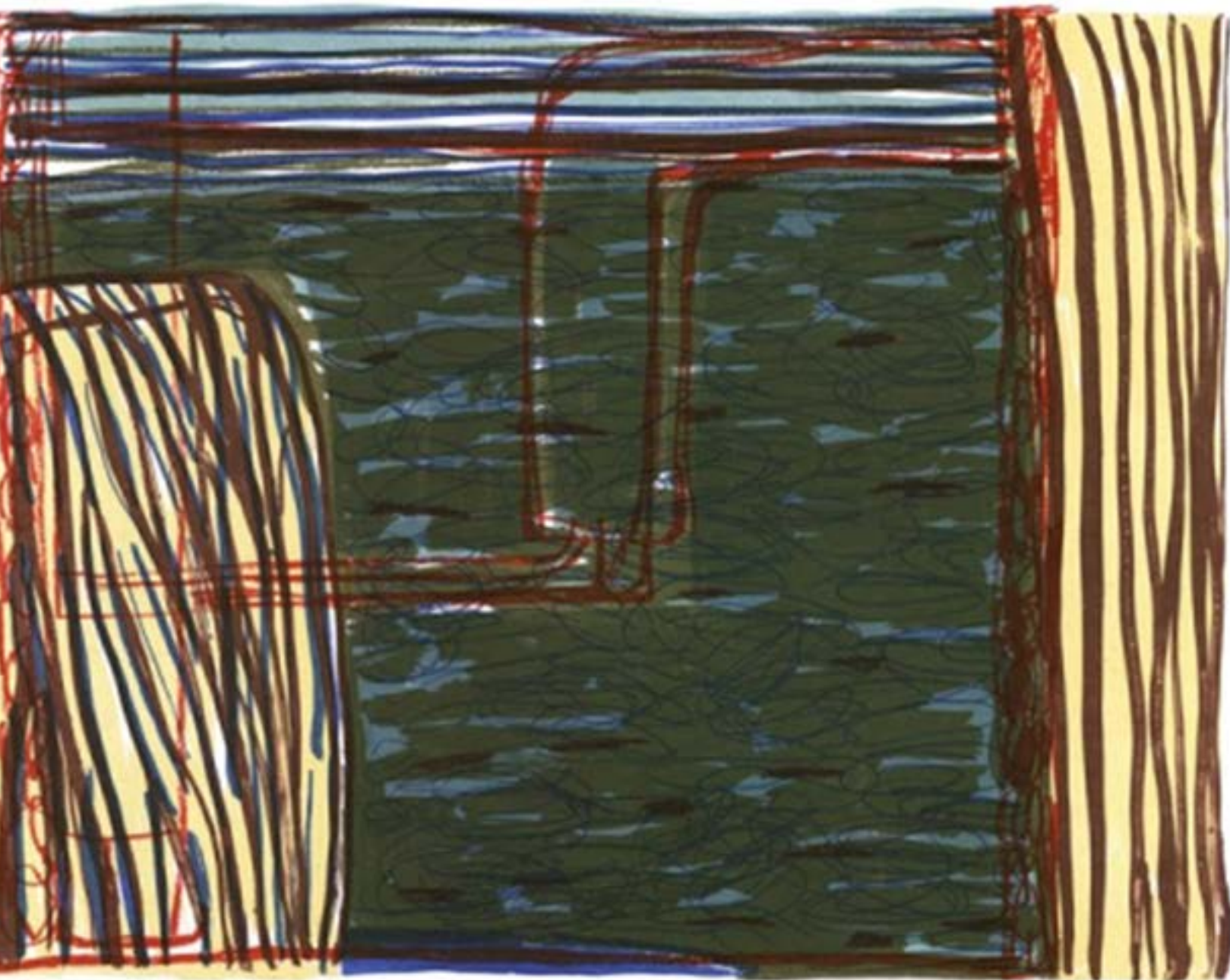


## JUDY MENSCH

*Across the Pool*, 2013  
Seven-color photolithograph, 11 x 14 1/8 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

## SUSAN FAUST

# Tribute to Yoshiko Uchida

Remembering a  
beloved Berkeley  
children's book author

In the three decades after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, no mainstream children's book addressed the subsequent Executive Order 9066. Then, in 1971, author Yoshiko Uchida broke the silence with *Journey to Topaz*. This fictionalized account describes what happened to a family like her own as President Roosevelt relocated those of Japanese descent from the West Coast to inland deserts. Loyal citizens and residents alike were seen as the enemy by virtue of race, incarcerated in desolate camps and deprived of their constitutional rights.

In the fifties and sixties, in my Bay Area schools, no one talked about what had taken place on the home front during World War II. We did not learn about how hysteria and racism resulted in such an egregious mistake. We did not learn about what our friends and neighbors had so recently endured. In *Journey to Topaz* and other books to follow, Uchida sheds light on this vitally illustrative but previously ignored chapter in our past.

From 1949 until her death in 1991, Uchida drew on personal experience to write folktales, novels, memoirs, articles, and poetry, mostly for children. Recurring themes thread through her work—being different, being humiliated for being different, the meaning of home, family love and loyalty, justice and injustice, opportunity and obstacles, culture, patriotism, and identity. From her particular perspective emerge insights that render her books more relevant than ever.

Born in 1921, Uchida grew up in Berkeley, California, the second daughter of Japanese immigrants. Her Issei parents believed in the American Dream for their Nisei children and provided an encyclopedia, piano lessons, concerts, museum visits, church activities, and travel, even to Japan. The family rented a three-bedroom stucco bungalow in a once all-white neighborhood. At age ten, Uchida began to write, initially inspired by the death of her beloved dog. More stories followed, all the protagonists being Caucasian, as in the books then available to her. At the outset, it never “occurred to me to write about a Japanese American child,” she later reflected.

Prodigious writers themselves, Uchida's mother regularly produced thirty-one syllable tanka poetry, and her father enthusiastically carried on a large correspondence. After all, he was a businessman with Mitsui & Co. in San Francisco and a community leader in Berkeley and