

FeteChinoise

## MATTHEW WONG: BLUE VIEW | AUGUST 13, 2021 - APRIL 18, 2022

AUGUST 19, 2021

*Written by Deborah Lau-Yu, with notes from the Art Gallery of Ontario*

*Images: Art Gallery of Ontario & Karma, New York*



MATTHEW WONG, *A DREAM*, 2019. OIL ON CANVAS, 177.8 X 203.2 CM. © 2019 MATTHEW WONG FOUNDATION. IMAGE COURTESY OF KARMA, NEW YORK.

It is not very often that a local artist is exhibited at the Art Gallery of Ontario, and even more rare that Asian-Canadian representation happens in the art space at this level of recognition. The AGO is presenting an exciting solo exhibition beginning August 13, 2021 to April 18, 2022 titled *Matthew Wong: Blue View*, featuring works by a Toronto-born Chinese Canadian artist. The first-ever museum show of Matthew Wong (1984-2019), the exhibition features his acclaimed Blue series of oil, gouache and watercolour paintings. The New York Times described him as “one of the most talented painters of his generation.” The exhibition features Wong’s expressive style through 31 paintings and nine works on paper from his Blue series (2017-2019).



MATTHEW WONG. *MEANWHILE...*, 2018. OIL ON CANVAS, 101.6 X 76.2 CM. © 2018 MATTHEW WONG FOUNDATION. IMAGE COURTESY OF KARMA, NEW YORK.

He lit up the art world during the final two years of his brilliant, but sadly, short-lived career. In his extraordinarily expressive style, Wong captivated audiences all over the world with his imaginary landscapes and interiors in cerulean, cobalt, navy, indigo, ultramarine, and azure. Marking the first-ever museum show of his work, *Matthew Wong: Blue View* opened to AGO Members last Friday, and to Annual Passholders and members of the public this week, on **Aug. 17, 2021.**

Organized with the support of the artist’s family, *Matthew Wong: Blue View* is curated by **Julian Cox**, the AGO’s Deputy Director and Chief Curator, and installed in the Phil B. Lind Galleries.

“Wong’s singular talent produced artworks that are deeply personal and universally appealing,” says Cox. “Drawing inspiration from an array of modern and postmodern painters, he produced thrilling works in oil and gouache that are bold in conception and intricately executed in hypnotic patterns and virtuosic strokes. It is with pride that we present the first ever museum exhibition of Wong’s work here in his hometown and birthplace of Toronto, and I am honoured to have organized it with the support and guidance of his family.”





MATTHEW WONG, AUTUMN NOCTURNE, 2018. OIL ON CANVAS, 121.9 X 182.9 CM. © 2018 MATTHEW WONG FOUNDATION. IMAGE COURTESY OF KARMA, NEW YORK.

Self-taught, Wong’s remarkable and rapid success followed his formal education in North America and Hong Kong, where he studied cultural anthropology and photography and pursued his passion for poetry. Through his vivid still life compositions and imaginary landscapes, he sought to “activate nostalgia, both personal and collective.” But ever-present in these deeply personal artworks is a reoccurring sense of isolation. In a 2018 interview, when asked about his paintings, Wong responded, “I do believe 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.” — Art Gallery of Ontario.



## WHO WAS MATTHEW WONG?

Matthew was born in Toronto in 1984. His family then emigrated to Hong Kong when he was seven, and returned to Canada when he was fifteen, in part to help his treatment for Autism. He eventually attended the University of Michigan, in Ann Arbor, and finished his Bachelors degree in Cultural Anthropology in 2007. He returned to Hong Kong that year, and would later enrolling as a graduate student at the City University of Hong Kong School of Creative Media, where he received his Master of Fine Arts in Photography in 2012.

He found acclaim quickly after his works were included in group exhibitions in Hong Kong and China, and at Karma gallery in Amagansett, NY in 2016, in a show curated by Matthew Higgs. Recent solo exhibitions include: ARCH Athens, Greece (2020); Karma, New York (2019); Massimo de Carlo, Hong Kong (2019); Karma, New York (2018); and the Hong Kong Visual Arts Centre (2015). Select Group exhibitions include: Andrew Edlin, New York (2020); Château Shatto, Los Angeles (2019); Performance Ski, Aspen, Colorado (2018); Aishti Foundation, Beirut (2018); Office Baroque, Brussels (2017); Galerie Frank Elbaz, Dallas (2017); and Gallery 1969, New York (2016) among others.

Wong's works are held in international collections such as the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Guggenheim Museum, New York; Dallas Museum of Art, Texas; Estée Lauder Collection, New York; and Aishti Foundation, Beirut. The AGO acquired its first work by the artist in 2020, a painting titled *The Long Way Home*, 2014-15. It was generously gifted by Monita and Raymond Wong in memory of their son.

Matthew battled depression throughout his adult life; he died in 2019 at the age of 35 in Edmonton, Alberta. He is one of not many celebrated Chinese-Canadian painters, and it is important to take a close look at his work and life story, on many levels. His perspective was uniquely at the intersection of marginalized circumstances, and his paintings captivate the viewer with highly emotive and illustrative strokes, connecting poignant moments of solitude and introspection in life. It is impossible not to be drawn into his work, as its expressiveness speaks with an incredibly profound presence.



MATTHEW WONG, UNTITLED, 2019. GOUACHE AND WATERCOLOR ON PAPER, 30.5 X 22.9 CM; FRAMED: 48.6 X 40.6 X 3 CM. © 2019 MATTHEW WONG FOUNDATION. IMAGE COURTESY OF KARMA, NEW YORK





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MATTHEW WONG, UNTITLED, 2018. GOUACHE ON PAPER, 22.9 X 30.5CM; FRAMED: 39.4 X 47.3 CM. © 2018 MATTHEW WONG FOUNDATION. IMAGE COURTESY OF KARMA, NEW YORK

## ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

A wide range of influences can be seen in the works of Wong's *Blue* series (2017-2019), from Chinese calligraphy and scroll painting to pointillism and fauvism. Organized by the AGO, *Matthew Wong: Blue View* features 31 paintings and nine works on paper from that final series.

A dream-like possibility infuses Wong's works. Evening and nightfall were Wong's favourite times to contemplate and paint, and in his shadowy interiors, doors and windows serve as portals to other realms. Profound and poetic solitude radiates from his self-portrait *Meanwhile...* (2018). In it, the solitary figure reflected in the vase looks out at the moon, while the venetian blinds cast long shadows across a white table and an orange flower. Elsewhere, bursts of orange inject energy into his works, lighting up the skies in both *Unknown Pleasures* (2019) on loan from MoMA, and in his homage to van Gogh, *Starry Night* (2019).



MATTHEW WONG, BLUE NIGHT 2018. OIL ON CANVAS, 152.4 X 121.9 CM. © 2018 MATTHEW WONG FOUNDATION. IMAGE COURTESY OF KARMA, NEW YORK.

Roads and winding paths cut through many of Wong's landscapes, and close looking often reveals traces of human presence. In *Path to the Sea* (2019), a lone figure in the bottom left corner of the painting peers down a winding pathway that leads into a dark and mysterious wood, where blue tones give way to black.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated hardcover catalogue, edited by Julian Cox, featuring essays by Nancy Spector and Winnie Wong, co-published by the AGO and DelMonico Books/D.A.P. The catalogue will be available at shopAGO in mid-August.

From the multiple lenses of Canadian art, culture and representation, mental health and awareness on autism, artistic style and approach, introspective reflection during this pandemic... (to name just a few important perspectives), this exhibition is a must-see for our community. Don't miss it.



*About the writer, Deborah Lau-Yu*

**DEBORAH LAU-YU** IS THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF FÊTE CHINOISE PLATFORM AND THE CREATIVE DIRECTOR OF PALETTERA INC. SHE IS PASSIONATE ABOUT VISUAL CULTURE AND DESIGN, THE ARTS, AND THE CHINESE CANADIAN DIASPORA.