



Art

The Most Influential Artists of 2020

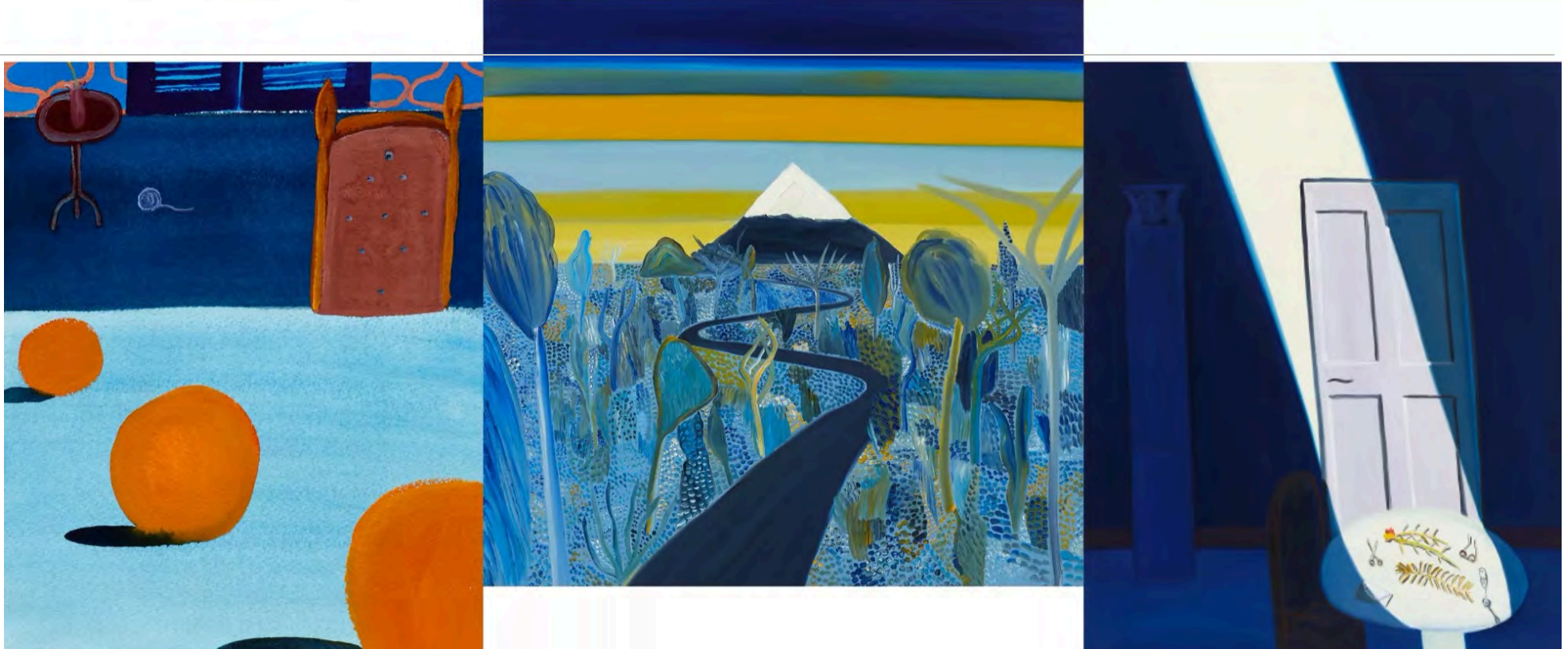
Artsy Editorial



Matthew Wong

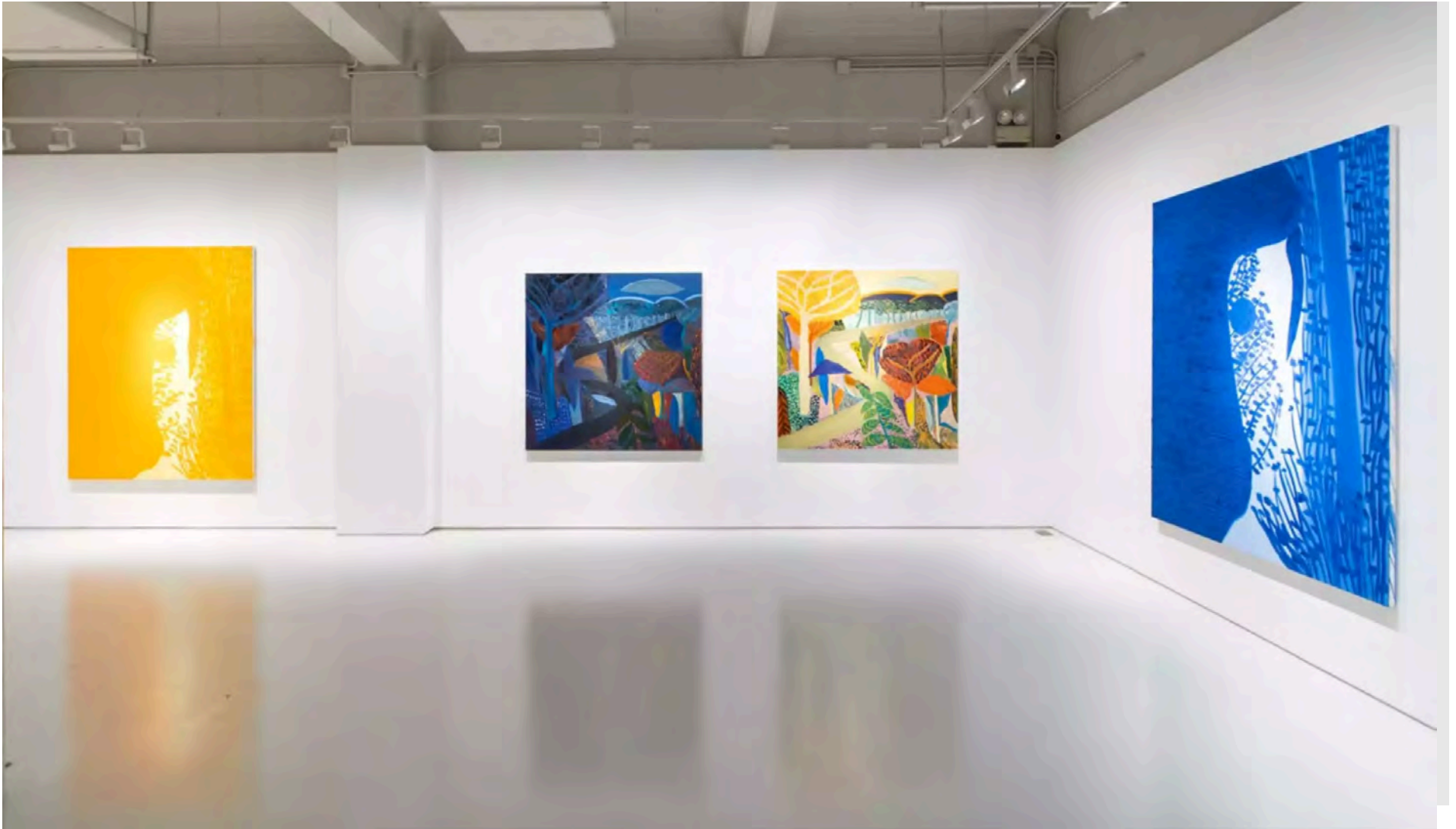
B. 1984, Toronto. D. 2019, Edmonton, Canada.

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Just as Matthew Wong's career was taking off, we lost him. The Canadian painter had long struggled with mental health issues and died by suicide in October 2019 at age 35. At the time, he was preparing a solo exhibition, "Blue," his second with New York gallery Karma, which opened the following month and continued into the first week of 2020. It was tempting to read intimations of his suffering into the paintings of moonlit landscapes and serene interiors, yet more than that, the exhibition showcased Wong's

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A problematic side effect of Wong's tragic genius is that his paintings have attracted the attention of speculators and flippers.



His work first appeared at auction in May 2020, when an untitled watercolor from 2018 sold for \$62,500 — more than four times its high estimate — at Sotheby’s. The following month, at another Sotheby’s sale, his 2018 canvas *The Realm of Appearances* sold for a mind-boggling \$1.8 million — about 22 times its high estimate. That record has since been eclipsed twice, most recently in early December, when his 2018 painting *River at Dusk* surpassed its high estimate of HK\$10 million (US\$1.2 million) to sell for HK\$37.7 million (US\$4.8 million) at a Phillips and Poly Auction sale. But while Wong’s market may be volatile, his legacy is secure now, with works in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Guggenheim, the Museum of Modern Art, and others.

— Benjamin Sutton