

Martin Wong papers, 1980-1995, 4 boxes



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Prepared by Houda Lazrak, 2014.
Edited by Lindsay Turley, Assistant Director of Collections.
This description is in English.

Descriptive Summary

Creator: Martin Wong (1946-1999)

Title: Martin Wong papers

Dates: 1980-1995

Abstract: The Martin Wong papers collection consists of materials collected by artist and collector Martin Wong between 1980 and 1994. The bulk of the collection consists of graffiti-related publications and correspondence between Wong and graffiti artists in the 1980s and 1990s. These materials provide insight into the kinds of sources Wong was reading and drawing from, along with the people he was communicating with, as he became an active member of the graffiti community in New York City. Additional material types include photographs, photograph negatives, legal documents, event invitations and arrest records.

Extent: 4 boxes

MCNY Numbers: Activity Number ACCN: 26270, 26400

Language: English, French, German, Dutch

Biographical Note

Martin Wong

Martin Wong (1946-1999) was a native San Francisco artist whose style is referred to as poetic realism and often revolves around unconventional subject matters. Wong had been trained in ceramics and street performance and was an expert in calligraphy, decorative arts, American antiques, Chinatown souvenir pieces, and graffiti. His early works were influenced by Asian traditions and landscapes. Wong moved to New York City in the 1978, where he established his new home and art studio in a tenement building at 141 Ridge Street in the Lower East Side. He then became an active and influential artist, collector, and curator in the East Village art scene. Wong exhibited in several galleries in New York City during his lifetime and opened the Museum of American Graffiti on Bond Street in August of 1989. The institution was the premier graffiti museum in the United States and remained open for approximately six months. His work has been increasingly celebrated throughout the United States and abroad since the 2000s. Before leaving the East coast, the artists donated over 300 works and 55 black books (artist's sketchbooks) to the Museum of the City of New York from a graffiti art collection that he had assembled through his encounters with local graffiti writers. The collection of works documented the roots of the graffiti movement in NYC and the evolution of writing styles up to the 1990s. In 1994, Wong returned to San Francisco, where he passed away five years later of AIDS-related causes at age 53 in his family residence.

Angel Ortiz

Angel Ortiz (1967-present), also known Lil Angel, LA ROCK and LA2 is a prolific Puerto Rican graffiti artist based in the Lower East Side. Born in 1967, he grew up in the Baruch housing projects, located between Houston and East Delancey Street. He has worked on a variety of surfaces and his art began appearing on New York City walls during the 1980s. During this time, he met artist Keith Haring at a downtown ball court, which led to creative collaboration that heavily influenced Ortiz's work. Together, they created the energetic and colorful aesthetic that is today associated with Keith Haring – Haring drew the characters and Ortiz's LAII tag filled in the spaces in between, though Angel Ortiz's contribution to this work is not widely known. Ortiz has exhibited worldwide since the 2000's and his art can be found on skateboard designs, street wear, and still on Lower East Side walls.

Scope and Content

The Martin Wong Papers consist of materials about graffiti and related topics during the 1980s and 1990s, at a time when graffiti art began appearing in art galleries and the underground movement was proliferating and gaining prominence. The collection is the product of Wong's interest and belief in the unique creative and visual qualities of graffiti art. The printed materials primarily include magazines and newspaper articles, but also books and exhibition catalogues. Particularly noteworthy is an original manuscript by Jesus Sterling titled "Kings and Toys: Graffiti From the Inside." The manuscript includes a glossary for graffiti related terms, a historical style timeline of graffiti art, biographies of influential artists and writing crews and a terminology list for painting techniques. The papers also contains of 42 hand-written letters by Angel Ortiz to Martin Wong. These letters were sent by Ortiz, an influential graffiti artist who lived on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, New York from various correctional facilities between 1992 and 1995. The correspondence sheds light on the relationship between the Wong and Ortiz, but also documents Ortiz's daily life while in prison.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged in four series, Series I: Printed Publications, Series II: Museum and Exhibition Publications, Series III: Martin Wong Personal Material, and Series IV: Angel Ortiz Correspondence with Martin Wong. All four series are arranged chronologically, with undated material is arranged before dated material. Oversize material is housed separately.

Series I: Printed Publications (1983-1989)

Series II: Museum and Exhibition Publications (1991-1993)

Series III: Martin Wong Personal Material (1980-1994)

Series IV: Angel Ortiz Correspondence with Martin Wong (1992-1995)

Series and Sub-Series Description

Series I: Printed Publications (1983-1989)

The materials in Series I primarily consists of magazines and newspaper publications. The publications are either dedicated to graffiti art, such as the *International Graffiti Times* (later renamed *International Get Hip Times*), or more mainstream press outlets, such as *Time* and *Art in America*, that feature articles about graffiti related topics or events. The series also includes a 1984 original manuscript of Jesus Sterling's "King and Toys: Graffiti From The Inside," in which he elaborates on the graffiti subculture as well as a book by Johannes Stahl presenting essays and artists interviews about graffiti art in Dutch.

Series II: Museum and Exhibition Publications (1991-1993)

Series II contains three printed publications created to accompany graffiti related museum exhibitions and art shows in Europe. Two of the publications are in French and serve as companion catalogues. In the remaining one, written in Dutch and English, the Groninger Museum retraces the history of subway graffiti art in New York City.

Series III: Martin Wong Personal Material (1980-1994)

The series consists of a variety of materials pertaining to Martin Wong's personal life such as event announcements and invitations, newspaper articles featuring Wong, and his correspondence with graffiti artists and art institutions in the United States and abroad. Also included are legal agreements and arrest records. The series contains twelve photograph negatives of Wong's apartment, three photography portrait of the artists between 1992 and 1994 as well as several original photographs of subway art. Other assorted materials include seminal graffiti artists Chris "Daze" Ellis's graded high school homework assignments, tagged scrap paper, announcements from Wong's Museum of American Graffiti, and a photo album from the opening of the Museum of American Graffiti.

Series IV: Angel Ortiz Correspondence with Martin Wong (1992-1995)

This series consists mainly of handwritten letters by graffiti artist Angel Ortiz, still in their original envelopes, in which he asks his friend Martin Wong to send him books, money, food, written supplies, or clothing, and to write him back. Ortiz's letters were sent from various correctional facilities, including Ulster and Riverview Correctional Facility. The letters are written and drawn on various types of paper, with pen, pencil, and colored pencil. Some of the correspondence also contains poems, sketches by Ortiz or other graffiti writers in the same facility, and brief descriptions

of his everyday life inside the institution. Ortiz signs his letters with variations of his personal tag, either LAII or LAROCK, which both stand for “Little Angel.” The series also contains envelopes with colorful hand drawn cartoon character references on the front side, such as Garfield and Mickey Mouse. Of the forty two letters in this series, one is written by Andres Aganza, in which he asks for artistic advice.

Language of Materials

The vast majority of the materials is in English. The collection also contains publications in French, German, and Dutch.

Access and Use

The Museum of the City of New York collections must be examined on site. Appointments to examine materials must be made in advance by contacting the Archivist through e-mail at research@mcny.org.

Collection use is subject to all copyright laws. Permission to publish materials must be obtained in writing from the Rights and Reproductions Office at the Museum of the City of New York. For more information please contact:

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Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Title, date. Martin Wong papers, 1980-1995. Museum of the City of New York.

Custodial History

The materials in this collection were accumulated by Martin Wong, or his mother, Mrs. Florence Wong Fie, and were kept with the Paintings Department object files from the time they were brought into the Museum’s care in 1994 and 1995, respectively. In 2007, the Martin Wong Graffiti Collection and associated archival material was moved under the custodianship of Sean Corcoran, Curator of Prints and Photographs. Following the exhibition “City as Canvas,” featuring the work from the Martin Wong Collection, February – September 2014, Corcoran transferred this material to the care of the Manuscripts and Ephemera department.

Acquisition Information

The majority of the material (Activity 26270) was donated to the Museum in November 1994, by Martin Wong, except for the photographs (Activity 26400) of Martin in Series III: Personal Materials, which were donated by his mother, Mrs. Florence Wong Fie, in October 1995.

Processing Information

These papers were processed by Houda Lazrak, Collections Intern, under the supervision of Lindsay Turley, Assistant Director of Collections, November – December 2014.

Related Material

Museum of the City of New York

Martin Wong Graffiti Collection

Jack Stewart photographs (four gifts: 2014.24, 2013.10, 2013.7, 95.98)

Collections in Other Repositories

The Estate of Martin Wong at P.P.O.W. Gallery

Access Points

Personal names*

Andrew (Zephyr) Witten
Angel (LA II) Ortiz (1967-)
Anthony (A-One) Clark (1964-)
Christopher (Daze) Ellis (1962-)
Donald J. (Dondi) White (b. 1961)
Futura 2000
John (Crash) Matos (1961-)
John (Jonone) Parello (1963-)
Keith Haring (1958-1990)
Lee George Quinones
Martin Wong
Michael (Tracy 168) Tracy (b. 1958)
Rammellzee (1960-2010)
Sandra (Lady Pink) Fabara (1964-)
Steve Blade Ogburn (1958-)

*The Museum of the City of New York developed a thesaurus of Graffiti writers' names when cataloging the Martin Wong Graffiti Collection. These terms are sourced from that thesaurus, rather than the Library of Congress.

Corporate names

Whitney Museum of American Art

Topical subjects

AIDS (disease)
Art
Art exhibitions
Artist
Drawings
Exhibitions
Galleries and museums
Graffiti

Graffiti artists
 Graffiti--New York (State)--New York
 Graffiti--New York (State)--New York--1990-2000
 Hip-hop
 Lower East Side (New York, N.Y.)--Art
 Realism in Art
 Spray paint
 Subway stations
 Twentieth Century

Geographic subjects

Lower East Side (New York, NY)
 Lower Manhattan (New York, NY)
 Germany
 Netherlands
 New York (City)
 Paris (France)
 San Francisco (Calif.)

Container List

Series #	Box #	Series/ SubSeries Title	Folder #	Folder Title	Date
1	1	Printed Publications	1	American Film, Volume IX, Number 2 "Wild Style"	November 1983
1	1	Printed Publications	2	Tiger Beat, Vol. 21, No. 1 "Go Graffiti" pages 34-35	October 1984
1	1	Printed Publications	3	Rapid Enamel	1984
1	1	Printed Publications	4	Jesus Stirling manuscript "Kings & Toys: Graffiti From the Inside"	1984
1	1	Printed Publications	5	Time Magazine Vol. 126, No.26	December 1985
1	1	Printed Publications	6	Arts Magazine Volume 60 No. 5	January 1986
1	1	Printed Publications	7	Artnews Voume 89/Number 2	February 1990
1	1	Printed Publications	8	IGT/Tight Magazine, Vols. 3, 8 ,12, 13	1984-1993
1	1	Printed Publications	9	Art in America No. 5 "Doors Open at Graffiti Museum"; No.9 "A City of Bricks and Ciphers"	May 1989
1	1	Printed Publications	10	An der Wand: Graffiti zwischen Anarchie und Galerie by Johannes Stahl (Hrsg.) (German)	1989
1	1	Printed Publications	11	Groninger Museumkrant 5e Jaargang NR 2 (Dutch)	1992

1	1	Printed Publications	12	Can Control: Graffiti Magazine, Vol. 1, Issues 4-5	1993
1	1	Printed Publications	13	Crazy Kings Graffiti Magazine, Issues 1-2	1993
1	1	Printed Publications	14	On The Go, Vol. 2 # 3	1993
1	1	Printed Publications	15	Skills Magazine, No. 4-5	1993
1	1	Printed Publications	16	Overkill, No. 5-6	1993-1994
1	1	Printed Publications	17	Hype Magazine, Issue 24 (Australian)	1994
2	2	Museum and Exhibition Publications	1	East Villager, "Graffiti Finds a (Brief) Home: Museum in Exile" pages 4, 14; "Spred the Word" page 11	August 1989
2	2	Museum and Exhibition Publications	2	Graffiti Art: Artistes Americain et Francias 1981-1991 au Musee National des Monuments Francais, Acte II	1991
2	2	Museum and Exhibition Publications	3	Paris Tonkar, edited by Florent Massot & Romain Pillement	1991
2	4	Museum and Exhibition Publications	oversize	Martin Lawrence Modern , "Crash"	1992
3	2	Martin Wong Personal Materials	4	Coming From the Subway: New York Graffiti Art - Groninger Museum Education (Dutch)	1992-1993
3	2	Martin Wong Personal Materials	5	Annoucements - Museum of American Graffiti	Undated, 1989
3	4	Martin Wong Personal Materials	oversize	Annoucements - Museum of American Graffiti	1989
3	photo storage	Martin Wong Personal Materials	photo storage	Museum of American Graffiti opening - photo albumn	1989
3	2	Martin Wong Personal Materials	6	Photograph negatives of Martin Wong's apartment	Undated
3	4	Martin Wong Personal Materials	oversize	Photograph negatives of Martin Wong's apartment	November 1994
3	2	Martin Wong Personal Materials	7	Assorted	1980, Undated
3	2	Martin Wong Personal Materials	8	Chris Ellis Homework Papers	1980
3	2	Martin Wong Personal Materials	9	Arrest Records	1980-1992
3	2	Martin Wong Personal Materials	10	Newspaper Articles	1982-1995
3	2	Martin Wong Personal Materials	11	Photographs + photographies of photographs and art	1982, Undated
3	4	Martin Wong Personal Materials	oversize	Slides of art	1982, Undated
3	2	Martin Wong Personal Materials	12	Legal Agreements	1983-1992
3	2	Martin Wong Personal Materials	13	Event Annoucements and Invitations	1986-1994

3	2	Martin Wong Personal Materials	14	Tags	October 1987
3	2	Martin Wong Personal Materials	15	Correspondence	1989-1993
3	2	Martin Wong Personal Materials	16	Photographs of Martin Wong	1992-1994
3	2	Martin Wong Personal Materials	17	Tracy 168 Promotional Material	1994
4	3	Angel Ortiz Letters to Martin Wong	1	Angel Ortiz Letters to Martin Wong	October 1992
4	3	Angel Ortiz Letters to Martin Wong	2	Angel Ortiz Letters to Martin Wong	November 1992
4	3	Angel Ortiz Letters to Martin Wong	3	Angel Ortiz Letters to Martin Wong	December 1992
4	3	Angel Ortiz Letters to Martin Wong	4	Angel Ortiz Letters to Martin Wong	January 1993
4	3	Angel Ortiz Letters to Martin Wong	5	Angel Ortiz Letters to Martin Wong	February-December 1993
4	3	Angel Ortiz Letters to Martin Wong	6	Angel Ortiz Letters to Martin Wong	January 1994
4	3	Angel Ortiz Letters to Martin Wong	7	Angel Ortiz Letters to Martin Wong	February-March 1994
4	3	Angel Ortiz Letters to Martin Wong	8	Angel Ortiz Letters to Martin Wong	April-May 1994
4	3	Angel Ortiz Letters to Martin Wong	9	Angel Ortiz Letters to Martin Wong	December 1994
4	3	Angel Ortiz Letters to Martin Wong	10	Angel Ortiz Letters to Martin Wong	1995
4	3	Angel Ortiz Letters to Martin Wong	11	Aganza Letter to Martin Wong	October 1992