

This fall The Bronx Museum of the Arts will feature a major retrospective of the work of Martin Wong, examining the trajectory of the artist's career. Through more than 90 works, as well as rarely seen archival materials, *Human Instamatic* will explore Wong's textured presentation of the communities in which he lived, his role in the artistic and cultural ferment of the East Village and the Lower East Side of the 1980s, and works he created in San Francisco at the end of his tragically shortened life. The exhibition, organized by Director of Curatorial and Education Programs Sergio Bessa and Adjunct Curator Yasmin Ramírez, will be on view from November 4, 2015 – February 14, 2016.

“Martin Wong boldly defied the notion of boundary,” said Holly Block, Executive Director of The Bronx Museum of the Arts. “As an artist, he overhauled assumptions that a painter is defined by their identity. Within his work he embraced the complexity and hybrid nature of urban culture—mixing everything from graffiti and Chinese calligraphy, to West Coast and East Coast styles, to star constellations and crumbling tenement walls of the Lower East Side. We are looking forward to finally examining his entire career at the Bronx Museum, and to sharing his work once again with one of the cities he called home.”

Human Instamatic offers a new assessment of Wong's full career. The exhibition will examine:

The artist's early work in 1970s San Francisco—highlighting the beginning of his transition from working in ceramics and poetry to painting, his designs for the gay street performance groups the Cockettes and the Angels of Light, and his first portraits, which he originally sold under the nickname “Human Instamatic.”

Wong's later career in the 1980s and the early 90s in New York—showcasing his place in the East Village artistic burgeoning of that period, his documentation of the vibrant, resilient, and multi-ethnic communities facing displacement on the Lower East Side, as well as his growing relationship with underground poet and writer Miguel Piñero. In the early 1990s, Wong revisited his Chinese and Chinese-American identity and combined disparate elements including classical Chinese artistic traditions and the products of pop culture, such as Chinatown gift shop souvenirs and depictions of Bruce Lee.

The final stage of Wong's career—when he was ill with AIDS-related complications and returned home to San Francisco. There he created, among other works, an enigmatic series of paintings depicting potted cacti that his mother kept in the backyard of the family's home.

“The connection to community is vivid in all of Martin Wong's paintings, and it is clear that he was

deeply impacted by both the people surrounding him and the images that were a part of his daily life,” said Sergio Bessa. “This retrospective will enable visitors to explore the layers that made Martin Wong who he was both as an artist and a man.”

About Martin Wong

Born in Portland, Oregon, in 1946, Martin Wong was raised in San Francisco, California, and came of age during the city’s blossoming countercultural movement. He studied art at Humboldt State University (1964 – 1968) and after graduation worked closely with the performance art collectives Angels of Light and the Cockettes in San Francisco. Wong created elaborate sets and costumes for these collectives and documented their work from an insider’s point of view. In 1978, Wong moved to New York City, first occupying a room at Meyer's Hotel, which he described in a letter to a friend as the last remaining single- occupancy hotel at the waterfront. In 1982, he relocated to the Lower East Side until his return to San Francisco in the late '90s, when he lived with his parents while fighting AIDS-related complications. Martin Wong died in 1999.

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