

Artist Resources – Matthew Wong (Canadian, 1984-2019)

[Wong at KARMA Gallery, New York](#)

“At the center of my practice is exploring the materiality of paint and struggling to yield a surface that gives a sense of space and structure, however contradictory, that reaches a state of form I can live with,” [explained Wong in 2013](#) as he planned his first solo show in an artist compound near his studio Zhongshan, China. “One mark responds to another, colors start piling up, getting scraped away, and built up again, and so on and so forth, and somewhere along the line I always reach a certain point where I can intuitively sense the general shape and structure of the image I need to work towards.”

“I am a bit of an omnivore for sights, sounds and ideas and am always on the lookout for perspectives I had not considered before,” Wong reflected in a thoughtful [2018 interview](#) about his entry into painting, inspirations, and process. “The making of my work has come to a rhythm where most of the work is done in idle moments...going by intuition and my emotions I will then head to the studio and set out to elaborate in paint these vague glimpses I get.”

KARMA worked with Wong on his [first solo exhibition, in 2018](#). The self-titled show displayed Wong’s reverence for color and talent with texture, gesture, and space in visualizing physical and emotional landscapes in both oil paint and watercolor.

In 2019, Wong received his first solo exhibition in Hong Kong, with [Massimo De Carlo](#), showcasing a new series of eight large-scale oil paintings in which Wong paired day and night views of four imagined landscapes.

Twenty works on paper were displayed at [ARCH Athens in 2020](#), honoring the summer residency in Greece Wong was planning before he passed. In gouache and watercolor, Wong’s *Postcards* pay homage to the real landscapes through which he traveled in North America and China, and the fantasy landscapes he traveled during moments of internal reflection.

[Friends](#) and [fellow artists and critics](#) remember Wong and grieve the loss of his peaceful fantasies and soulful creativity after [his passing in October 2019](#).

To honor the [press request of Wong’s father and mother, Raymond and Monita](#), to limit use of photographs of Matthew under estate copyright, this guide does not include images



Matthew Wong (Canadian, 1984-2019)

Far Away Eyes, 2017

Acrylic on canvas

Private Collection; L2021:189.2

Self-taught artist Matthew Wong began painting in 2013 at the age of 29. Blending imagery from Western Post-Impressionism and East Asian Literati painting, Wong worked to reconcile his Canadian and Hong Konger identities through their respective art historical precedents. The imagined landscapes of **Far Away Eyes** and **Untitled (Pilgrim)** feature bright, whimsical colors, pointillistic brushstrokes, and flattened perspectives. A characteristic lone figure contemplates the vast landscape in both paintings, a common motif in East Asian landscape painting that Wong frequently adopted in his oeuvre. The mystical scenes evoke a sense of nostalgia and awe, which the artist sees as “both personal and collective.” According to Wong: “I do believe that there is an inherent loneliness or melancholy to much of contemporary life, and on a broader level I feel my work speaks to this quality in addition to being a reflection of my thoughts, fascinations, and impulses.”

On view March 2 – June 5, 2022

Matthew Wong (Canadian, 1984-2019)
Untitled (Pilgrim), 2017
Acrylic on rag, mounted on illustration board

Private Collection; L2021:172.1

On view March 16 – June 19, 2022





Matthew Wong (Canadian, 1984-2019)

The Magic Hour, 2016

Acrylic on canvas

Private Collection; L2021:69.1

Born in Toronto and raised in Hong Kong, Matthew Wong was a self-taught painter. After receiving an MFA in photography from the City University of Hong Kong, Wong decided to abandon the medium in favor of painting and drawing. The artist turned to Facebook to launch his new career. Wong's Facebook posts engaged artists, dealers, and collectors in conversation about painting as a medium and how to develop a successful practice. By 2016, Wong was exhibiting in Canadian galleries and secured a solo exhibition at New York's Karma Gallery. Tragically, Wong died by suicide at 35 and his small body of work has since exploded in the art market.

On view July 7 – October 10, 2021

Matthew Wong (Canadian, 1984-2019)

Mirage, 2018

Gouache and watercolor on paper

Private Collection; L2021:13.8

In one of his final interviews, Matthew Wong called his process “improvisatory,” driven by a “rhythm” inspired by time in the studio and “idle moments when I am at home daydreaming, or watching movies and listening to music, drinking coffee or going out on walks that have no destination or purpose in mind.” Meditative time in nature, intuition, and emotion formed the core of his identity as a painter, which he came to at the age of 29. Though his promising career was cut short by suicide only six years later, the work left behind remains a testament to an empathic soul attuned to the fantasy of the natural world, the beauty of a quiet moment, and the melancholic refrain that runs through life.

On view April 14 – July 18, 2021





Matthew Wong (Canadian, 1984-2019)

Landscape with Two Birds. 2018

Gouache and watercolor on paper

Private Collection; L2021:13.7

On view April 14 – July 18, 2021

Matthew Wong (Canadian, 1984-2019)

Before Night Falls, 2018

Oil on canvas

Private Collection; L2021:10.2

When he first discovered his interest in painting, Matthew Wong was pursuing an MFA in photography at the University of Hong Kong's School of Creative Media. He remembered an encounter while an intern at the Venice Biennale in 2011 as the catalyst for his own explorations in the medium, which he started developing through self-study two years later. Contemporary masters like Lee Lozano, Louise Bourgeois, and Yayoi Kusama (all on view) joined Edvard Munch and Vincent van Gogh as pivotal influences for the young painter during his tragically short career. A rare interior scene, *Before Night Falls* displays Wong's intuitive talent for fantastic, dream-like compositions and an expressive use of color. His diverse interests and sources of inspiration give life to the scene through a delicate Asian screen, an abstract painting, and a lone figure gazing at an anonymous city twinkling in the light of dusk.

On view April 14 – July 18, 2021





Matthew Wong (Canadian, 1984-2019)

Catharsis. 2018

Oil on canvas

Private Collection; L2021:10.1

On view March 31 – July 4, 2021



Matthew Wong (Canadian, 1984-2019)

The Little Prince, 2017

Oil on canvas

Private Collection; L2021:13.4

Born in Toronto and raised in both Canada and Hong Kong, Matthew Wong began teaching himself how to paint in 2012 while pursuing a graduate degree in photography at the City University of Hong Kong. Wong was a quick study, developing an expressive style blending romantic and surreal landscapes through gestural brushwork and a reverential attention to color. Solitary figures and dwellings occasionally populate the artist's fantastic forest, farmland, and lakeside visions, watched over by starry skies. The intimacy and mystery evoked through works like **The Little Prince**—which in title and composition evokes the beloved 1943 illustrated novella of exploration, love, and loss by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry—demonstrates the appeal which promoted Wong to international fame just a few years into his practice. Social media platforms also played a substantial role, enabling the painter to introduce himself on his own terms to an extensive community. Wong's anticipated stunning career was cut short in 2019, when the artist took his own life after struggling with the impact of autism, Tourette's syndrome, and depression since childhood. His work continues to be highly sought after and adorn gallery walls in posthumous exhibitions.

On view March 17 – June 20, 2021