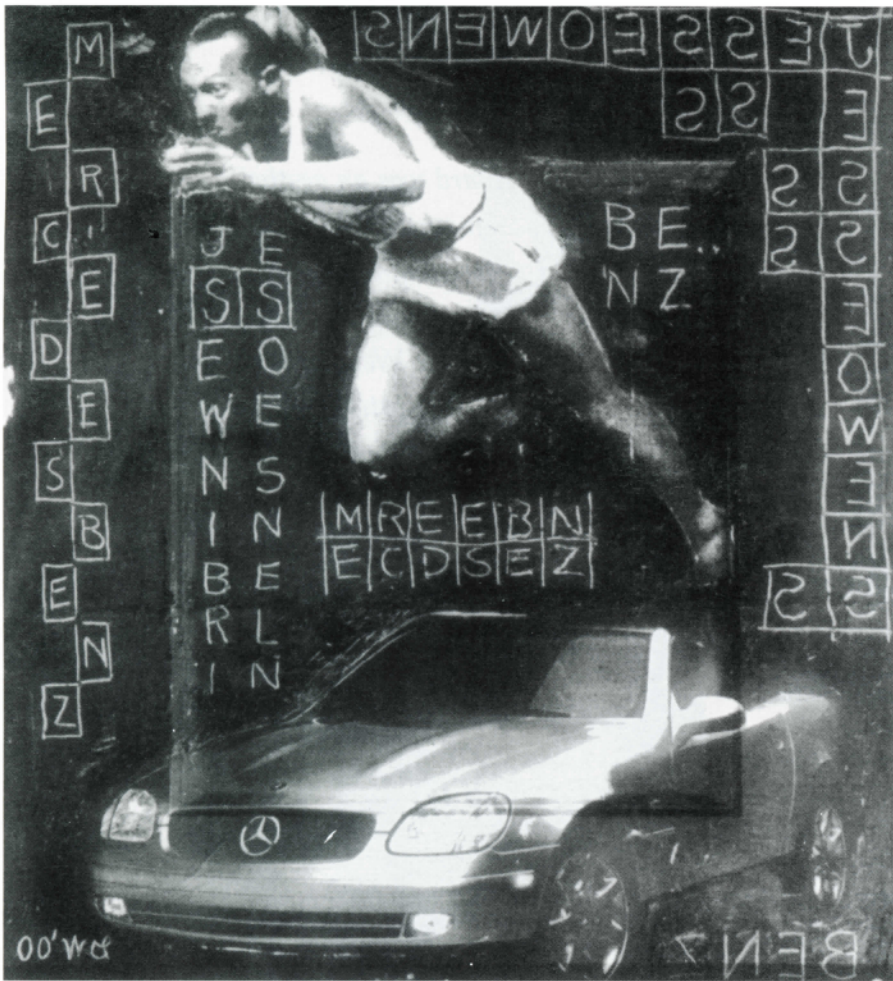

THE CHOUINARD FOUNDATION

GRAND VIEW



In This Issue: Gary Wong

NUMBER TEN / JANUARY 2002



"JOBNZ," 18 1/2 x 16 1/4, mixed collage on paper, 2000

GARY WONG

Truth in the Process

Dave Tourjé

Much can be said for the artist truly committed to the art-making process; who steadfastly adheres to important principles concerning his art and remains aloof to the maelstrom of hype and commerce generally surrounding this occupation known as "artist." This is a path that undoubtedly more would love to strictly follow, yet due to the usual pressures of finance, demand, and survival requirements, cannot always take that risk.

This is the narrow path of Gary Wong.

Wong was born in Oakland, California and grew up in Los Angeles, a fourth generation Chinese-American. "I moved to L.A. when I was about four. I grew up at 21st and San Pedro, Central Ave., around in there ... before freeways. 21st is known in the Chinese community as one of the first kind of "suburbs" outside of Chinatown. It was a pretty racially mixed street."

Wong's hard-won individualism is to be admired. In the 60's, like many young artists, he operated beneath the tall shadows still cast by the major art status quo of the 50's - Abstract Expressionism. "I fell in love with the stuff in art school (Chouinard). You can't help it, you know. I had Kanemitsu. I had Woelffer. Cats from the old school that had lineage to the

New York School." He adds "I spent a good twenty years painting this notion of *painting* . . . eventually I felt like I'd painted myself into a corner."

Though his relationship with this dominant style would turn from active participant to philosophic demolition man, he remains loyal to his early influences and what he gained from his experience under his teachers at Chouinard. "Kanemitsu was like my link to having a lineage because he was Asian-American, born in America. He hung out at the Cedar Bar, you know, he was like second or third generation New York. So I was really taken by that. Me and Mike had dialogue, long dialogue, and when he died something happened to me aesthetically. What it was was symbolically, Mike had died. He was my hookup to the American Abstract painting lineage and in AE I felt there was nothing left for me to do. I was trying to free myself up to find another way to make art that was not as intellectually needy." As regards Emerson Woelffer, Wong remains appreciative. "I've always looked at Emerson as a Dadaist. He does what he wants but doesn't get the credit he deserves - why is he wasting his time trying to teach a bunch of knuckleheads? But what I got from Emerson was understanding and respecting

him as a person and an artist that was a Dadaist. Because I was into Dada. He was the living embodiment of it . . . he had that European thing about him. He instilled so many modes of thinking in my head, you know, just by him being him."

About Chouinard Wong remembers "There at Chouinard was another aesthetic awakening . . . a moment . . . an extended moment over a period of three or four years of observing and studying and being with and around people like Woelffer who, you know, just piqued that interest in me enough to say, well, you know, he's committed to it - maybe I can be committed to it."

And there is his singular memory of Nelbert Chouinard. "During the Chouinard / Cal Arts transition everybody was up in arms. During the heat of it all, Mrs. Chouinard came down to the school and assured the students and faculty that as long as she was alive, there would always be a Chouinard Art Institute. She came down very queen-like. It was her baby, man." Philosophic art-freedom began to fully manifest for Wong in the late 70's, hastened when he befriended a fast rising art star named Jean-Michel Basquiat. Basquiat had just arrived on the West Coast, showing at Gagosian's gallery in Venice. Wong, for a day gig, did art cartage for many artists, including Basquiat. "I struck up a friendship with Jean-Michel and we kicked it around for awhile. I was able to see first hand what was happening to him with the gallery scene. At the time, he was still free and not tied up into having to produce a lot. He still had his aesthetic intact. So I took him quite seriously like, you know, 'this kid is really saying something'."

This impacted Wong and helped provide a window through which he saw an aspect of his own aesthetic future. "I was affected by his use of words, his use of images, his use of found objects. To me, it was a very Dada thing." And this, among many influences, has contributed to Wong's unique artistic statement. He paints on found paintings, makes collages mixed with primitive, visceral imagery, with abstract poetry scratched into the surface. The result: a simple, powerful, cryptic message.

Today, Wong remains resolute in his direction. "Knowing what you don't want carries as much weight as knowing what you do want." And with this, Gary Wong has achieved artistic freedom with a very broad range of sublime influences from his early experience through his recent interest in Chinese Brush Painting. The foundation underlying direction is the observation of the everything. "You know, I'm not an entertainer, I'm not interested in hype. I'm just a picture maker."

And Gary Wong has found truth in the process.

"Slap Down," 18 1/2 x 23, mixed collage on paper, 1994

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Gary Wong with Ed Flynn at the Oceanside Museum of Art on the afternoon of the Chouinard show opening last July.

