

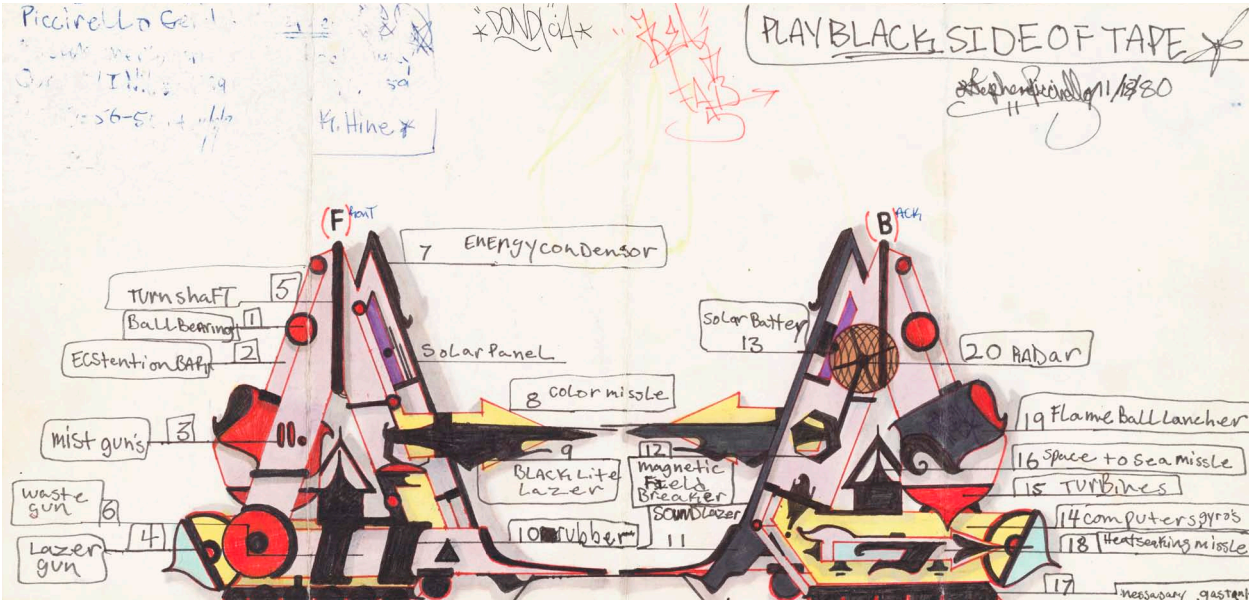
# CITY AS CANVAS



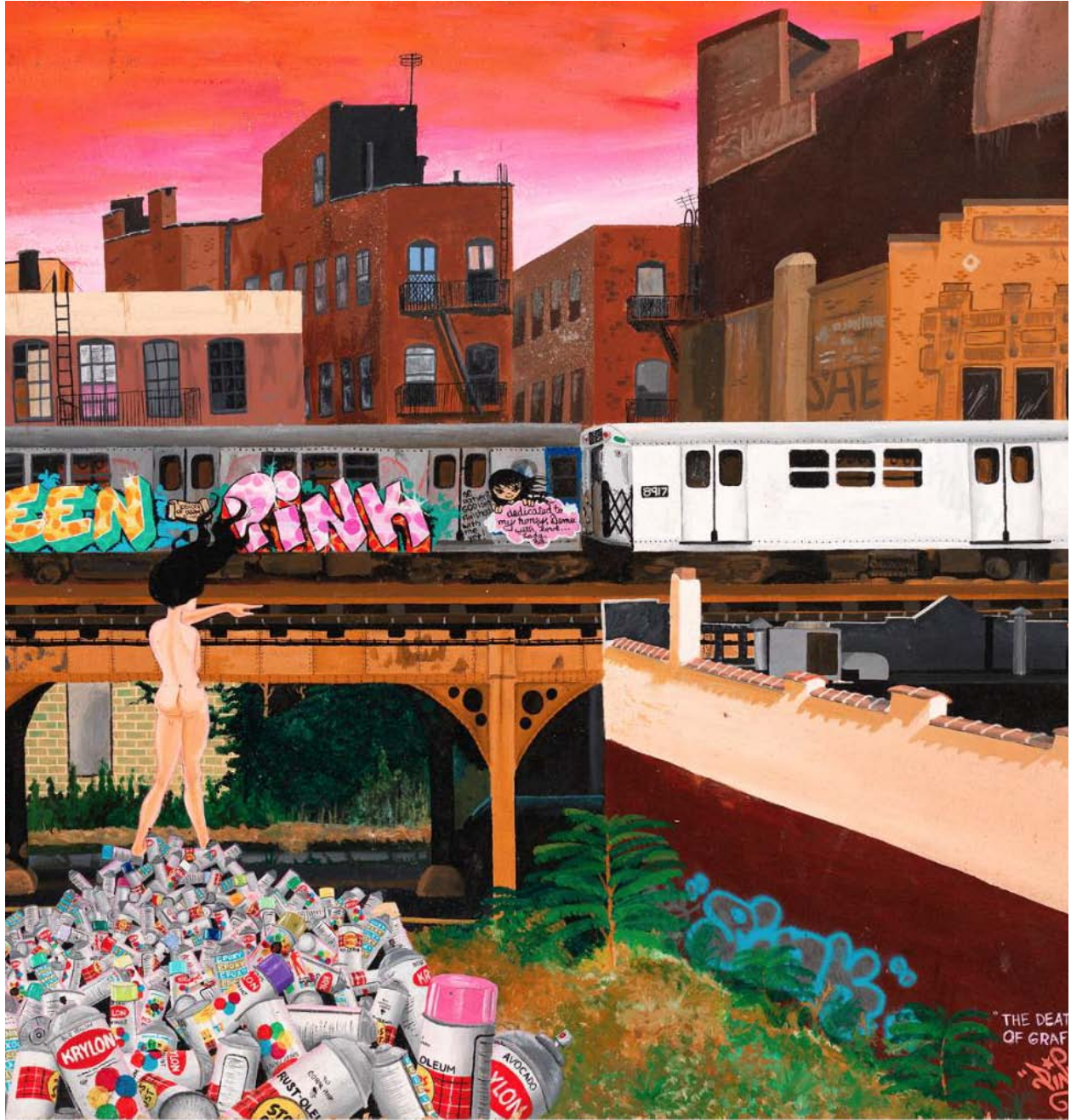
GRAFFITI ART FROM THE MARTIN WONG COLLECTION

# CITY AS CANVAS

A powerful form of artistic and counter-cultural self-expression, graffiti in New York City has had a polarizing history and rapid rise into the mainstream. Beginning in the 1970s as illicit “writing” on subway cars and station walls, by the 1980s it had evolved to include colorful paintings embraced as valuable works of art by downtown collectors and patrons. *City as Canvas: Graffiti Art from the Martin Wong Collection* features vibrant and provocative works on paper and canvas, as well as artist black books and photographs of graffiti writing long erased from city walls. This important exhibition highlights the early work of such seminal artists as Keith Haring, FUTURA 2000, Lee Quiñones, DAZE, and LADY PINK, giving voice to their perspective as young, outsider creatives who would go on to become well-known artists and ambassadors of the genre.



I. RAMMELLZEE. *Untitled*, 1980. 94.114.197.  
 II. LADY PINK. *The Death of Graffiti*, 1982. 94.114.96.



II.

# EXHIBITION HIGHLIGHTS

This transformational exhibition marks the first time many of the works from the expansive collection of Martin Wong, an East Village artist and collector of graffiti art, have been publicly exhibited. Wong saw the importance of graffiti long before it became part of our vernacular, and amassed a treasure trove of hundreds of works. Specific highlights in the exhibition include DAZE's *Transition* (1982), Martha Cooper's photograph of DONDI (1980), LADY PINK's *The Death of Graffiti* (1982), and LEE's *Howard the Duck* (1988). These works were part of an artistic movement that spawned a worldwide phenomenon, altering music, fashion, and popular visual culture for decades to come. *City as Canvas* shows us that graffiti was, and continues to be, an important and evolving part of popular culture, sparking dialogue about the nature of art, art the role of art in public spaces.



III.

- III. Lee Quinones. *Howard the Duck*, 1988. 94.114.1.
- IV. FUTURA 2000. *Untitled*, 1981. 94.114.17.
- V. Keith Haring and LAll. *Untitled*, 1983-1984. 94.114.333.001-002.



IV.



V.



VI.



VII.

- VI. Jon Naar. *Graffiti Kids*, 1973. Courtesy of the artist.
- VII. Martha Cooper. *DONDI and friends sketching their blackbooks*, East New York, 1980. Courtesy of the artist.
- VIII. Martha Cooper. *DONDI painting in New Lots Yards, Brooklyn*, 1980. Courtesy of the artist.





IX.

## MARTIN WONG

When Martin Wong (1946-1999) began collecting art in the 1970s, graffiti was still considered an illicit and underground movement. While working at Pearl Paint, an art supply store on Canal Street in Manhattan, he befriended New York City graffiti writers, many of whom were just teenagers, and began acquiring their work through purchase or trade. During this time Wong also pursued his own career as a painter; his work has been displayed at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Whitney Museum of American Art. While Wong himself painted in a realist/representational style, he recognized the artistic ability of up-and-coming graffiti writers and began acquiring at a time when graffiti was not highly regarded in the art world.

*City as Canvas* includes many of the earliest surviving examples of graffiti art by writers who went on to have important careers in the arts, fashion, and music industries. Several works in this pioneering exhibition refer back to original pieces that were spray-painted on buildings or subways before being destroyed. Wong was dedicated to preserving the history of this important art movement. When he was diagnosed with AIDS in 1994, he made the decision to donate the entire collection to the Museum of the City of New York.

IX. ZEPHYR. *Untitled*, 1984. 94.114.67.

X. RIFF 170 (CASH). *Untitled*, 1972-1973. 94.114.277.012.

XI. Keith Haring. *Untitled* [for LAII], ca. 1985. 94.114.332.

XII. LA II. *Untitled*, ca. 1984. 94.114.328.2

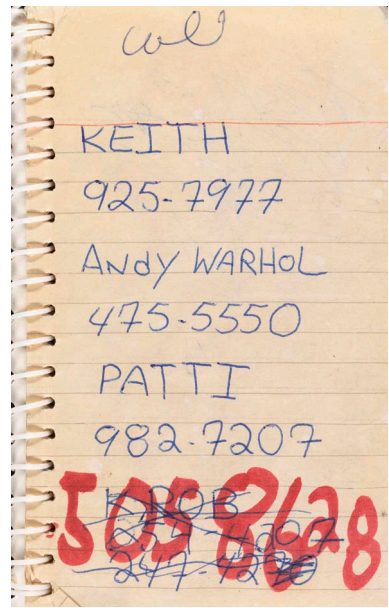




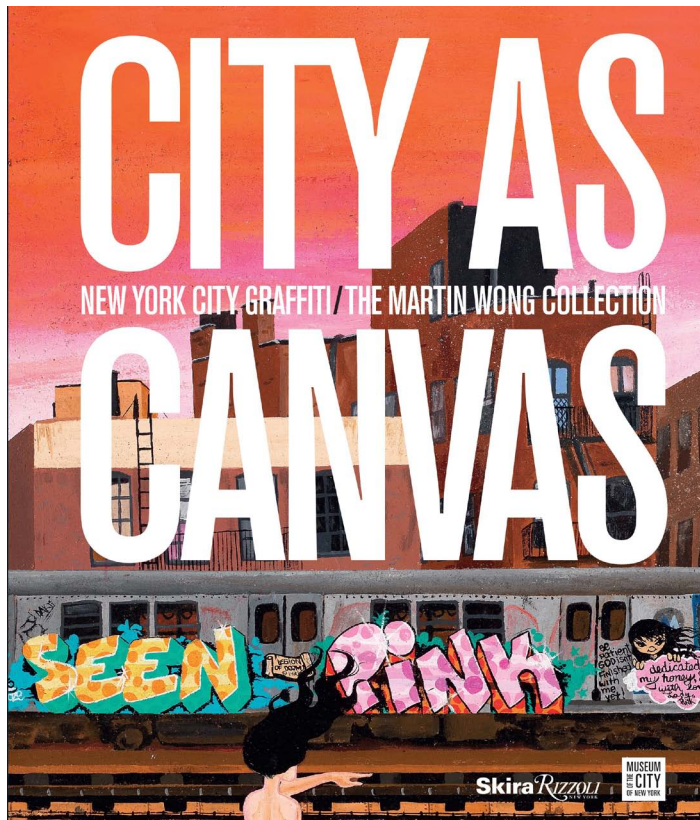
X.



XI.



XII.



## COMPANION PUBLICATION

The exhibition is accompanied by *City as Canvas: New York City Graffiti from the Martin Wong Collection*, edited by Sean Corcoran and Carlo McCormick, and published by Skira Rizzoli. *City as Canvas* traces the origins of urban self-expression and the era of “outlaw” street art in New York, which primed the floodgates for graffiti art to spread worldwide. The book includes anecdotes from the artists themselves, as well as unpublished art by famous street artists such as Futura 2000, Christopher “Daze” Ellis, LA II, Lady Pink, and Keith Haring, among others.



# ABOUT THE MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

The Museum of the City of New York fosters understanding of the distinctive nature of urban life in the world's most influential metropolis. It engages visitors by celebrating, documenting, and interpreting the city's past, present, and future. Founded in 1923 by Henry Collins Brown, a Scottish-born writer with a vision for a populist approach to the city, the Museum was originally housed in Gracie Mansion, the future residence of the Mayor of New York. Completed in 1932, the Museum's current home is a Georgian Colonial-Revival building constructed by Joseph H. Freedlander on land owned by the City of New York. Over the years, the Museum has amassed a considerable collection of exceptional items, approximately 750,000 objects including prints, photographs, decorative arts, costumes, paintings, sculpture, toys, and theatrical memorabilia.



Installation, Museum of the City of New York. City as Canvas: Graffiti Art from the Martin Wong Collection, 2014.



Front: STASH 2. *Diamond Style*, Ca. 1987. 94.114.5

Back: Installation, Museum of the City of New York. *City as Canvas: Graffiti Art from the Martin Wong Collection*, 2014.

**Curator**

Sean Corcoran

**Number of Works**

Approximately 150 sketchbooks, drawings, paintings on canvas, and photographs

**Availability**

Summer 2021 - Winter 2023

**Booking Period**

12 weeks, can be prorated for a shorter or longer presentation

**Exhibition Requirements**

Fine art museum security; 2,500 - 3,500 square feet, 390 linear feet; Facility report subject to approval by the Museum

**Shipping**

Host venue covers the cost of incoming and return shipping to Museum

**Loan Fee**

Please inquire

**Contact**

TravelingExhibitions@mcny.org  
 Museum of the City of New York  
 1220 Fifth Avenue  
 New York, NY 10029  
 www.mcny.org

1220 Fifth Avenue  
 New York, NY, 10029

