

## Martin Wong

*Sea Plane* 1993  
acrylic on canvas  
26 x 72 ¼ inches (66.04 x 183.52 cm)



In the early 1990's, Martin Wong began to focus on Chinese-American subject matter, generating a hybrid style of cultural motifs. Painted just a year before Wong was diagnosed with HIV and before his final return to San Francisco, *Sea Plane* is emblematic of Wong's increased interest to work within an abstract space where childhood memories, American war history, popular-culture and classical Chinese iconography freely interact to create his nuanced visual language.

In *Sea Plane* we see elements that would come to define the artist's Chinatown series. Strange faced characters in Kabuki make-up peer out from an American war plane. Between these two seaplanes, which seem suspended within Wong's characteristic royal blue sky, appears the artist's seal. Acting as a signature, the stamp pulls from a tradition in East Asian art and in particular Chinese calligraphy. In the left corner of the painting Wong also includes ancient Chinese characters that read "Air Traffic".

**Martin Wong** (1946-1999) During the '70s Wong was active in the San Francisco Bay Area art scene and was involved with the performance art groups The Cockettes and Angels of Light. In 1978 he moved to Manhattan, eventually settling in the Lower East Side, where his attention turned exclusively to painting. Wong set forth to depict urban life on the Lower East Side where he then lived. In Wong's last major body of work he turned his attention to his own heritage and painted scenes from New York and San Francisco's Chinatowns. Wong died in San Francisco from an AIDS related illness in 1999. His work can be found in museum collections including: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Museum of Modern Art, The Bronx Museum of The Arts, The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; The Art Institute of Chicago; and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Wong had a one person show *Sweet Oblivion* at the New Museum in 1998. In 2013 the exhibition *City as Canvas: New York City Graffiti from the Martin Wong Collection* opened at the Museum of the City of New York. Wong's retrospective, *Human Instamatic*, opened at the Bronx Museum of The Arts in November 2015 and will travel to the Wexner Center in Columbus, OH and the Berkeley Art Museum in San Francisco, California.