

Martin Wong

Works on Paper

7 February - 3 May 2025

Drawing was a crucial component and constant within Martin Wong's various artistic practices. In our fifth solo exhibition dedicated to Martin Wong, we are showing an overview of his works on paper from 1968 to 1997.

Martin Wong was born in Portland, Oregon and grew up in North Beach, neighboring San Francisco's Chinatown. After graduating high school in San Francisco, he studied ceramics at Humboldt State University in Arcata. His study of ceramics would exert an immense influence on his practice as a painter, particularly on his palette (with its earth reds, burnt siennas, ochers, and umbers) and his deep feeling for materials. After graduating from Humboldt State University in 1970, Wong traveled to Europe, the Middle East and Asia to work with local ceramic artists. Concurrent with his ceramics, Martin Wong developed a practice around calligraphy starting in the late 1960s, foreshadowing his lifelong interest in poetry, graffiti, and sign-language. Between 1970 and 1973, Martin Wong again lived in San Francisco, where he worked in the environment of the queer performance groups Cockettes and Angels of Lights, of which he was also a member for some time. After 1973, Wong returned to Humboldt County, where he concentrated on his painting over the next few years. In 1978, Martin Wong moved to New York and, beginning in the early 1980s, lived in the Lower East Side. Wong became part of the emerging art and poetry scene there and was also particularly interested in graffiti. In 1994, Martin Wong was diagnosed HIV-positive. Due to the better medical care in San Francisco, he decided to return to his parents, with whom he had a very close relationship. He stayed with them until his death in 1999.

Malicious Mischief, the first major European institutional survey exhibition on Martin Wong, opened at CA2M, Centro dos de Mayo, Madrid (2022-2023) and traveled to KW Institute, Berlin (2023), Camden Art Centre, London (2023) and the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2023-2024). Prior to that, an American retrospective titled *Human Instamatic* opened at the Bronx Museum (2015) and traveled to the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus (2016) and to the Berkeley Art Museum (2017). Martin Wong's works has been included in numerous museum and international exhibitions, most recently the 24th Biennale of Sydney (2024), and *The Way I See It: Selections from the KAWS Collection* at the Drawing Center, New York (2024-2025). His work is represented in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; The Art Institute of Chicago; The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and Tate Modern, London, among others.

The exhibition *Above Ground: Art from the Martin Wong Graffiti Collection* is currently on view at the Museum of the City of New York, through August 2025. In the autumn of this year, the Asia Society in New York will present a new solo exhibition on the work of Martin Wong.