

HYPERALLERGIC

Matthew Wong: Footprints in the Wind, Ink Drawings
2013–2017



Matthew Wong, "The Watcher" (2017), ink on rice paper, 43 3/4 x 42 inches (©2021 Matthew Wong Foundation, Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York; photo by Alex Yudzon, image courtesy Cheim & Read, New York)

When: through September 11

Where: Cheim & Read (547 West 25th Street, Chelsea, Manhattan)

For years, Matthew Wong made an ink illustration every morning: nature scenes, dreamscapes, abstractions. *Footprints in the Wind* presents 24 achromatic ink drawings on rice paper by the self-taught Toronto-born artist, including some of his earliest works in the medium. Wong, who died by suicide at the age of 35 in 2019, pays homage to the legacy of Chinese landscape painting in a starkly moving style that is uniquely his own.



Matthew Wong, *The Watcher* (2017). ©2021 Matthew Wong Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: Alex Yudzon / Cheim & Read, New York.

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 metaphoric—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.