

CHEIM & READ



Matthew Wong, *Untitled*, 2015. Ink on rice paper, 26 5/8 x 21 3/4 inches / 67.6 x 55.2 cm. ©2021 Matthew Wong Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photography: Alex Yudzon / Cheim & Read, New York.

Matthew Wong *Footprints in the Wind, Ink Drawings 2013–2017*

May 5 – September 3, 2021

Cheim & Read
547 West 25 Street
New York NY 10001

Cheim & Read is pleased to present *Matthew Wong: Footprints in the Wind, Ink Drawings 2013–2017*, an exhibition of ink drawings on rice paper. These works represent some of the late Canadian artist's very first efforts in painting. The exhibition opens on May 5 and runs through September 3, 2021, and is presented in collaboration with the Matthew Wong Foundation. It will be on view at Cheim & Read's ground floor exhibition space in Chelsea located at 547 West 25th Street.

The 24 ink drawings displayed in *Footprints in the Wind, Ink Drawings 2013–2017* possess the crisp graphic incision of woodcuts as well as the wildly imaginative expressionism that Will Heinrich described in his 2018 *New York Times* review as “psychedelic pointillism.” (1) Most of the imagery is based on nature and the landscape, while some are completely abstract (as in *Where Did the Time Go?*, 2016), and others are lyrically surreal (see *Inside the Flower Cave*, 2016, and *The Performance*, 2017). Wong lived and worked in Zhongshan, China, from 2013 through 2015, and moved back to Edmonton, Canada, in 2016. The influence of the legacy of Chinese landscape painting on these works is clear, and the young artist's deployment of these traditional materials — ink wash on rice paper — seems to be a direct reference to ancient tradition. On trips to New York City, the artist visited Cheim & Read several times and met with John Cheim, who supported Wong's earliest artistic efforts.

Throughout these works, Wong's celebration of light — as in *The Sun*, 2016, and *The Watcher*, 2017 — never excludes a dark side. Hulking black shapes sometimes dominate the images, such as the mantis-like silhouette in an untitled drawing from 2015, or the jagged rocky outcropping in *Landscape of the Longing*, 2016. They are, however, surrounded by bright fields of grass or sky; centralized blazing orbs in the sky beat down on the landscape. Wong's reconciliation of opposing forces in these works might suggest he was a pantheist in the vein of Mitchell and Van Gogh. Cheim comments on these works, “It is as if you can feel the particles in the air. The space between the interior and the exterior dissolves.”

No painter in recent memory has blazed as brightly as Wong, who struggled with Tourette syndrome, Autism, and depression, and died by suicide in 2019 at the age of 35, only a handful of years after he made his first artwork. The freedom and complexity of his surfaces have led to comparisons to Édouard Vuillard, Vincent van Gogh, Edvard Munch, Yayoi Kusama, and the early ink drawings of Louise Bourgeois. Writing in *Hyperallergic* in 2018, John Yau called him a “painterly cartographer [who] literally feels his way across the landscape, dot by dot, paint stroke by paint stroke.” (2)

The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully-illustrated catalogue, along with a new commissioned essay by the art critic and theorist Dawn Chan, a New York-based writer and editor whose work appears in the *The Atlantic*, *Artforum*, *Bookforum*, *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *New York* magazine, *The Paris Review*, among other publications.

MATTHEW WONG

Matthew Wong (b. 1984, Toronto, CA; d. 2019, Edmonton, Canada) was a self-taught Canadian painter who lived and worked between Zhongshan, China, and Edmonton, Canada. Born in 1984 in Toronto, he earned a BA in 2007 in cultural anthropology from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and an MFA in 2013 in photography from the School of Creative Media of the City University, Hong Kong. The artist rose to international prominence in 2017. Wong’s painting was included in a group exhibition, *The Horizontal*, at Cheim & Read, which was illustrated in the show’s review in *The New York Times* by Will Heinrich (3). His first solo exhibition was presented at Karma in New York in 2018, and Massimo de Carlo in Hong Kong in 2019. The artist died shortly before his second solo exhibition was scheduled to open in New York at Karma, also in 2019. A posthumous exhibition of his work, organized by Julian Cox, is planned to open this year at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. His work is represented in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the Dallas Museum of Art, and the Art Gallery of Ontario.

NOTES

1. Heinrich, Will. “What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week.” *The New York Times*, 11 Apr. 2018.
2. Yau, John. “Matthew Wong’s Hallucinatory Pilgrimages.” *Hyperallergic*, 22 Apr. 2018.
3. Heinrich, Will. “What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week.” *The New York Times*, 20 Jul. 2017.