

On the Languages of Martin Wong (Berlin, 14–15 Apr 23)

KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Apr 14–15, 2023

www.kw-berlin.de/en/conference-on-the-languages-of-martin-wong/

Anna Falck-Ytter

Martin Wong is recognized for his depictions of social, sexual, and political scenographies from the US in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Poetically weaving together narratives of queer existence, marginal communities, and urban gentrification, Wong stands out as an important countercultural voice at odds with the art establishment's reactionary discourse at the time. Heavily influenced by his immediate surroundings, the artist's practice merges the visual languages of Chinese iconography, urban poetry, graffiti, carceral aesthetics, and sign language. His work offers rare insight into decisive periods of recent US American history as told through its changing urban landscapes, unfolding hidden desires and complexities.

On the Languages of Martin Wong is two-day conference accompanying the exhibition Martin Wong – Malicious Mischief at KW Institute for Contemporary Art (25 February – 14 May 23). The conference focuses on as well as aims to shed new light on the linguistic and symbolic systems applied in Wong's paintings by creating new points of departure through current artistic and academic practices from Berlin and elsewhere.

The conference takes form as two days of lectures, conversations, performances, music, and exchanges at KW. Organized by Sofie Krogh Christensen, Assistant Curator, with Nikolas Brummer, Public Program Coordinator.

Program

Friday, 14 April 23

10 am

Arrival and registration

10:30 am

Welcome

Krist Gruijthuijsen, Director and Curator, KW Institute for Contemporary Art

Sofie Krogh Christensen, Assistant Curator, KW Institute for Contemporary Art

10:45 am

How Many Worlds? Martin Wong in San Francisco and Humboldt Bay

Lecture by Solomon "Zully" Adler

This lecture will follow Martin Wong from the San Francisco Counterculture of the late 1960s to the provincial community of California's Humboldt Bay in the 1970s. It will consider how the artist forged personas and artforms to meet these environments and illuminate his tendency to move between worlds, stepping in and out of their cultural idioms to reveal what often remained unsaid.

12:15 pm

Cultural Imaginaries: Loisaida and Chinatown

Conversation between Yasmin Ramirez and Agustín Pérez Rubio

Academic, writer, and co-curator of Martin Wong: Human Instamatic at The Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York (2015) Yasmin Ramirez and co-curator of Martin Wong – Malicious Mischief (2022–2024) Agustín Pérez Rubio will discuss the cityscape of Loisaida, enfolding its cultural, artistic, and political environments while interlacing its legacy along with that of Chinatown with the oeuvre of Martin Wong.

1:45 pm

Lunch break

2:45 pm

On Graffiti: Writing the Streets of New York and Berlin

Conversation between Christopher “DAZE” Ellis and Alexei “NEON” Tursan

Artists DAZE and NEON will exchange experiences from their work in the New York and Berlin graffiti scenes from the 1980s onwards elaborating on their development and connection, as well as touch upon the impact of the movie Wild Style.

4:15 pm

Screening Wild Style by Charlie Ahearn with a digital introduction by the director

Wild Style is a 1983 American hip hop film directed and produced by Charlie Ahearn. Regarded as the first hip hop motion picture, it includes appearances by seminal figures such as Fab Five Freddy, Lee Quiñones, Lady Pink, The Rock Steady Crew, The Cold Crush Brothers, Queen Lisa Lee of Zulu Nation, Grandmaster Flash and ZEPHYR.

6 pm

End

Saturday, 15 April 23

10:30 am

Arrival and registration

11 am

Martin Wong's Layering of Time and Visual Codes

Lecture by Mark Dean Johnson

Martin Wong Catalogue Raisonné co-editor Mark Dean Johnson will share stories from his friendship with Martin Wong and reflections on his work that help suggest the complexity of Wong's mind and oeuvre, and suggest his full embrace of a societal moment of revolutionary potentiality.

11:45 am

“Bricks and Jails – Revisited:” Preliminary Thoughts on Repetition and Queer World-Making in the Work of Martin Wong

Lecture by Dr. João Florêncio

Repetition of motifs, forms, themes are found throughout Martin Wong's work, at times coming across like mantras or refrains, as forms of repetition deployed for the production of difference, for the production of desire and new lifeworlds. This lecture will offer some preliminary thoughts on the echoes and resonances between Wong's artistic methodologies and other creative methodologies of world-making that defined queer politics and culture in the later decades of the twentieth century.

1 pm

Lunch break

2 pm

Poetry reading

2:30 pm

Painting, Memory, and Image-Making

Conversation between Manuel Solano and Sofie Krogh Christensen

Artist Manuel Solano will elaborate on their painting practice and their way of creating portraits and intimate sceneries based upon memory and pop cultural imagery commenting on their lived experiences and self. Solano continued painting after they became blind as a result of an HIV-related infection in 2014.

3:30 pm

Conversation between Moshtari Hilal & Sinthujan Varatharajah

5 pm

'on being collective' – conversing collectivity as practice – sonically and poetically

Performances by ALVOZAY (Ebru "Ebow" Düzgün and Tmnit Ghide) and guests

Founders of the Berlin-based creative music and poetry platform ALVOZAY, rapper Ebru "Ebow" Düzgün and cultural creator Tmnit Ghide, will unfold their work in the music industry and beyond in the format of small performances together with invited guests.

from 6 pm

Music and drinks at Café Bravo

Reference:

CONF: On the Languages of Martin Wong (Berlin, 14-15 Apr 23). In: ArtHist.net, Mar 28, 2023 (accessed Sep 21, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/38910>>.