the Broadway staging of his play *Short Eyes* (1974). In his third incarnation, Piñero stands in the top center fire escape reading a poem to his sister and her children. To the right of this group sits poet Amiri Baraka, who cocks his ear to listen in on the recital.

Although Wong says he did not create *La Vida* with any one poem of Piñero’s in mind, *La Vida*’s iconography conforms to many details mentioned in “A Lower East Side Poem,” a work that Wong knew well: he had excerpted parts of it in two previous paintings, *Portrait of Piñero* (1982; pl.32) and *Portrait of Mickey Piñero at Ridge Street and Stanton* (1985; pl.34). Written in 1978, “A Lower East Side Poem” were originally conceived by Piñero and poet Miguel Algarín as an exercise to create a last will and testament in verse. Piñero’s eight-stanza poem, excerpted below, extols the sights and sounds of Loisaida and concludes by pleading with the reader to keep him nearby after death.
La Vida

THE LIFE AND WRITINGS OF MIGUEL PIÑERO IN THE ART OF MARTIN WONG
Yasmin Ramirez

La Vida (1988; left) is Martin Wong’s quintessential image of Loisaida, a mostly Black and Latino area of the Lower East Side. La vida means “the life” in Spanish, and Wong’s brick face tenement teems with people celebrating being alive. We are at the scene of a block party where distinctions between private and public space have been suspended. Children frolic in an open fire hydrant and dance in the streets to a conga band. Residents call out to each other from their windows and use their fire escapes as living rooms. Couples and families tenderly embrace. Even the somewhat nefarious activities going on at the margins of the picture—rowdy boys drinking in the corner window; a man carrying a swiped TV down a fire escape—seem to add a note of comic relief to what might otherwise have been a rather saccharine scene.

Familiar faces enhance the painting’s genial aspect. La Vida includes all the characters that Wong created over a six-year period to depict Loisaida. Homeboys, hip-hop dancers, boxers, firemen, and policemen are interspersed between portraits of friends. Wong, who began collecting graffiti after moving to Loisaida in 1981, forged tight relationships with graffiti artists Daze, Lee, Sharp, and LA 2, all of whom appear in La Vida under various guises. Stevie Hernandez, a young man who shared Wong’s enthusiasm for dressing up in uniforms, is pictured twice: he is the smiling fireman in the far left second-story window and the policeman in the fourth-story window on the right.

It is not unusual for Wong to repeat figures in his paintings. As works like Saturday Night (1992; pl.54) and El Caribe (1988; pl.27) demonstrate, twins and mirror images are leitmotifs throughout Wong’s works. However, the look-alikes in La Vida do not merely display Wong’s penchant for visual puns; they are a means to recuperate from the death of his friend, poet and playwright Miguel Piñero, who passed away on June 17, 1988. Wong not only indulges his wish to revive Piñero’s spirit in La Vida, but he protects himself against further loss by creating double images of his surviving friends.

There are three portraits of Miguel Piñero in La Vida. From left to right, Piñero’s first appearance is in a left-hand second-story window, where he wears a white hat similar to the one he wore on the cover of La Bodega Sold Dreams, the book of his collected poetry. The pensive young man with a full Afro profiled in the third-story window left of center represents the way Piñero looked in the mid-70s, the era in which he came to prominence as a writer with
Just once before I die
I want to climb up on a
tenement sky
to dream my lungs out till
I cry
then scatter my ashes thru
the Lower East Side.

So let me sing my song tonight
let me feel out of sight
and let all eyes be dry
when they scatter my ashes thru
the Lower East Side

From Houston to 14th Street
from Second Avenue to the mighty D
here the hustlers & suckers meet
the faggots & freaks will all get
high
on the ashes that have been scattered
thru the Lower East Side

I don’t wanna be buried in Puerto Rico
I don’t wanna rest in long island cemetery
I wanna be near the stabbing shooting
gambling fighting & unnatural dying
& new birth crying
so please when I die...
don’t take me far away
keep me near by
take my ashes and scatter them thru out
the Lower East Side . . .

An allusion to the location of the poem, the tenement Wong depicted in La Vida stands at Houston Street and
Avenue B; its bricked-up entrances that seal the residents inside give the building the appearance of the “concrete
tomb” that Piñero called his home. In scattering Piñero’s face over the picture plane, the artist allusively spreads the
poet’s ashes. Finally, complying with Piñero’s wishes to “let all eyes be dry” at his passing, La Vida illustrates a cele-
bration of life after death, a ritual that spreads love from the deceased to the living.³

Martin Wong met Miguel Piñero in 1982 at the opening of The Crime Show at ABC No Rio, a storefront art gallery on
156 Rivington Street. ABC No Rio was run by members of an artist’s collaborative known as Colab. The gallery’s
inclusive submission policy——first come, first hung——gave Wong his first opportunity to exhibit in New York.⁴ He
contributed two sign language paintings to The Crime Show based on sensational headlines about the Son of Sam
murders printed in a short-lived tabloid: Psychiatrists Testify: Demon Dogs Drive Man to Murder (1980; pl.19) and
Son of Sam Sleeps (1980; unillustrated).

Like many of ABC No Rio’s exhibitions, The Crime Show was intended to provoke discussion about the social prob-
lems that gave rise to the art on display. Piñero, as Loisaida’s reigning outlaw poet, was invited to give a recital on
opening night. Wong does not remember exactly what Piñero read that evening. However, one could imagine, based on the show's theme, that he recited something along the lines of "Kill, Kill, Kill," a poem in which the subject recounts a day-long chain of miserable encounters with bureaucratic authorities who enraged him enough to murder his wife.

Fired last week man was I mad. I don’t mean angry or pissed off I was mad. I wanted to grab the boss and the foreman by their red necks, and kill, kill, kill.

So I jumped on the elevator and bumped into my case worker who said that he was taking me off the rolls 'cause I was working, and that you people think you can get away with anything. I wanted to snag him by his $50.00 mod tie, and kill, kill, kill.

I ran into Rev Willy the preacher who told me that the poor box was to put in and not take out like I did Sunday, so talking like as if I was a rich man, acting like I was a poor man. I ran into Mr. Goldman the social worker, who said I was not underdeveloped enough, or culturally deprived enough to get into the projects, and besides I was working, and I wasn't on welfare. I wanted to take him and his never ending legal folders and kill, kill, kill.

So I busted the key in the door and stepped into Blackie's dog shit, and wiped it off with Junior's baby diaper and that was full of baby shit. So while relaxing I told Gloria of all the shit I had been through and she said I was full of shit, I said I wasn't bullshitting, she said I wasn't shit, I said that I didn't want to hear no shit, she said that I still wasn't shit...

So I grabbed her by her fucking neck and threw her ass across the kitchen table and she went flying over the living room table and over the rest of the unpaid over priced furniture landing on the over worked bed, I jumped in the air with the scream of an Apache warrior's cry of battle and I kill, kill, killed...

All my troubles away.
Piñero was an extraordinary performer who could emote both the pathetic and the menacing aspects of the personas he created, and Wong was moved by what he heard. After the opening Wong struck up a conversation with Piñero and, feeling an "instant affinity" with the poet, invited Piñero to see more of his art. Piñero visited Wong a few days later, and they became fast friends. In a matter of weeks, Wong's apartment became a "hideout" for Piñero and a posse of four young men whom he had adopted as apprentices: Pito a.k.a. Little Ivan, Little Brian, and the twins, Pete and Marty.

One of the factors that made Piñero a well-loved figure in Loisaida was that he was capable of great generosity. It was not unusual for him to give to those in need, and he began to pay part of Wong's rent, leaving him more time to paint. Money came from a variety of sources, most of them legitimate. Piñero made a strong impression with his role in the movie Fort Apache: The Bronx, which was still in release when he met Wong, and he was scheduled to begin working on another film, Alphabet City. He was also acting as a consultant and guest star on a number of crime-related TV shows. In April 1982, Piñero won an $80,000 Guggenheim grant and was working on a new play.
was their, no where and a city of (seductive and dancing)
boys, and a town. The city had already devised a way
in which it could be hit to hit-

Kelley (who had learned the secrets of death on
his gallon, which is a way he has invented, making a swordsman
and such sexual process that the man of woman can resist
the, with the exception of Captain Stag, whom he regards
as a man of honor." He, too, wrote a letter to Kelley, saying,
marking his fingers along the rope mark. (A letter to marquee
written to protecters by their government, authorizing them
themselves in the capacity of accredited combatants,
and thus distinguishing them from common pirates.
Such a letter often, but by necessity, saved thee
from the gallows.) Kelley tells me that the mere sight
of his hemp marks instills in adversaries a weakness and terror
that the appearance of Death Himself.

I asked Kelley what it feels like to be hanged.

"At first I was sensible of very great pain due to the
weight of my body and felt my spirits in a strange commotion
violently pressed upward. After they reached my head, I
saw a bright blaze of light which seemed to go out at my
eyes with a flash. Then I lost all sense of pain. But after
I was cut down, I felt such intolerable pain from the prickings
and shootings as my blood and spirits returned and I wished
those who cut me down could have been hanged.

The reader may question how I find time to write this account
of the sea voyage in a crowded forecastle. The answer is that
I wake very short nights, each day, with the intent of painting
them later. I now have a hour of leisure each day to
reconstruct a narrative from these notes since Stedman's


29. Portrait of Little Brian,
Photo: Fred Scruton

throughout the year and a half he spent with Wong. Despite these successes, Piñero was wedded to living the life of
a street hustler. The poems about crime and drug addiction that came to decorate the skies in Wong's paintings
reflected Piñero's daily experiences at the time.

Their first collaboration was the result of Piñero's request that Wong document a handball court that had been fresh-
ly tagged with graffiti by Little Ivan. The painting, *Attorney Street Handball Court with Autobiographical Poem by Piñero* (1982-84; pl.28), is a riot of graffiti, poetry, and sign language. It marks the beginning of Wong's Loisaida
series (his previous landscapes did not specifically relate to sites in the neighborhood).

Wong recalls that it was only after he had been working on *Attorney Street Handball Court* for some time that Piñero
decided he wanted Wong to letter in the "autobiographical" poem that ends: "I Knocked Out Lighting, Drowned A
Drop of Water, Put Handcuff on the Wind, Lock [sic] Thunder in Jail, Slapped Jesus in the Face and Ran Satan Out
of Hell." Piñero's boastful poem draws on the African-American poetic tradition of "toasting," in which speakers
compete to create the most outrageous statements about themselves in rhyme. Toasting set a precedent for rap,
which was just beginning to override the early 80s New Wave club scene in the same way that graffiti was challeng-
ing mainstream painting. Positively responding to the bold lyrics of rap artists, Piñero's poem for Attorney Street Handball Court toasts this new generation of inner-city poets.

Wong's gesture of overlaying sign language on the bottom of the graffiti-covered handball court makes an equally strong visual connection between his work and the cryptic signs of self-affirmation found in graffiti art. Spelling out a memorable line spoken by Piñero in the movie Fort Apache: The Bronx, Wong announces his ambitions with the deaf-mute alphabet to distinguish himself in the art world: "It's the real deal Neal I'm going to rock your world make your planets twirl, ain't no wack attack." One of the largest works that Wong has ever executed on canvas, Attorney Street Handball Court is the artist's manifesto. When it was first exhibited at the Bess Cutler Gallery in 1984, William Lieberman, Chairman of 20th Century Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, recognized Attorney Street Handball Court as a masterpiece and bought it for the collection.

During the next year and a half, Wong and Piñero collaborated on three more paintings: For My Pito (1983; above); Little Got Rained On (1983; pl.31); and King Heroin (1983-84; unillustrated). Following the precedent set by Attorney
Street Handball Court, Piñero submitted to Wong an original poem that he wanted to have illustrated. Densely packed with text, the paintings in this series resemble pages from an illuminated diary. In *For My Pito*, a solitary Piñero stands on a roof against a backdrop of taller tenements and recites a moving soliloquy to his delinquent son in which he empathizes with Pito’s struggle to maintain faith in himself while undergoing drug rehabilitation. The poet reassures the young man that he can beat his problems: “You who share the outline of my life story...when the world fell heavy on your shoulders whatever chemical strength remaining was played with total faith, faith that came from the glory called you.” The overcast gray sky Wong rendered in this painting foreshadows the stormy future lying ahead for Pito, who continued to be plagued by addiction.

*King Heroin* relates the ironic tale of an addict who goes to heaven and discovers that God is a pusher. Wong underscored *King Heroin’s* punch line by embellishing the tall, thin, scroll-like painting with a flaming sky that rakes the boundaries between heaven and hell. *Little Got Rained On* recounts the tragedy of a fictional character named Little who was shot to death with his own gun. Unlike the other collaborative works, Wong did not illustrate the story in a conventional manner. A shower of words pours down on Little’s head like a stream of bullets, but the rose painted in the left-hand corner is not expressive of any sentiment in the story. Instead, the rose pays a compliment to the hand-
some young man who served as the model for Little. Painted contemporaneously with *The Annunciation According to Mickey Piñero (Cupcake and Paco)* (1984; pl.33), a work that bears a similar looking rose, *Little Got Rained On* reflects Wong's growing interest in rendering beautiful male physiques.

Adding poetry to his art was not a novel enterprise for Wong. He was including poetry—actually, quotations of headlines he found interesting—in his paintings before his collaborations with Piñero. However, those paintings were based on Chinese traditions: the sign language alphabet was executed in uniform blocks that resemble the precisely outlined characters found in Chinese art. Piñero introduced the painter to the Nuyorican way of working with language, a poetry directly inspired by the hybrid speech patterns heard in the streets, an aesthetic that showcased the poet's ability to amplify the significance of ordinary verbal encounters. The lettering he adopted to transcribe Piñero's poetry has an expressive, uneven quality that mimics the rise and fall of the voice reciting verse. During the time he lived with Piñero, Wong produced several paintings inspired by themes in the poet's previously published texts. Works such as *Portrait of Piñero* and *Pedro's Lament* (1984; pl.15) record Wong's assimilation of Nuyorican aesthetics.

In *Nuyorican Poetry: An Anthology of Puerto Rican Words and Feelings*, Miguel Algarín describes the Nuyorican poet as a “troubadour” who “tells the tale of the streets to the street,” and Piñero took his role as Loisaida’s troubadour seriously. Wong recalls that Piñero did not limit his recitals to formal occasions. His speech was itself poetic, and he toured Loisaida reading his new poems aloud to whoever was around:

Piñero pretty much introduced the neighborhood to me as subject matter. . . . He used to show me around the neighborhood in the middle of the night and he’d read stories. . . . He would just make up these stories. . . . He’d make the neighborhood seem really dramatic and it was back then because everything was in ruins. He was a born entertainer, like one day I saw him reading a poem he’d just written to a wino who was passed out. He was just sitting on a garbage bag reading to this guy.

While he and Piñero were working on *Attorney Street Handball Court*, Wong made *Portrait of Piñero* in 1982, the first of a series of portraits which depict Piñero reciting *A Lower East Side Poem* on the sidewalks of Loisaida. As in the collaborative works, Wong includes excerpts from the poem and credits Piñero. However, there is far less text here than in the formal collaborations in which Piñero dictat-
sweet oblivion the urban landscape of martin wong

33. The Annunciation According to Mikey Piñero (Cupcake and Paco), 1984, Acrylic on canvas, 48 x 72". Courtesy of the Syracuse University Art Collection, NY. Photo: Larry Lamay

ed a full-length poem. It is fitting that Wong portrayed Piñero reading to his family in La Vida since neither Portrait of Piñero nor Portrait of Mickey Piñero at Ridge Street and Stanton depict the poet before an audience.

Piñero’s recitations attuned Wong’s ear to the poetry inherent in the everyday speech of Loisaida’s residents. Although the Spanish words that appear in his works are lifted either from Piñero’s poetry or from Spanish-language comic books and signs, Wong’s paintings became bilingual in the mid-80s. He also began to include dialogues in his paintings at this time.

Pedro’s Lament is Wong’s masterful transcription of a tense confrontation between himself and Pedro Rodriguez, an ex-boxer who lived with him for a time. Miguel Algarin has coined the word dusmic to define poems that transform aggression directed at the speaker into a source of strength, and Pedro’s Lament falls into that category. A drug user, Pedro had been badgering Wong for money one evening to the point where Wong became agitated. Wong recorded this event by creating a painting in which refrains of “Give me $6.00 or I’ll...” echo above a row of tenement buildings. The large, threatening words in the sky are juxtaposed with an attractive small drawing of Pedro that Martin mounted in a glass case and affixed to the bottom of the painting, a keepsake perhaps of the affection that Wong once felt for him.
The picture-within-a-picture device employed in this painting frames Pedro's Lament within the visual codes of art in the same way that the stage had transformed Piñero's words into theater. One of the affinities between the work of Piñero and Wong is that they continually cross the line between "art" and "life" in their respective mediums without erasing the line completely. But Wong takes a further step. The Annunciation According to Mickey Piñero represents a landmark in Wong's creative absorption of Piñero's writings. In this painting Wong removed a scene in Piñero's play Short Eyes from its theatrical context and re-presented it using the pictorial conventions of Christian iconography.

Short Eyes concerns the murder of a child molester (called a "short eyes" in prison slang) at the hands of his fellow inmates. A subplot involves a power struggle among the prisoners to seduce Cupcake, a young male first-time offender. At a dramatic point in the play, Paco, one of the more ruthless characters, acts on his desire for Cupcake by groping him in the shower. It is this scene that Wong transforms into a homoerotic icon.

The Annunciation According to Mickey Piñero shows Paco kneeling before Cupcake in his jail cell as though he were an angel announcing to the Virgin Mary that she would give birth to Christ. The pose is so conventional in the history of art that the fact that it is assumed here by two dark-skinned muscle-bound male prisoners does not make this "annunciation" any less convincing. The Spanish dialogue on the cell wall is Paco's declaration of love in Short Eyes and Cupcake's rejection of Paco's advances: "No soy un maricon" (No, I am not a faggot). Although The Annunciation According to Mickey Piñero has been interpreted as a scene of unrequited love, the meaning of this work is more subtle. In the biblical story of the annunciation recounted in Luke 1:34, Mary initially questions the angel's prophecy that she will bear a son: "Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing that I know not a man?" Wong's The Annunciation According to Mickey Piñero, when interpreted in light of the scripture, expresses the hope that Cupcake will accept Paco's love just as Mary accepted the fact that she would bear the Christ child.

Readers familiar with Short Eyes will no doubt regard Wong's interpretation of this scene as highly idiosyncratic and the painter rather blind to the race and class conflicts that Piñero raised in the play. In Short Eyes, Cupcake accuses Paco of cowardice after the attack in the shower. The young man berates Paco for forcing himself on a "brother" rather than directing his aggression toward the "short eyes," who is white and middle-class. At the play's end, Cupcake and Paco do not become lovers. Instead, they join forces to gang-rape and murder the "short eyes," who turns out to be a falsely accused man.

Certainly the other sources to Wong's The Annunciation According to Mickey Piñero are Genet's Our Lady of the Flowers and "The Eternal Couple of the Criminal and the Saint" in Sartre's Saint Genet. Piñero has often been compared to French outlaw writer Jean Genet, a comparison that he welcomed, up to a point. Piñero's writings, unlike Genet's, reflect an ambivalence toward homosexuality, and "queens" are not treated sympathetically in his plays. Despite the tender sentiments underlined by the placement of a rose on the cell wall in The Annunciation According to Mickey Piñero, Wong's hypermasculinized depiction of Cupcake and Paco conforms to Piñero's vision of homosexual encounters in prison as expressions of male prowess. Moreover, Wong's The Annunciation According to Mickey Piñero, when considered in the context of Piñero's writings, can be seen as a work that draws on the poet's iconoclastic humor, as a parody of an Annunciation scene analogous to Piñero's "The Book of Genesis According to St. Miguelito," a satiric poem that credits God with the creation of ghettos.
Ultimately, *The Annunciation According to Mickey Pñero* cannot be evaluated on the basis of how well Wong followed the plot of Pñero’s play, Genet’s book, or biblical accounts of the Annunciation, for that matter. The complexity of this work refuses a single interpretation, and Wong has declined to comment on its meaning. However, the importance of the painting is apparent in the context of Wong’s career as an artist. *The Annunciation According to Mickey Pñero* set the precedent for Wong’s series of jail paintings and his works on the subject of homoerotic love, the most famous of which are his series of kissing firemen. Moreover, *The Annunciation According to Mickey Pñero* offers a unique contribution to the treatment of the annunciation theme in the history of twentieth-century painting. When Wong created another version of this painting in 1988, *Cupcake and Paco [Corot] (unillustrated)*, he further contextualized it within the discourse of art history by placing it in an elaborate gold frame that bore the name plaque of Barbizon landscape painter Jean Baptiste-Camille Corot.

Pñero and Wong ended their collaboration sometime in 1984: “He [Pñero] just didn’t come home one day....Then I read that he was in Los Angeles.” During the poet’s absence from Loisaida, Wong painted *Portrait of Mickey Pñero at Ridge Street and Stanton*, the second portrait in which Pñero is depicted reciting “A Lower East Side Poem.” Dressed in a suit and tie, Pñero strikes a handsome figure against a night sky ablaze with reddish hues. *Mickey Pñero at Ridge Street and Stanton* is Wong’s best treatment of “A Lower East Side Poem.” The eight ball, razor, screwdriver, beer can, and brick heart beating back bullets from a loaded gun above Pñero’s head vividly allude to the tough life of crime and vice described in the poem:

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A thief, a junkie I've been
committed every known sin
Jews and Gentiles...Bums and Men
of style...run away child
police shooting wild...
mother’s futile wails...pushers
making sales...dope wheelers
& cocaine dealers...smoking pot
streets are hot & feed off those who bleed to death...
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all that’s true
all that’s true
all that is true
but this ain’t no lie
when I ask that my ashes be scattered thru
the Lower East Side.15
34. Portrait of Mickey Piñero at Ridge Street and Stanton, 1985, Acrylic on canvas, 72 x 72". Collection of Joel Cooper. Photo: Scott Wolff
When Piñero returned from Los Angeles, he and Wong assumed a distant friendship. And, sadly, the event that catalyzed Wong to create his final major portrait of Piñero was the poet’s death." Penitentiary Fox (1988; left) is Wong's memorial to Piñero's immortal gifts as a playwright and poet. Here lies Piñero before Ossining Penitentiary (Sing Sing), the prison he entered to serve his sentence for armed robbery, from which he later emerged having written Short Eyes, named best American play of the 1973-74 season by the New York Drama Critics' Circle. Echoing the words of those who have since hailed Short Eyes for exposing how race, class, and sexual politics figure in the construction of power relationships among prisoners, Wong cracks Sing Sing's walls wide open to reveal portraits of former inmates who made up the play's original multiethnic cast. With eyes half-closed and head cocked to one side, Piñero appears to be dreaming the scene above him. But the poet is not smiling. The sorrow on Piñero's face conveys the gravity of what he has experienced and written. The inscription bearing the date of his birth and death testify to the finite nature of his existence. Like the poet's text, Wong's final portrait of Piñero is rendered with unsettling honesty and brutal imagination. In Penitentiary Fox the tears that were held back in La Vida are passionately shed.

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FOOTNOTES
1. Oscar Lewis's classic ethnography on Puerto Rican working-class life is also titled La Vida. Wong does not recall ever having reading this book, but it is possible that he came across it and stored the title in his memory. See Oscar Lewis, La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty—San Juan and New York (New York: Random House, 1966).
3. Piñero's ashes were spread throughout the Lower East Side in a ceremony conducted by the Nuyorican Poets. Wong attended the ceremony and took pictures of the wake. The portrait of Amiri Baraka in La Vida was drawn from that series of photographs. For a full description of Piñero's wake, see Miguel Algarin's introduction to Aloud: Voices from the Nuyorican Poets Cafe (New York: Henry Holt, 1994), pp. 5-8.
6. Fort Apache: The Bronx was picketed by several community groups for portraying the South Bronx as a site of crime and drug addiction. Piñero's participation in the movie was criticized within the Puerto Rican community for perpetuating the negative stereotypes of Latino men as drug dealers. Nevertheless, Fort Apache was a box office hit and Piñero's line in the movie, "I'm gonna rock your world, make your planets twirl," became a popular underground expression.
7. In an 1984 interview, Wong related his sign language paintings to traditional Chinese art: "Basically I'm a Chinese landscape painter.... If you look at all the Chinese landscapes in the museum they have writing in the sky. They write a poem in the sky, and I do that, too." See Yasmin Ramirez, "Writing in the Sky: An Interview with Martin Wong," East Village Eye, (October 1984:25).
8. The distinction between the collaborative and non-collaborative works is that with the former, Piñero handed Wong an unpublished text that only appears in the painting; with the latter, Wong selected a Piñero text from his published work.
9. Miguel Algarin and Miguel Piñero, eds., Nuyorican Poetry: An Anthology of Puerto Rican Words and Feelings (New York: William Morrow, 1975), p. 11. Although the Nuyorican poetry movement originated in the Puerto Rican community, the group's emphasis on the hybrid identity of New York Puerto Ricans fostered a sense that Nuyoricans are allied with other ethnic minorities and progressive Anglo-Americans. Co-founded by Miguel Piñero and Miguel Algarin in 1974, the Nuyorican Poets Cafe has always championed multiethnic collaborations based on the belief that the Nuyorican identity is more of a state of mind than an ethnic birthright. The collaboration between Wong and Piñero is therefore consistent with Nuyorican praxis and Wong's paintings are categorically Nuyorican works of art.
10. From a conversation I had with Wong in 1996.
11. Although Martin Wong's paternal grandfather was Mexican, no one in his immediate family spoke Spanish. Wong's assimilation into Loisaida can be seen as a reconnection to his Chinese-Latino heritage. However, the artist maintains that he has always behaved more like a "tourist" in the neighborhood; the only time he truly feels "Spanish" is in the Puerto Rican Day parade.
15. Piñero, La Bodega Sold Dreams, pp. 7-8.
16. Wong has made two small portraits of Piñero since his death: one is of Piñero writing; the other shows the poet as a young man with a large afro. They are untitled and remain in Wong's private collection.
17. Wong credits James Rivera with providing schema for the bottom left-hand part of Penitentiary Fox. James Rivera was an artist who had served time in jail and sold several prison drawings to Wong, who later used them as a basis for his series of jail paintings.
36. Lock-Up, 1985, Acrylic on canvas, 92 x 70". Collection of Marie Chun, Calabasas, CA. Photo: Adam Reich
37. *Down for the Count*, 1985, Acrylic on canvas, 83 x 107". Collection of Joel Cooper. Photo: Adam Reich
39. Sacred Shroud of Pepe Turcel, 1990,
Acrylic on canvas, 23 1/2 x 23 1/2”.
Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Larry Lamay
40. Chinese Telephone Exchange, 1992, Acrylic on canvas, 46 x 60". Courtesy of the artist and P.P.O.W., New York, NY. Photo: Adam Reich