20 feet. The high winds constantly blew dust and dirt into the barracks through the cracks in the floor and the shoddy tar-papered walls. However, the portrait of the Hibi home is a relatively sweet one, without overt indications of the difficulties of camp life.

Concentration Camps, Topaz | barracks | door | pail | sunflower

A Study #1 4/27/1945 96.601.42  http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf9x0nb41x
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: paintingoil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Framed, stretched canvas. Portrait of an old man with grey hair, red shirt.

Historical Note
This painting is one of the only known works of its kind done by Hisako Hibi while at Topaz concentration camp. Hibi did not often paint figures in such great detail. People appear in her paintings diminished in size and lacking specificity. Here the sense is that this is a unique individual, given the details of his face. Hibi portrays this man at a slight angle from the chest up. It is significant that Hibi insists on including a view of the camp barracks in the background of this figure. Thus, the context of camp frames this man's portrait.

Concentration Camps, Topaz | barracks | mountain | portrait | man
**Topaz Farm Products 9/1/1944 96.601.43**  http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf896nb34r
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: painting oil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of still life of squash and melon. The colors are yellow, green and gray.
Historical note
This painting is another still life work done by Hisako Hibi in which she featured the vegetables grown by the Topaz Agricultural Department. Unlike most of her other still life paintings of this period, here Hibi does not include any flowers in the arrangement. Situated on a tray, a grouping of green melons and corn are punctuated by bright yellow squash. As in her other still life paintings Hibi seems to be experimenting with a compositional style inspired by Cezanne. The tray seems to be tipping upwards so that the vegetables appear to be about to slide off the table. Hibi had a deep appreciation for these vegetables and the work of the Agricultural Department. Such vegetables helped supplement the often mediocre meals offered in Topaz. The ability to incorporate these items into their diet allowed internees to assert a sense of control over their camp conditions. Over and again Hibi reiterated her acknowledgement of the importance of this seemingly benign contribution to the community of internees.
Concentration Camps, Topaz | still life | melon | squash | table

**Snowing 1/1/1945 96.601.44**  http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf1c6001d3
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: painting oil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of someone walking in a snow storm with barracks and utility poles. Everything is snow covered. The colors are white and gray.
Historical Note
Painted during her last winter at Topaz concentration camp, this work by Hisako Hibi represents the snow that overwhelmed the camp and its internees. Of course, Hibi did not know at the time she painted this work that it would be her last winter at Topaz. The view of camp offered by this painting is a barren one, empty of life except for the lone figure in the foreground. At the right Hibi portrays a long row of barracks at a severe angle. It works to frame the image and give a sense of depth to the work. The barracks thus appear to continue for a long distance, with no end in sight. Hibi seems to be trying to portray falling snow in this painting. Daubs of white paint are strewn across the canvas towards this purpose.
Concentration Camps, Topaz | barracks | snow | person | telephone pole
Conversation 4/28/1945 96.601.45 http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf6n39n8cc

Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: painting oil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum

Description
Framed, stretched canvas nailed to stretcher edge of canvas taped to stretcher, 8 keys in stretcher. Image of snow scene with woman holding a broom and man in center foreground, talking.

Historical Note
In this painting Hisako Hibi captures a moment of intimacy between two figures. Positioned outdoors within a snowy landscape, the man and woman in the foreground conduct a private conversation. At the left, the edge of a barrack frames the image. In the background is another barrack building which stands against a hazy sky. Two figures in the distance make their way through the snow, heads bowed and carrying buckets in each hand. As viewers we are positioned at the same level as the two figures in conversation. In this way we are allowed access to the scene and the couple, as if eavesdropping on their private moment. Their intimacy is buttressed by their close proximity to each other. Thus, while we are allowed to enter their space by being positioned at their level, we are also prevented from interfering with their conversation. We are physically closed off from their space since the woman stands with her back to the viewer, thereby, obstructing a view of their faces. The scene can be identified as that of camp, due to the barracks. However, the focus in this work is on the relationship between the couple in conversation.

Concentration Camps, Topaz | barracks | snow | pail | broom | people

Waiting near Topaz high 2/1/1945 96.601.46 http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf896nb358

Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: painting oil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum

Description
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of a woman leaning against a telephone pole and there is a man walking along side a building heading towards her. A back of a barracks is on the right side.

Historical Note
Hisako Hibi's paintings from this period can be characterized, in part, for their experimentation with composition. In this work she depicts a building at a sharp angle which is used to create a sense of diagonal recession into space. The building at the left interrupts the direction of the green building and forms another diagonal movement into depth. The electrical pole at the right and the woman leaning against it function as anchors in the expanse of field in the foreground. We are positioned above ground level, looking slightly down upon this scene, yet we are unable to see beyond the buildings. The woman in the foreground stands casually, resting against the pole with her feet crossed at the ankles. The building at the left is presumably the high school auditorium. The green building at the right may also be part of Topaz High School, although Hibi is not explicit about the identification of the structures.

Concentration Camps, Topaz | barracks | mountain | people | telephone pole
**Eastern sky 7:50 A.M., Feb 25, 1945 2/25/1945 96.601.47 [http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf7m3nb29h](http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf7m3nb29h)**

Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako  
Physical Description: painting oil on canvas  
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum  
Custodial History  
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum  
Description  
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of red sky with clouds, mountain peak to left, barracks to the right.  
Historical Note  
Hisako Hibi noted in her writing her impressions of the beautiful sky at Topaz concentration camp. Both sunsets and sunrises inspired Hibi to paint. The focus of this painting is certainly the dramatic sky at sunrise. Hibi uses broad strokes of vibrant color to create an intense backdrop for her quiet camp scene. The barracks at the right remain in darkness below the fiery sky.  
Concentration Camps, Topaz | sunrise | barracks | mountain

**Western sky 7/1/1945 96.601.48 [http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf7s2005pn](http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf7s2005pn)**

Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako  
Physical Description: painting oil on canvas  
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum  
Custodial History  
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum  
Description  
Unframed, stretched canvas. Image of red sky with clouds, 2 mountain peaks, portions of 3 barracks with 2 to 3 people standing between them.  
Historical Note  
The title of this painting, "Western Sky" informs us that this is a depiction of a sun setting on the Topaz concentration camp. The soft outline of the sun is barely discernible as it falls below the crevice of the abstracted mountain range. Hibi uses bright oranges, reds and yellows to draw attention to this dramatic sky. Three barracks lie below but the focus is clearly on the sunset. The sky predominates the scene, taking up most of the canvas. Even the two figures present in the painting are diminished in size, adding to the sense of the grandeur of nature. The person at the left appears to be staring up at the sky as well. Hisako Hibi was certainly interested in landscape painting during this period. This work is similar to others from this collection in that it exhibits a concern with depicting the outdoors at different times of day in order to capture the brilliance of nature.  
Concentration Camps, Topaz | sunset | barracks | mountain | people
Shower, latrine and laundry building 10/1/1944 96.601.49 [view on Calisphere](http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf0m3n97r1)

**Creator/Collector:** Hibi, Hisako  
**Physical Description:** painting, oil on canvas  
**Contributing Institution:** Japanese American National Museum  
**Custodial History**  
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum  
**Description**  
Unframed, stretched canvas. Image of barrack with chimney and smoke, portion of another  
barrack at left, casting shadow on right barrack.  
**Historical Note**  
This painting demonstrates Hisako Hibi's concern with composition. The focus appears to be  
less on landscape, and more on shapes creating a sense of pattern. The corner of one  
barrack is depicted in the foreground and frames the painting at the left. Its shadow falls  
dramatically across the side of the building at the right. This creates sharp geometric  
patterns in this work. The viewer is positioned slightly outside of this space, but at ground  
level. There is no escape out of the closed quarters of this alleyway. Hibi utilizes broader  
brushstrokes so that there is less modulation of the surface of the canvas.

Concentration Camps, Topaz | barracks | chimney | smoke

To school 2/1/1945 96.601.50 [view on Calisphere](http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf987006v2)

**Creator/Collector:** Hibi, Hisako  
**Physical Description:** painting, oil on canvas  
**Contributing Institution:** Japanese American National Museum  
**Custodial History**  
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum  
**Description**  
Unframed, stretched canvas. Image of girl in red coat holding books under her arm standing  
on right, portion of green barrack at left, rows of barracks and snowy mountain peak in  
background.  
**Historical Note**  
This is one of the few paintings done by Hisako Hibi which focuses on a single figure  
portrayed in detail in the foreground. A young girl wearing a red coat stands at the right,  
carrying books under one arm with her head lowered. She appears to be gazing at the  
ground in front of her. Hibi provides relatively more detail for the face of this figure than in  
hers other works. The girl appears somewhat melancholy standing alone within the  
landscape. The edge of a barrack frames the painting at the left. In the background is a row  
of buildings that recedes into space. The mountain rises dramatically in the background  
against a hazy sky.

Concentration Camps, Topaz | barracks | mountain | girl | school
A letter 3/1/1945 96.601.51 [http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf7t1nb2kz]
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: paintingoil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of elderly woman in red dress and dark apron seated reading letter. Pot belly stove to the left, laundry hanging in background, broom and dustpan to her right.
Historical Note
This painting is the only example from this collection of an interior scene of one of the barracks. In this work Hisako Hibi provides a detailed and close view of one of the barrack "apartments" that families were housed in. A woman is seated slightly hunched over as she reads a letter. Her oval shape is echoed by the pot-bellied stove which stands slightly behind her and to the left. Although we do not know much about the woman, it is important to note that Hibi does identify her as a mother. The occasion of the letter is clearly significant and Hibi allows the viewer to see the opening of the letter which reads, "Dear Mother." This letter could have been from a son or daughter who had relocated outside of camp for a number of different reasons. Many young Japanese American men volunteered or were drafted into the US army, so it is possible that this letter is from the woman's son who became a soldier. Other young people were allowed to begin or resume their college educations in schools outside of the West coast. Many went to places in the Midwest and some went to the East coast. Still other individuals found work in other parts of Utah and places where there was a shortage of agricultural labor because of the war. The resettlement project conducted by the WRA was a complicated one. Its main purpose was to prevent Japanese Americans from repopulating the West coast which was considered vulnerable to attack by the Japanese. Thus, the letter referred to in this painting could have referenced a number of different situations. Hibi provides other details of the living quarters, including the hanging laundry and the drawing pinned to the wall behind the woman. (This drawing apparently refers to a picture made by Ibuki Lee, the artist's daughter, when she was a child.) The presence of the hanging laundry and the broom and dustpan at her side suggest that the woman may have interrupted her chores to read this letter.
Concentration Camps, Topaz | mother | letter | stove | broom

A bathroom 4/28/1945 96.601.52 [http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf0199n3tw]
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: paintingoil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Unframed stretched canvas. Charcoal (?) drawing of almost empty room, smaller room at end visible with woman bent over bathtub.
Historical Note
This is a particularly interesting piece because it is an unfinished painting and, thus, provides information about Hisako Hibi's method of painting. This example suggests that Hibi began with a charcoal sketch and used light washes of paint to begin to build up the image. It appears that this work was situated in the interior of one of the bathrooms. In the background a woman appears to be bending over a child in a tub. There are some outlines of figures at the left as well. Clearly this work is important for its documentary meaning, providing insight into Hibi's working method.
Concentration Camps, Topaz | bathtub | bathroom
A wind brought a storm 2/1/1945 96.601.53 http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf096n97nh
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: paintingoil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of puffy clouds filling top half of canvas, large gymnasium type building on horizon, green building to right and front of it.
Historical Note
In this painting Hisako Hibi depicts Topaz concentration camp during one of its many storms. Buildings stand in the distance on a low horizon line. Above is an abstract geometric shape, perhaps an outline of the mountain range. The sky contains large swelling clouds in grey, white and blue tones. Small shadowy figures walk in the foreground. Hibi seems to be trying to achieve a sense of the gusty wind of Topaz. The inscription on the back of the painting notes that Hibi went outside to paint but that the wind knocked down her easel and canvas.
Concentration Camps, Topaz | barracks | clouds | storm

Vegetables 8/1/1945 96.601.54 http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf4c6003kk
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: paintingoil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of eggplant, green onion, tomato, etc. on blue drapery and brown table.
Historical Note
This painting is possibly one of the last still life images completed by Hisako Hibi while at the Topaz concentration camp. Painted in August of 1945 it is probably also one of the last paintings Hibi completed in camp. Several vegetables are arranged on a table on blue drapery. Hibi provides relatively more modeling for these objects than some of her other still life paintings. She uses different shades of color to create this effect. The large brown vegetable anchors the painting and provides the focus for the image. The inscription on the back notes that Hibi again was thinking of the Topaz Agricultural Department when she painted this work. Almost all of her other still life works reference her gratitude to those who provided the vegetables that supplemented the meals at Topaz.
Concentration Camps, Topaz | vegetables | still life | table
Topaz flower-sunflower and corn 8/1/1945 96.601.55
http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf409n99wc
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: paintingoil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of sunflower in pot on table, ears of corn laying to the left.
Historical Note
This painting appears to be an unfinished work done in the last few months that Hisako Hibi and her family were at Topaz concentration camp. The colors are rather muddied and it seems as though Hibi painted this image over another one. The image of another painted sunflower is visible beneath the top layer of paint. Rings of color are used to depict the sunflower that dominates the canvas. There is little modeling or detail in this work. Drips of paint are also evident in this work, suggesting the unfinished nature of the painting. In the inscription on the back Hibi notes her admiration for the sunflower that thrived in the desert climate.
Concentration Camps, Topaz | sunflower | corn | still life

Evening 11/1/1943 98.138.3
http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf5q2nb192
Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
Physical Description: paintingoil on canvas
Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
Custodial History
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
Description
Unframed stretched canvas. Image of camp at nightfall. Two figures in BL foreground. Dark mountains in background. Glowing yellow moon TR.
Historical Note
One of eight Hisako Hibi paintings from Topaz that had been previously believed to be lost. Hisako Hibi (1907-1991) was born in a village near Kyoto and immigrated to the United States in 1920. She studied art at the California School of Fine Arts and participated in annual exhibitions of the San Francisco Art Association. She taught art during her incarceration in Tanforan and Topaz. Hibi resettled in New York City where she continued to paint while working as a dressmaker, domestic, and factory worker to support her two children. She moved back to San Francisco in 1954. The work for which she is most noted is that which captures various domestic scenes within camp. Over the course of her lifetime, her work evolved from landscapes, images from the internment camps, and her life after the war in New York to explorations in abstraction and interpretations of spiritual realities. She is certainly one of the more "canonical" of the Japanese American painters, and her work is both well-known and highly regarded among various artistic circles. A substantial collection of her work also exists at the Special Collections Dept. at UCLA.
Concentration Camps, Topaz | barracks | mountain | night
**Dried Flowers 1/1/1944** 98.138.4  [http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf7z09n993](http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf7z09n993)

**Creator/Collector:** Hibi, Hisako

**Physical Description:** painting/oil on canvas

**Contributing Institution:** Japanese American National Museum

**Custodial History**

Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum

**Description**

Unframed stretched canvas. Image of dried flowers in multicolored vase. Dried sunflowers with heads wilting. Indistinct red and pink flowers also in vase. Vase on green table or book. Several rectangular objects that appear to be books surround the vase of flowers.

**Historical Note**

One of eight Hisako Hibi paintings from Topaz that had been previously believed to be lost. Hisako Hibi (1907-1991) was born in a village near Kyoto and immigrated to the United States in 1920. She studied art at the California School of Fine Arts and participated in annual exhibitions of the San Francisco Art Association. She taught art during her incarceration in Tanforan and Topaz. Hibi resettled in New York City where she continued to paint while working as a dressmaker, domestic, and factory worker to support her two children. She moved back to San Francisco in 1954. The work for which she is most noted is that which captures various domestic scenes within camp. Over the course of her lifetime, her work evolved from landscapes, images from the internment camps, and her life after the war in New York to explorations in abstraction and interpretations of spiritual realities. She is certainly one of the more "canonical" of the Japanese American painters, and her work is both well-known and highly regarded among various artistic circles. A substantial collection of her work also exists at the Special Collections Dept. at UCLA.

Concentration Camps, Topaz | flowers | vase

**Sunflowers 9/1/1944** 98.138.7  [http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf1d5n983p](http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf1d5n983p)

**Creator/Collector:** Hibi, Hisako

**Physical Description:** painting/oil on canvas

**Contributing Institution:** Japanese American National Museum

**Custodial History**

Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum

**Description**

Unframed stretched canvas. Image of a large central yellow sunflower. 5 more sunflowers surround. Small yellow butterfly/bee in TR.

**Historical Note**

One of eight Hisako Hibi paintings from Topaz that had been previously believed to be lost. Hisako Hibi (1907-1991) was born in a village near Kyoto and immigrated to the United States in 1920. She studied art at the California School of Fine Arts and participated in annual exhibitions of the San Francisco Art Association. She taught art during her incarceration in Tanforan and Topaz. Hibi resettled in New York City where she continued to paint while working as a dressmaker, domestic, and factory worker to support her two children. She moved back to San Francisco in 1954. The work for which she is most noted is that which captures various domestic scenes within camp. Over the course of her lifetime, her work evolved from landscapes, images from the internment camps, and her life after the war in New York to explorations in abstraction and interpretations of spiritual realities. She is certainly one of the more "canonical" of the Japanese American painters, and her work is both well-known and highly regarded among various artistic circles. A substantial collection of her work also exists at the Special Collections Dept. at UCLA.

Concentration Camps, Topaz | sunflowers
At Night 12/1/1944 98.138.8 [9, content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf4290039g]
  Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
  Physical Description: paintingoil on canvas
  Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
  Custodial History
  Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
  Description
  Unframed, stretched canvas. Image of barracks at night. 2 barracks in foreground. yellow
  colored windows of glowing light. Yellow crescent moon plus one yellow star in TL. 3 smoke
  stacks emerging from barracks. The smoke stack CL is emitting gray stream of smoke.
  Historical Note
  One of eight Hisako Hibi paintings from Topaz that had been previously believed to be lost.
  Hisako Hibi (1907-1991) was born in a village near Kyoto and immigrated to the United
  States in 1920. She studied art at the California School of Fine Arts and participated in
  annual exhibitions of the San Francisco Art Association. She taught art during her
  incarceration in Tanforan and Topaz. Hibi resettled in New York City where she continued to
  paint while working as a dressmaker, domestic, and factory worker to support her two
  children. She moved back to San Francisco in 1954. The work for which she is most noted is
  that which captures various domestic scenes within camp. Over the course of her lifetime, her
  work evolved from landscapes, images from the internment camps, and her life after the war
  in New York to explorations in abstraction and interpretations of spiritual realities. She is
  certainly one of the more "canonical" of the Japanese American painters, and her work is
  both well-known and highly regarded among various artistic circles. A substantial collection
  of her work also exists at the Special Collections Dept. at UCLA.
  Concentration Camps, Topaz | barracks

Study for a Self-Portrait ca. 1944 99.63.1 [9, content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf3199n64x]
  Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
  Physical Description: paintingoil on canvas
  Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
  Custodial History
  Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
  Description
  1 color painting of self-portrait of Hisako Hibi. The artist wears a green blouse. Her hair is
  parted in the middle and appears to be pulled back. Rough oil sketch (wash) in background.
  Concentration Camps, Topaz | painting

New Year's Mochi ca. 1944 99.63.2 [9, content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf1199n4rn]
  Creator/Collector: Hibi, Hisako
  Physical Description: paintingoil on canvas
  Contributing Institution: Japanese American National Museum
  Custodial History
  Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum
  Description
  1 unstretched still-life color oil painting. Subject matter consists of cloth backdrops with
  kagami mochi topped by tangerine in upper right corner. Cylinder-like object stands to the
  left of the mochi. Below cylindrical object are 2 pieces of fruit, 1 pomegranate on left and 1
  orange on the right. Red cloth draped near center with 2 apple as at bottom. Upper left
  corner is a quick pencil sketch of buildings and people Signed in lower left corner: Hisako
  Hibi Jan. 1943.
  Concentration Camps, Topaz | painting | mochi | fruit