

## The New York Times Magazine

GALLERY: THE PIONEERS OF GRAFFITI ART, THROUGH THE EYES OF KAWS

When the painter Martin Wong moved to New York in the late 1970s, the colorful graffiti around his new hometown so enthralled him that he began collecting and archiving what he knew would soon become historically significant art. He spent the next decade gathering pictures of the artists and their now painted-over masterpieces from photographers like Martha Cooper, who famously documented the emerging art form. In the '80s, when gallerists began commissioning various mixed-media paintings from the graffiti artists — which were easier to display than tagged subway cars or building facades — Wong began to collect those too. Bryan Thomas for The New York Times Brooklyn-based artist Brian Donnelly, also known as KAWS. In 1994, five years before he died from AIDS, Wong donated his archive to the Museum of the City of New York. Beginning Tuesday, nearly 150 items from this collection will be on view for the first time at the museum in “City as Canvas: Graffiti Art From the Martin Wong Collection.” Items like sketchbooks and black books, which the artists shared with one another for style and lettering inspiration, offer insight into the makings of the urban landscape of the time. A short documentary by Charlie Ahearn introduces unseen footage of the collector himself. The show represents the biggest names in graffiti of the '80s, including Jean-Michel Basquiat, Keith Haring, Crash (John Matos), DAZE (Chris Ellis) and Dondi (Donald White). They paved the way for modern artists like Banksy and Brian Donnelly, better known as KAWS, who began his career with graffiti and continues to paint and sculpt to international acclaim. In anticipation of the exhibition, T asked Donnelly to choose 10 favorite works from the Martin Wong Collection. Here, the 39-year-old discusses their influence, then and now.

REAS (Todd James) | “Seeing REAS in this black book makes you realize how young the participants of this art form were. REAS was 18 when he drew this, and he was already painting trains for six years.”



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