



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Museum of the City of New York Presents
Above Ground: Art from the Martin Wong Graffiti Collection

On View: November 22, 2024-August 10, 2025

Press Preview: November 19th, 10AM – 12PM

“There are people who see the graffiti experience as a vocation of adolescence, rites of passage without a sense of direction...But I saw it early on as a catalyst to develop as a painter and explore the other horizons outside of a 40-foot subway car.”

– Lee Quiñones

New York, NY – October 2024 – The **Museum of the City of New York** proudly presents ***Above Ground: Art from the Martin Wong Graffiti Collection***, an extraordinary exhibition tracing the evolution of graffiti art from its roots on the streets of New York City in the early 1970s to recognition and celebration in galleries and museums worldwide.

Above Ground showcases work drawn from the Museum's substantial graffiti art collection, complemented by loans from private collections. It highlights the transition many graffiti artists made from tagging subway cars to creating paintings on canvas, marking a pivotal moment in the movement's evolution as it entered broader public awareness and significantly influenced global culture.

Above Ground highlights many never seen donated 30 years ago by the visionary artist and collector Martin Wong – including works in aerosol, ink, and other mediums by key figures such as **Keith Haring, Futura 2000, Fab 5 Freddy, Rammellzee, Lee Quiñones, Haze, Crash, Lady Pink, and Tracy 168.**

“Above Ground celebrates the 30th anniversary of Martin Wong’s donation to the museum and the 10th anniversary of MCNY’s initial *City as Canvas* exhibition,” says **Sean Corcoran**, Senior Curator of Prints and Photographs at the Museum of the City of New York. “This show offers a renewed and expanded look at graffiti’s journey from NYC streets to the most prestigious galleries around the world.”

The exhibition is organized into several sections, highlighting the origins of graffiti and its broader cultural impact, particularly the Post-Graffiti movement. The exhibition touches on the East Village scene, and the impact of early indie galleries such as Fun Gallery, Fashion Moda, and others that showcased graffiti on canvas. It considers the art form’s initial international success and underscores the legacy of Martin Wong and his commitment to preserving the art form.

Select exhibition highlights include:

- **Martha Cooper's** photographs of work by **Keith Haring** and more;
- **Lee Quiñones'** monumental painting, *A Life Takes a Life* (1983);
- **TRACY 168** from ESSY Studio sketch pad (1980);
- **Rammellzee's** *Atomic Note* (1986) and *Atomic Futurism* (1987);
- **A-One's** spray paint on canvas work, *Beauty of a Beast (In Memory of Bear 167)* (1987);
- Photographs from **Henry Chalfant's** *Subway Art* series, including *Skeme and Daze* and *Kel Crash*;
- **DAZE** spray paint on canvas pieces, *Phobia* (1983) and *French Dream. Life Below Aerosol* (1984);
- Several pieces from **KAWS'** collection, including **DONDI's** *Bishop of Battle* (1985); and **Martin Wong's** *Sharp and Dottie* (1984);
- A documentary by **Charlie Ahearn** on Martin Wong's collection offers a deeper understanding of the art and its historical context

Stephanie Hill Wilchfort, Ronay Menschel Director and President of the Museum of the City of New York, adds, "Born in New York City, graffiti is now a global phenomenon. This exhibition not only celebrates the artistic contributions of graffiti artists, but also reflects the dynamic and ever-evolving culture of our city, and explores how New York's art and popular culture influences the world."

Lead support for *Above Ground: Art from the Martin Wong Graffiti Collection* is provided by UNIQLO USA, with additional support from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the New York City Council.



ABOUT THE MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

The country's first and largest city museum, the Museum of the City of New York fosters an understanding of the distinctive nature of urban life in the world's most influential metropolis. Through history, popular culture, and art, the Museum explores New York City's influence nationally and globally. Named the "Best Museum" in *Time Out New York's* "Best of the City 2021," MCNY holds a 750,000-object collection and hosts two permanent exhibitions, two immersive films, and four rotating exhibitions in its historic building at the top of Museum Mile.

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