



# Wong Does Wrong

Troublemaker Tobias Wong invites customers to look but not to touch or even purchase as he recreates a celebrated art world happening

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COME IN, WE'RE CLOSED: (Opposite) No one could enter or shop in The Wrong Store for the two months it "opened" in Chelsea this summer. Photography LUCA POITTELLI (Left) Nonetheless, its inventory could be seen through the storefront. (Below) Items included a mask by designer Hella Jongerius and a football by fashion maverick Martin Margiela



Conceptual artist Maurizio Cattelan once taped his gallerist to a wall – as a piece of fine art. It's no surprise, then, that the similarly mischievous designer and curator Tobias Wong looked to Cattelan for inspiration during this year's International Contemporary Furniture Fair in New York. Wong, with Cooper-Hewitt retail director Gregory Krum, opened the Wrong Store, appropriating the concept of artists Cattelan, Massimiliano Gioni and Ali Subotnick whose Wrong Gallery showed art out of a teensy-weensy door front (yes, it was that small) in Manhattan's Chelsea arts district in 2002.

On opening night 2007, once again in Chelsea, a sign on the window of Wong's 60-square-foot "store" read "Come In, We're Closed." Inside, beautiful one-offs or limited edition pieces made by the likes of Kaws, Ron Gilad, Bless and Ineke Hans crowded the white shelves. Curious people clogged the sidewalk in front unable to get into the party – not because they weren't on the VIP list but because no shopper will ever be able to enter the store during the two months that it is "open." Nor will anyone be able to purchase its merchandise unless they do so directly from the designer who made it or, even better, buy the art installation wholesale from its creators.

As millers-about pressed their noses to the glass, it was easy to take in the product: some old school stuff, including a Jenny Holzer BMW B12 racing car model that reads "Protect Me From What I Want" (a phrase that is also tattooed on Wong's arm) and a silkscreened Barbara Kruger bag that reads "I Shop Therefore I Am." But the store's inventory also featured recent loot. Architects Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron's Rotterdam perfume – composed of ingredients like tangerine, algae, hashish and the scent of a domestic dog – made its American debut. On a shelf above Martin Margiela's made-to-measure cotton-sheathed football, tennis and soccer balls sat a gas mask-clad, helmeted head sewn by Hella Jongerius. Above that, three boxes of Yves Béhar's limited-edition Camouflage Series Jawbone headsets were hand-painted in flesh tones to resemble an ear (Wong's ear, to be precise). "This is gonna kill Murray Moss," Wong said, referring to New York's design retail legend, "because he's only getting unlimited Jawbones in black."

As night fell on the sidewalk, Wong flitted amongst his audience, pumping gin from a fifth bottle hidden in his jeans pocket into plastic shot glasses and plying visitors with Black & Gold cigarettes set aflame with a crystal lighter. "Everything is for sale, but you can't go in and there's no one there to sell it to you," he explained. "It's all about creating desirability." Despite the nonexistent sales channels and wicked irreverence, Wong is an unabashedly commercial character. Stealing Cattelan's old logo, he's created a whole identity, including stationery, shopping bags, business cards and an online storefront. The web address brings you to a line drawing of the shop window but links only to another unreachable window – and a cheeky note: "Closed Mondays." **SQ**