



Art Gallery of Ontario pays tribute to Toronto-born artist and art world phenom Matthew Wong with solo exhibition



Matthew Wong, *Autumn Nocturne*, 2018. Oil on canvas, 121.9 x 182.9 cm. © 2018 Matthew Wong Foundation /Artists Rights Society (ARS) New York. Image courtesy of Karma, New York.

TORONTO.- Heralded by the New York Times as “one of the most talented painters of his generation,” Toronto-born Chinese Canadian artist Matthew Wong (1984–2019) lit up the art world during the final two years of his brilliant but 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 on Aug. 13, 2021, and to Annual Passholders and members of the public 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.”

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.”

The AGO re-opened on July 21, 2021, under strict health and safety guidelines for all visitors and employees. *Matthew Wong: Blue View* is free for AGO Members, holders of the \$35 Annual Pass, and visitors aged 25 and under, and is included in General Admission. Admission to the AGO requires advance booking of a timed-entry ticket.

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).

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.

Matthew Wong (b. Toronto, 1984 – d. Edmonton, 2019) was a self-taught painter. Wong was educated at York School, Toronto, and received a degree in cultural anthropology from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and an MFA in photography from the City University of Hong Kong’s School of Creative Media. 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.