

# ARTNET NEWS

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THE LATE ARTIST MATTHEW WONG MADE AN INK DRAWING EVERY MORNING. FOR THE FIRST TIME, TWO DOZEN WILL GO ON VIEW IN NEW YORK

by Taylor Dafoe



Matthew Wong, Untitled (2015). © 2021 Matthew Wong Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: Alex Yudzon / Cheim & Read, New York.

Next month, two dozen never-before-exhibited ink drawings by the late painter Matthew Wong will debut at Cheim & Read in New York.

The graphic, black-and-white drawings represent just a small sampling of such works the artist left behind when he died by suicide in 2019 at the age of 35.

ARTnews, the first outlet to report the upcoming show, points out that, for years, Wong would make an ink illustration every morning after waking up. “The only thing that takes place at the same time every day is when I get out of bed, I have to do an ink drawing before doing anything else, such as brushing my teeth or eating,” the artist said in an early interview with the blog Studio Critical.

“Footprints in the Wind, Ink Drawings 2013–2017,” as the show is called, comes via a collaboration between the gallery and the newly created Matthew Wong Foundation, run by Wong’s parents.

It's set to open May 5 at Cheim & Read's old building in Chelsea—the first time the dealers John Cheim and Howard Read have used the space for a public exhibition since decamping to the Upper East Side in 2018. A representative from the gallery declined to share the price range of the works, but did mention that “several of them have been earmarked for museum acquisitions only.”

You can expect collectors to make the trip. The market for Wong's work has been rapacious in the wake of his death: Since June of 2020, 11 of the artists' paintings have fetched over \$1 million at auction, with each exceeding their pre-sale estimate by at least 100 percent, according to Artnet's Price Database.

The influence of Chinese landscape painting looms large in Wong's ink-on-rice-paper illustrations, but a darkness—literal and metaphorical—undercuts the sense of sublimity you'd expect from such work. Mysterious figures and looming specters appear throughout.

In a statement to Artnet News, Cheim, one of the artist's earliest supporters in the New York art world, compared his drawings to “Kusama, Van Gogh, Munch, and the early ink drawings of Louise Bourgeois. It is as if you can feel the particles in the air. The space between the interior and the exterior dissolves—a kind of psychological pantheism presents itself.”

Sometime in 2014, the dealer met Wong over Facebook, a platform on which the artist often engaged in public discussions about art. The next year, Wong and his mother Monita visited Cheim in New York with a tube of large black ink drawings in tow. “Matthew was a striking presence—tall, handsome, a shock of black hair and large black eyeglasses, all carefully considered,” the dealer recalled.

“I found the ink drawings to be singular, intense,” Cheim added. He reportedly purchased one at the time and maintained a close relationship with the artist thereafter.