

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JAMES ROMBERGER
ANTON VAN DALEN
MARTIN WONG

January 23 – February 17, 2019

James Fuentes is pleased to present works by James Romberger, Anton van Dalen, and Martin Wong. The exhibition is presented alongside Jane Dickson, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*.

This exhibition brings together multifaceted portraits of a complex city. Romberger, van Dalen, and Wong were each close observers and keen documenters of life in New York City during the 1980s, a tumultuous and violent period that saw the wreckage wrought by AIDS, crack, heroin, homelessness, and real estate development. These artists describe a crime-ridden and cop-flooded history. At the same time, their works are saturated with the brilliance and energy of the communities that surrounded them. Together, they offer a certain mythology of their lives in the city. Wong and van Dalen appear courtesy of PPOW Gallery, New York.

Martin Wong (1946–1999) was a prolific painter of New York City’s gritty, textured cityscapes. His works stand as semi-autobiographical registers of the Lower East Side and Chinatown in the 1980s and ‘90s, merging details of his life with a rich and poetic imagination. *The New York Times* describes Wong as “the self-dramatist; the mythologist; the existential tourist; and the virtuoso realist.” Oftentimes he employed trompe l’oeil effects, mimicking the characteristics of his surroundings in combination with other recurring motifs—constellations, billows of smoke, shuttered storefronts—that give these scenes an apparition-like quality. Wong moved to New York in 1978 and soon became friends with artists also moving into the East Village, including Charlie Ahearn, Jane Dickson, Julie Ault, and Keith Haring. He became close with poet and playwright Miguel Piñero, who often appears in his paintings. Poetry and text were also important to Wong, whether borrowing Piñero’s words or found within his ongoing series of works “for the hearing impaired.”

Anton van Dalen (b. 1938) was born in the Netherlands, emigrating with his family to Toronto in 1954, then moving to Rivington Street in 1966. Van Dalen recalls arriving to an East Village that resembled the second world war that he left behind, riddled by urban flight, poverty, and drugs. He also describes an environment that was rich with crossing cultures, sharing space and life on the sidewalk. Van Dalen has lived in the East Village since this time. His paintings of the city contain abundant color and movement, often drafted from a semi-aerial perspective. Birds—specifically, carrier pigeons—appear frequently in van Dalen’s works. “The birds have really been my life since I was a child,” he explains. “Some people might call it an escape; I think of it as a parallel universe.” In a broader sense, they also stand a symbol of unity, carrying messages between vast divides.

James Romberger (b. 1958) is known for his pastel drawings and comic-strip work describing the city’s downtown in motion. Romberger often draws from memory, placing details from recollected scenes into the corners, rooftops, and alleyways of larger compositions. Living in the East Village since the 1980s, his works are at once dismal and exuberant, approaching an almost hallucinatory manner. In 1984 Romberger and Marguerite Van Cook opened the Ground Zero Gallery in the East Village, presenting multimedia installations and performance events. The pair also began publishing the comic strip *Ground Zero*, a semi-autobiographical, science-fiction collaboration drawing on their lives in the neighborhood. Around the same time, Romberger, Van Cook, and David Wojnarowicz began collaborating on the comic book *7 Miles a Second*, based on Wojnarowicz’s autobiographical writings and illustrated by Romberger.

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