

# R AND A

## TimeOut New York

January 20 – February 2, 2016

Martin Wong

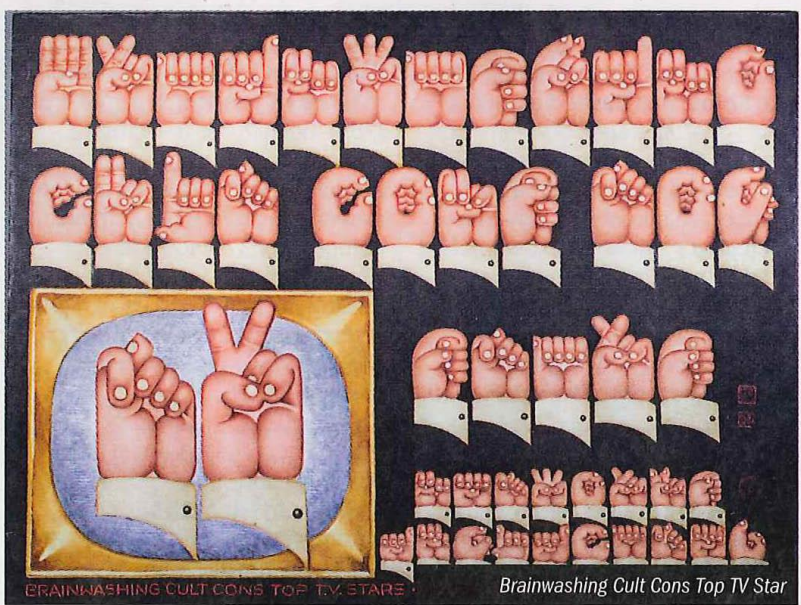
### Martin Wong



Bronx Museum, through Feb 14

The late, great Martin Wong (1946–99) arrived in New York in 1978 and quickly became a bard of the pre-gentrified Lower East Side, with moody depictions of burned-out tenements, often graced by hunky male Latinos. *Big Heat* (1988), for example, shows a pair of firemen kissing in front of abandoned buildings patchy with whitewashed graffiti. A self-taught painter, Wong cultivated an outsider artist's obsessiveness, meticulously rendering every rough brick in his cityscapes and strange, nearly abstract pictures of blank walls. He was also given to esoteric sign systems, filling skies with star charts and chubby hands forming inscriptions in American Sign Language.

This admirable retrospective also includes work envisioning



sexy prison fantasies and exuberant nocturnes of Chinatowns in Manhattan and Wong's native San Francisco. The artist's early death from AIDS cut short a career in full bloom, a loss made especially clear by three small canvases of ghostly cacti completed during the last years of

his life. But, like *Houston Street* (1986), a nearly life-size image of a battered security gate, Wong's odes to a vanished downtown remain his most indelible legacy.—Joseph R. Wolin

**THE BOTTOM LINE** A painter-poet of a long-lost gritty New York.

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