

ARTFORUM

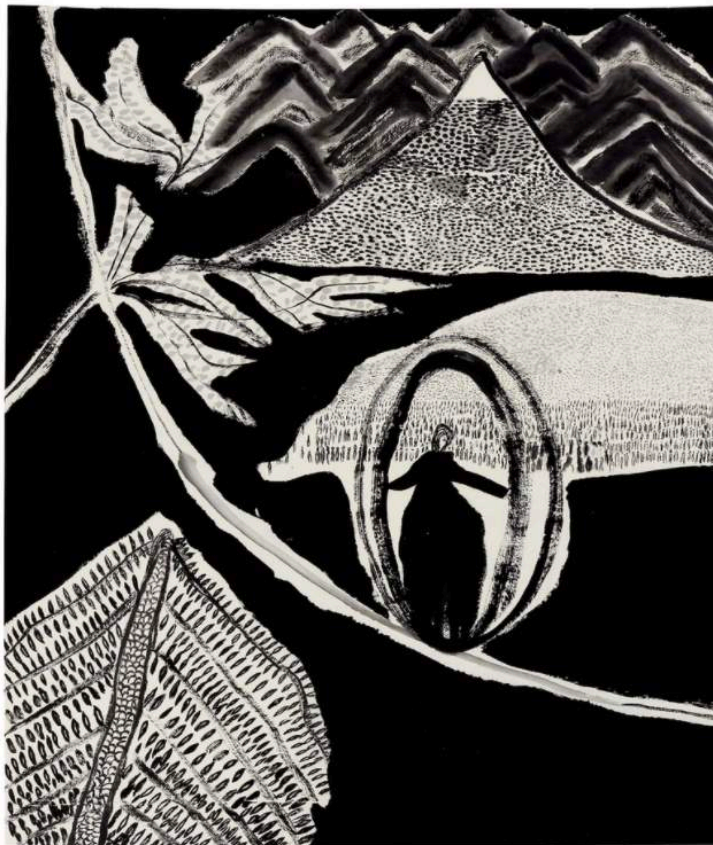
Matthew Wong

CHEIM & READ

547 W 25TH St

May 5—September 11, 2021

Isabel Parkes



Matthew Wong, *The Performance*, 2017, ink on rice paper, 34 1/2 x 28".

For artworks whose acclaim has continued to grow since their maker's suicide in 2019—and whose work is often framed by this terrible event—Matthew Wong's ink-on-rice-paper drawings emphasize a vibrant dialogue between his external influences and his interior life and crucially expand the conversation around his work. The exhibition here foregrounds Wong's interest in Chinese landscape painting, which proves a rich subject that helps illuminate the artist's sensitivity to the world before him.

To call Wong's work haunting is easier than to notice those moments of formal inventiveness and play where splashes of black ink or their omission create portals that tease a point of entry. *Where Did the Time Go?* and *Inside the Flower Cave* (both 2016) rely on circular shapes: In the former, nested in an irregularly crosshatched field, the opening appears empty; in the latter, it becomes an inwardly swirling, linear void against a blank background. Seeing the pictures side by side complicates our sense of coming or going. Nearby, in *The Performance*, 2017, another oval encircles a figure that is seen from behind. Here, Wong's attentive composition and varied application of ink lends the image a sense of tranquility that seems both dissociative and enchanting. In this piece and others, the artist's evocation of mountains, leaves, and water blurs the boundary between where one sensation begins and another ends.

Wong expresses psychic pain in his art with an exquisite tenderness. But "Footprints in the Wind, Ink Drawings 2013–2017," the exhibition here, offers one something perhaps even greater: an encounter with an expansive consciousness that was committed to conveying the vast and oceanic feeling of being alive.