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## **Paintings That Confront Japanese-American Incarceration During World War II**



Ben Sakoguchi's "Towers" (2014). Courtesy of Ortuzar Projects

**By Thessaly La Force**

The octogenarian artist Ben Sakoguchi was only three years old when he was separated from his parents who were incarcerated during World War II at Poston War Relocation Center, a Japanese-American concentration camp in Arizona. This month, Ortuzar Projects in New York has mounted an unprecedented exhibition of his paintings. The show includes early work from the 1960s along with selected pieces

from Sakoguchi's "Orange Crate Label" series from the '70s and '80s that have a Raymond Pettibon-esque punk-rock quality to them. Most astounding, though, is a group painting called "Towers" (2014) that depicts scenes of various Japanese-American concentration camps, as well as a group portrait of residents of Poston's Block 13 that includes Sakoguchi as a little boy in the front row. Sakoguchi said he only began painting the camps after the death of his parents, who had struggled to regain their life after the war; his mother had returned to their grocery store in San Bernardino with \$1,000 she had hidden in her belt throughout her imprisonment. The painting has a surreal quality that is both devastating and matter-of-fact. *"Ben Sakoguchi: Made in U.S.A."* is on view through April 4 at Ortuzar Projects, 9 White Street, New York, [ortuzarprojects.com](http://ortuzarprojects.com).