

DAILY SABAH

Melancholic artist Matthew Wong featured at Van Gogh Museum

BY AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE - AFP

AMSTERDAM

MAR 01, 2024 - 12:48 PM GMT+3



A man walks past an untitled painting by Chinese Canadian artist Matthew Wong during an exhibition in the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, Netherlands, Feb. 28, 2024. (AFP Photo)

Chinese Canadian painter Matthew Wong, whose expressive brush strokes, vivid colors and troubled life drew comparisons with Van Gogh, stars in a new show at the Amsterdam museum named after the Dutch genius.

"Painting as a Last Resort" at the Van Gogh Museum is Europe's first look at more than 60 works of Wong, whose intense output and style put him "on the cusp of fame" before he died at his own hand in 2019.

Colorful, enigmatic fantasy landscapes with high horizon lines, often painted in melancholic blues, tell the story of Wong, who, like Van Gogh, felt isolated from the world.

"I see myself in him. The impossibility of belonging in this world," the museum quoted Wong as saying of the Dutch post-Impressionist.

Wong himself is often depicted as a small human figure somewhere in the painting, conveying the sense of an outsider.

"There are so many similarities to Van Gogh's approach to painting," said the exhibition's curator, Joost van der Hoeven.

"Wong taught himself to paint at the age of 27, just like Vincent. There's the expressive brushwork and use of color," he told Agence France-Presse (AFP) on Wednesday at a press preview of the exhibit.

"But there is also a very raw emotionality in the work and when I started reading more about him (Wong) I learned about all these uncanny parallels between their life stories," he said.

Stricken by poverty and mental illness, Van Gogh took his own life in France at age 37.

Wong moved between Canada and Hong Kong throughout his life and started painting eight years before his death at 35, calling it a "last resort."

His breakthrough came around 2017 when his lush fantasy landscape, "The Other Side of the Moon," and other works caught the eye of art collectors in the U.S.

Critics hailed his exhibitions, with The New York Times in 2019 lauding him as "one of the most talented painters of his generation."

Melancholy

But Wong had a life-long struggle with depression, autism and Tourette's syndrome "and had trouble with connecting with other people," the Van Gogh Museum said.

On social media like Facebook, he found a like-minded community from whom he learned much about life as an artist.

Apart from Van Gogh, Wong also drew inspiration from a wide range of other painters, including Gustav Klimt, Henri Matisse and contemporary Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama.

"It's so much more than just, 'Oh, here's Vincent influencing Wong,'" said Van Gogh Museum director Emilie Gordenker.

"Wong was an incredibly talented artist who had a big range, a real emotional directness, a great painter" in his own right, she told AFP.

Wong's landscapes show Van Gogh's influence, but the Chinese Canadian artist "developed his very own language," she said.

"There are often references in his work that give it a sense of melancholy and sadness," Gordenker added.

There are other differences, too.

"Unlike Van Gogh, Wong's talent was more widely recognized during his short and tempestuous career," the Van Gogh Museum said.

"Matthew Wong, a painter on the cusp of fame, dies at 35," read an obituary in The New York Times after Wong's death in October 2019.

Opening on Friday, the show runs until Sept. 1, 2024.