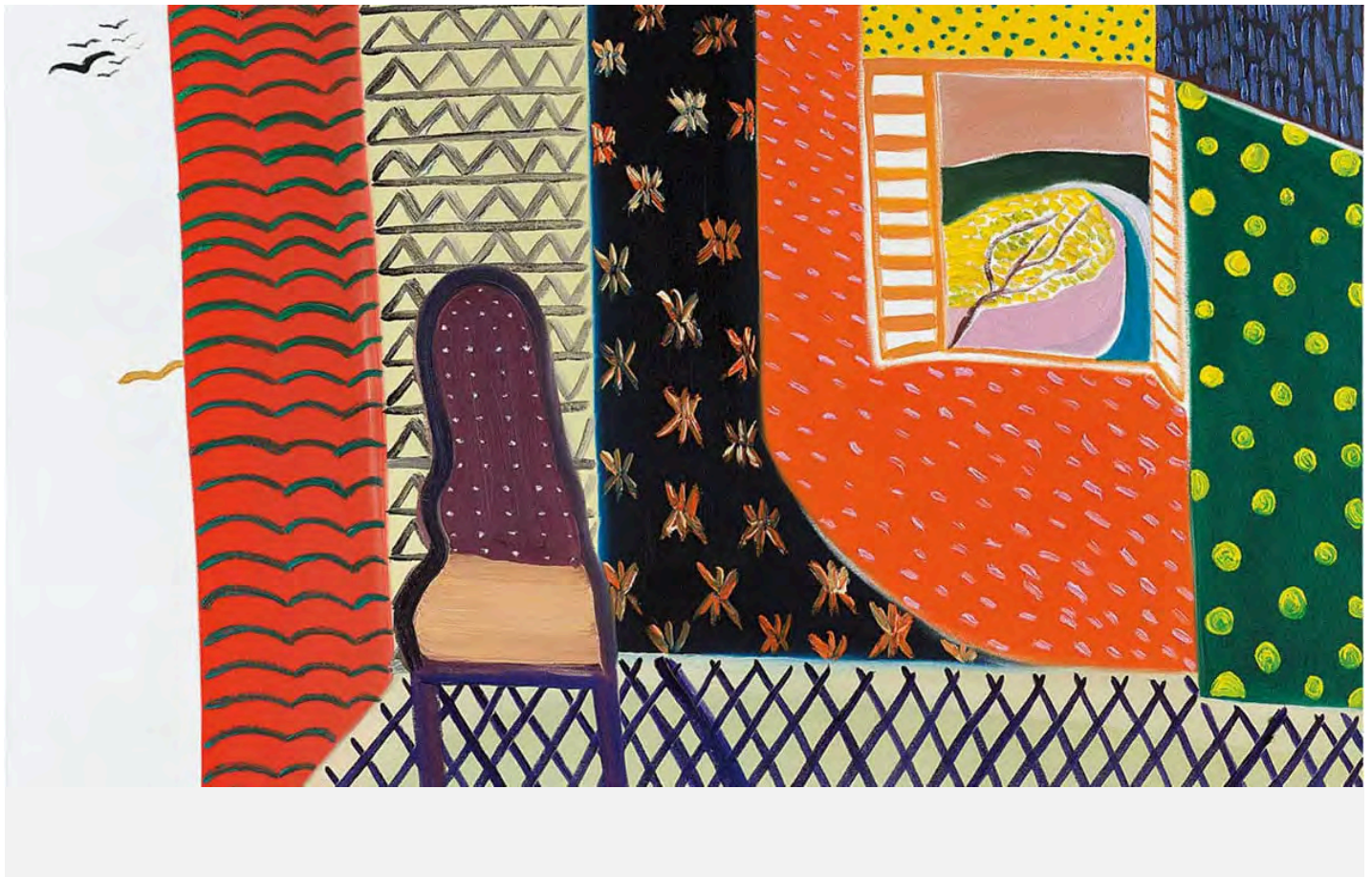


## Matthew Wong (1984-2019): A Brilliant Artist Pained By Depression

Canadian painter Matthew Wong, recognized internationally for his evocative works, had a brilliant career sparking critical acclaim.

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written by Lou Mo, *BA Art History w/ Chinese Art & Asian Studies concentration*

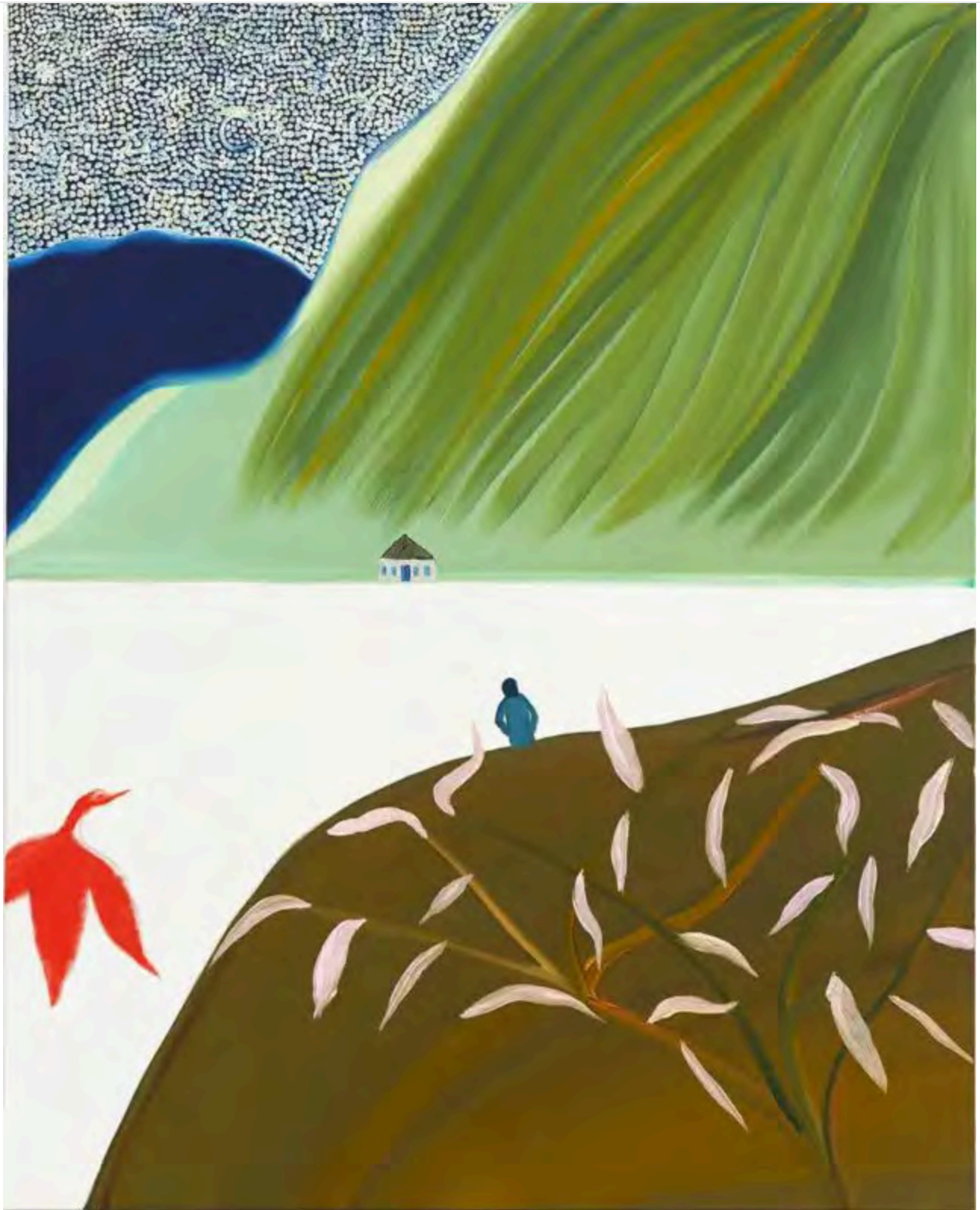


Matthew Wong's Mood Room, 2018

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In an age when art creation becomes increasingly versatile both in medium and expression, it takes courage and talent to establish oneself as a painter. Canadian prodigy Matthew Wong achieved global acclaim through his powerful and vibrant paintings. Unfortunately, his brilliance shone too short in this world. In 2019, the artist committed suicide in Edmonton, Alberta at the age of 35. Wong left a resounding legacy that continues to intrigue the art world. A look at his background and his work will help us understand Matthew Wong's art and its enchanting qualities.

## **Matthew Wong Was An Autodidact Painter**



*See You On the Other Side* by Matthew Wong, 2019, via KARMA Galley, New York

Matthew Wong started producing art in 2012, and he taught himself to paint and draw from scratch and adopted a rather gestural method. This makes what he had achieved in his very brief career as a painter all the more astounding. Matthew Wong's style matured quickly. He

started painting as a trial by chance as he found out during his graduate studies that photography was not the medium that could carry out what he wanted to express. Looking back to works later exhibited, what is also inspiring is the ease with which Matthew Wong was capable to capture different moods in creating artworks whose ambiance range from extreme tranquility to mystic rhythm.





*Somewhere* by Matthew Wong, 2018, via KARMA Gallery, New York

Most of Wong's large-scale works are landscape or still life paintings with a minimal hint of human presence. Wong stated in an interview that his works are spontaneous and intuitive, as he worked directly on compositions inspired by his experiences and imagination without



making preparatory drawings. This immediate quality does transpire in his work all the while echoing some uncanny aspects of modern life such as solitude and melancholy.

## Between Hong Kong And Canada



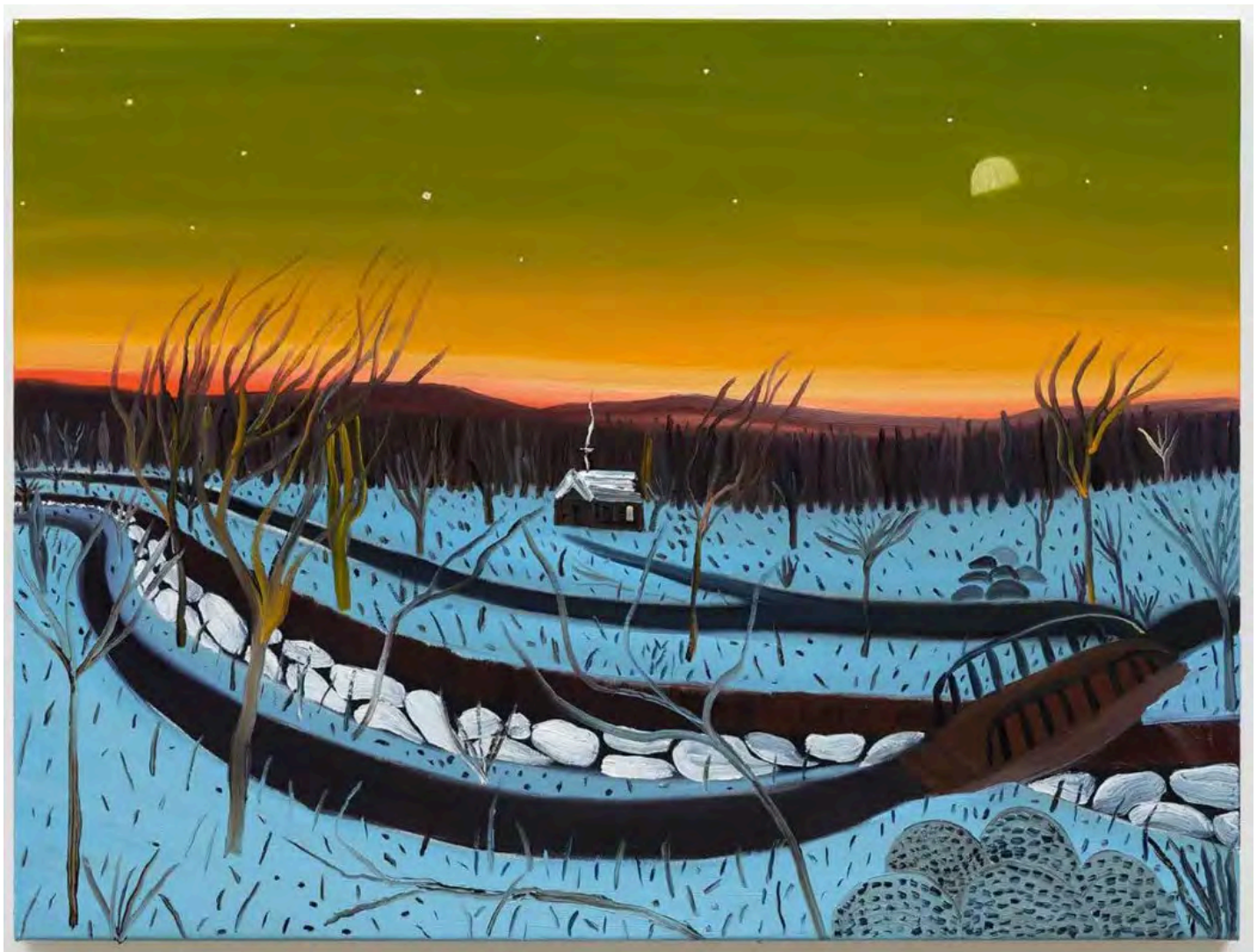
*Starry Night* by Matthew Wong, 2019, via KARMA Gallery, New York

Matthew Wong was born in Toronto in 1984, but he lived in two countries and two cultures. Between ages 7 to 15, Wong lived in Hong Kong before returning to Canada. He studied cultural anthropology at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor before moving back to Hong Kong

in 2007. There, he enrolled in the City University of Hong Kong's MFA program specializing in photography. An avid reader, Matthew Wong was not only interested in reading about art, but he was also interested in literature and wrote poems regularly.

Art permeates the intellectual life of the artist who was constantly looking for ways to narrate his feelings, and Wong continued to practice photography and poetry even as he established painting as his main method of expression. As for painting as his medium of choice, the artist himself reflected eloquently, “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.”

## Cultural Duality In His Work





His name in Chinese, Chun Kit, includes two characters meaning handsome and outstanding, respectively. These qualities are equally true of his artworks, often signed in Chinese on the reverse. His art reflects this richness and diversity in his background, and one with an observant eye is prone to find in the painter a sensible and tranquil understanding of a huge array of artistic influences ranging from Paul Sérusier to Shitao, from Vincent van Gogh to Alex Katz.

Matthew Wong soaks up painterly possibilities like a sponge to churn out something that is his own, modern and pulled together. Often cited inspirations include Post-Impressionism, Nabi, and Fauvism. Equally present in Matthew Wong's work is a quest to understand what could a painting be in today's world, the artist's experimentation went from colors, patterns, perspective, and dimensions to scale, drawing from an enormous corpus of knowledge. Sometimes, the painter called to Eastern references to resolve these issues playing hide and seek with the viewer's eye, as Chinese literati painters would have done.

## **Achieving Critical Acclaim**





*Morning Landscape* by Matthew Wong, 2017, via KARMA Gallery, New York

Social media has been an important tool for the artist's creation and interaction with the larger artistic community. Wong had been active on Facebook, and his work attracted much attention and praise from well-known critics from Jerry Saltz and Roberta Smith to Eric Sutphin. The painter's breakthrough moment came in 2018 with a solo show at New York's Karma. Saltz commented that the show was "one of the most impressive solo New York debuts I've seen in a while." Roberta Smith's comment in the New York Times was even more touching and intimate, she thinks his work "was deeply nourishing: my life had been improved and I know other people who have had the same reaction. Such relatively unalloyed pleasure is almost as essential as food."

## **Gone Too Soon: His Struggle And Death**





*A Dream* by Matthew Wong, 2019, via KARMA Gallery, New York

Matthew Wong committed suicide at age 35, a shock and tragedy for the art world, devastated to see a star fall so quickly. It was shortly after he finished the works for a now-posthumous exhibition for Karma. By that time, he was already shown in a number of galleries in New York and Hong Kong, off to a very promising career. The show *Blue* features a series of paintings and works on paper, and the eponymous blue dominates these works. What is touching is the deeply resonant emotive quality of Wong's work, so tender and pensive but in direct communion with the viewer. Wong's mother, with whom he was very close, said that the artist "on the autism spectrum, had Tourette's syndrome and had grappled with depression since childhood."



## Interest In Matthew Wong's Work



*Untitled* by Matthew Wong, 2018, via Sotheby's

In 2020, a small Untitled watercolor by Matthew Wong, dated 2018 and originally exhibited at Karma in New York that spring, was sold by Sotheby's online as the opening lot of a contemporary art day sale. The hammer price went many times over its high estimate of 15,000 USD by finally settling down on 62,500 USD. The work in question is a calm still life basked in vermillion tones, the colors saturated and dreamlike. A few persimmons lay on the right side beside a candle and a glimpse of a vase with flowers.



*Mood Room* by Matthew Wong, 2018, via Phillips

A couple of months later, another oil canvas painting titled *Mood Room*, also dated 2018 with the same provenance, achieved more than 800,000 USD at Phillips New York's evening sale. This fine and gorgeous interior scene encapsulates what modern painting has come to incarnate both in its exquisite style and the irresistible mood emanating from the room. Within the span of a few days, another reached the million-dollar status at Sotheby's



contemporary art evening sale. Wong is not uncalled for success. Understandingly so, his career was too short with few works available on the market for those who enjoy his art.



## **LOU MO**

BA Art History w/ Chinese Art & Asian Studies concentration

I graduated with BA in Art History from McGill University and later studied Chinese Art in the Asian Studies division of Paris' École des hautes études en sciences sociales.