



***Ephemera Office Enterprises***

**Martin Wong**

**Organized by Olga Dekalo**

**October 18 - March 13, 2016**

In conjunction with ***Martin Wong: Human Instamatic***

at the Bronx Museum of the Arts

November 8, 2015 - February 14, 2016

Curated by Sergio Bessa and Yasmin Ramirez

From October 11 - February 14, PARTICIPANT INC is proud to present ***Ephemera Office Enterprises: Martin Wong***, the first in a series of exhibitions that reflect on the ephemeral as both material and existence - presenting rarely seen work of documentation and process integral to alternative art practices. Since 2001, PARTICIPANT has highlighted the importance of experimental art production in the East Village and Lower East Side, showing artists strongly associated with the legacies of experimental film, performance, and visual art born of the club scene, AIDS activism, and the feminist movement.

Showing ephemeral material culled from the Martin Wong Papers at the Fales Library and Special Collections and a multi-panel work, *Mintaka*, from The Estate of Martin Wong, P.P.O.W, the presentation aims to address Wong's fascination with prisons, and more generally represent the scope of Wong's practice related and directly influenced by the artist's residence on the Lower East Side.

The selection of source material - newspaper clippings, *Time* and *Newsweek* features on state penitentiaries, the artist's book collection on prisons, and personal photographs of lovers, friends, and prisons toured by the artist - in many ways, point to the composition of *Mintaka*. Known to faithfully and imaginatively chronicle his passions, the work is imbued with a subject within a subject motif. Accentuating a mode of multiplicity, the combined picture planes depict a three-way between men differentiated by race and positioned beneath Wong's signature code of communication, his constellations.

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The year Wong painted *Mintaka*, a bulletin by the Bureau of Justice Statistics reported data on the Nation's prisoners stating, "the 1990 increase of nearly 59,000 prisoners equals a demand for approximately 1,100 new prison beds per week nationwide. Prisons were estimated to be operating from 18% to 29% above their capacities at yearend." Revealing a complexity of imposed intimacy and policed desire constituted by an oppressive system that now incarcerates racial minorities at six times the rate of whites, Wong probes a resistance in form of desire. Portraits of lovers taken in his apartment at his beloved Loisaida likened to images of prisoners, reclaim both subjectivity and promiscuity as famously propositioned by Douglas Crimp in his 1987 text, "How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic," at a time when multiplicity of pleasure equaled being.

Born in Portland, Oregon, in 1946, **Martin Wong** was raised in San Francisco, California, and came of age during the city's blossoming countercultural movement. He studied art at Humboldt State University (1964-1968) and after graduation worked closely with the legendary performance art collectives Angels of Light and the Cockettes in San Francisco. Wong created elaborate sets and costumes for these collectives and documented their work from a rare insider's point of view. In 1978, Wong moved to New York City, first occupying a room at the Meyer's Hotel, which he described in a letter to a friend as the last remaining single occupancy hotel at the waterfront. In 1982, he relocated to the Lower East Side until his return to San Francisco in the late '90s, when he lived under his parents' care while fighting AIDS. Martin Wong died in 1999.

Image caption: Martin Wong, *Mintaka*, 1990, acrylic on canvas, 29.5 x 66 inches. Courtesy of the Estate of Martin Wong and P.P.O.W



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Common Practice New York is an advocacy group that fosters research and discussions on the role of small-scale arts institutions in New York City. Common Practice New York aims to collectively embody the question, *What is our common practice and why do we value it?* [commonpracticenyc.org](http://commonpracticenyc.org)

PARTICIPANT INC is located at 253 East Houston Street, between Norfolk and Suffolk Streets on the LES, ground floor, wheelchair accessible. Subway: F to Second Avenue, Allen Street exit; or JMZ to Essex/Delancey. [participantinc.org](http://participantinc.org)