

**Queens Museum and No Longer Empty Present *Mel Chin: All Over the Place***

*A major survey of the conceptual artist's extraordinary, four decades-long career, which will be presented at various locations across New York City and premier four ambitious new commissions that include Chin's first mixed reality project*



Installation view, *The Funk & Wag from A to Z* (2012). Photo by Michael Stravato.

**April 8 - August 12, 2018**

**Exhibition Opening: April 8, 2018 from 2 - 5 PM**

**Queens, N.Y.** - [Mel Chin: All Over the Place](#) is the conceptual artist's first survey organized by a New York City-based institution. Co-produced by the Queens Museum and [No Longer Empty](#), the exhibition will span Chin's nearly four decades of artistic practice and include four ambitious new commissions: *Flint Fit*, *Soundtrack*, *Unmoored*, and *Wake*. The exhibition will spread out over a number of sites in New York City including the galleries and permanent collection at the Queens Museum; Times Square; and the Broadway-Lafayette subway station, where Chin's permanent work *Signal* is installed.

The exhibition features more than 70 works, including drawings, paintings, sculptures, installations, videos, documentation, and public artworks. It is organized around key themes that have resonated throughout Chin's career, taking a non-chronological approach to his work over time, presenting an infinite loop of the artist's thinking about our world and how we choose to occupy it. *All Over the Place* is curated by co-founder and chief curator of No Longer Empty, Manon Slome, and Laura Raicovich.

Chin's extraordinary range of artistic approaches and unusual use of media allow his work to be malleable and defy classification. Environmental injustice, history, cartography, and ecology are some of the disciplines that intersect in Chin's politically charged work. He investigates how art can promote social awareness and animate representation; and how collaborative teamwork can posit community-based solutions to ecological and socio-political crises. As a result of this teamwork, Chin's work challenges the idea of the artist as the exclusive creative force behind an artwork.

A prime example of his collaborative work is [Flint Fit](#), 2018, a new commission for *All Over the Place*. *Flint Fit* is envisioned as applying the strengths of places, as an action in the face of crisis, connecting New

York City; Flint, Michigan; and Greensboro, North Carolina in time, function, and fashion. Demonstrating the interconnectedness of resources, Chin's concept was brought to life with the help of many collaborators. The *Flint Fit* installation even activates the Queens Museum's 1939 room-size topographical model of the watershed for New York City.

In Flint, as the water is contaminated with lead, residents must use bottled water for cooking, washing, and drinking, creating countless, constantly-accumulating empty plastic vessels. At Chin's instigation, over 90,000 used water bottles were collected over the course of six weeks in Fall 2017. They were then sorted and sent to Unifi, Inc, a textile manufacturer in Greensboro, North Carolina where they were cleaned, shredded and transformed into REPREVE recycled fiber. The REPREVE fiber was sent to Mount Vernon Mills and Texollini where it was woven and knit into fabric. Renowned New York fashion designer and Michigan native, [Tracy Reese](#), designed a capsule collection for *Flint Fit*, using this fabric, inspired by the power and necessity of water, the manufacturing history of Flint, and the resiliency of the Flint community. Reese's creations were brought to life with the sustainable bottle fabric and the help of [St Luke N.E.W. Life Center](#), a nonprofit in Flint that provides local employment for women, that oversaw the sewing and manufacturing of the garments via its commercial sewing program. The *Flint Fit* collection will be unveiled at a fashion event at the exhibition's opening on April 8, and the prototypes will be on display alongside a fragile Flint River by Chin, overlaid on the Museum's watershed model of New York City.

"Mel Chin is deeply deserving of this city-wide celebration of his work," say Laura Raicovich and Manon Slome, co-curators of *All Over the Place*. "We have both known Mel's work for years, and are thrilled to bring his provocative and profound investigations of the ways in which we live, our socio-economic contexts, our relationship to our surrounding environments, how power skews the scales, and how poetry can intervene, to a broad public. In all of the works on view at the Queens Museum and throughout New York City, Mel delivers exquisite experiences of art while confronting devastating social and political conditions; he never fails to send a powerful message. We live in turbulent times where reminders of climate change and socio-economic instability must be addressed—and artists such as Mel provide new ways to see these circumstances and take action."

Slome adds, "*All Over The Place* exemplifies No Longer Empty's commitment to creating participatory platforms for art and exchange activated across spaces and places, whether those be physical, geographical, digital, or imagined."

As much as *Flint Fit* depends on complexity and collaboration, Chin's stand-alone sculptures and two-dimensional works often juxtapose unlikely elements to reveal alternative, and often dark, narratives. In a series called *Unauthorized Collaborations*, Chin acquired 19th- and 20th-century painted portraits from flea markets and eBay, and rearranged the images, shifting the portrait's original meaning dramatically. In *Dominance and Affection*, 2012, for example, a hand carefully cut from the woman's portrait now delicately caresses her husband's cheek, while one of the husband's hands has been placed over his wife's mouth. The Surrealist qualities of these works are also found in other sculptures in the exhibition, such as *Lecture Ax*, 1988 (lecture notes honed into an axe head) and *The Elementary Object (For Corsica)*, 1993 (a tobacco pipe that is actually a bomb).



Mel Chin and his installation *Sea to See* (2014). Courtesy Mint Museum of Art/Mel Chin Studio.

*All Over the Place* is not organized chronologically, but attempts to contend with Chin's intricate conceptual thinking, layered processes, and practical instincts through four sections that group works according to affinities and interrelations. These four sections contain both long-term collaborative works and stand-alone sculptures.

### **(I) Destroying Angels of Our Creation**

This section forms the heart of the exhibition, both conceptually and physically, presenting works that embody Chin's understanding of American democracy as a two-faced ideal, as full of inspiring potential as it is deeply flawed.

- *Our Strange Flower of Democracy*, 2005, an intricate bamboo sculpture in the form of a massive bomb, hovers prettily and ominously out of reach.
- *Safehouse*, 2008-2010, a giant bank safe door that originally marked a New Orleans home in a neighborhood at the center of that city's lead crisis.
- *Fundred Project*, 2008-ongoing, a collection of hundreds of thousands of dollar bill templates embellished by adults and school children across the nation over the course of ten years to combat lead poisoning and to spur legislative action in the US Congress.

### **(II) The Artifice of Facts and Belief**

Chin asks how knowledge is assembled: who is it for and who tells the story? Here, he relies on the Surrealist focus on collage and the subconscious to make new meaning.

- The room-sized *The Funk and Wag from A to Z*, 2012, reconfigures original illustrations from an entire encyclopedia into gorgeously rendered collages, highlighting the contradictions and plurality of interpretation within an existing system.
- *QWERTY Courbet*, 2001, a computer keyboard configured in the shape of Gustave Courbet's famous painting *Origin of the World*, 1865, dares visitors to touch the forbidden formation; their typed thoughts can only be read behind a velvet curtain.

### **(III) Levity's Wounds and Gravity's Well**

An exploration of the legacies of colonialism, racism, xenophobia, war, and their relation to the circulation of goods and ideas that run deep in Chin's work.

- *Cabinet of Craving*, 2012, is a vitrine in spider form holding a china tea set on a silver tray in its abdomen, connecting English and Chinese desires that prompted an illegal opium trade, resulting in subjugation and mass addiction.
- The video game *KNOWMAD*, 2000, maps current sites of conflict in Central Asia and the Middle East. Tribal carpets in the installation and in the game itself connect the knowledge-sharing of nomads and the forces of popular culture.

#### **(IV) Cruel Light of the Sun**

Presenting examples of Chin's extensive exploration of climate change and environmental degradation.

- *Landscape*, 1991, a room with various artistic depictions of "nature" sharing museum space with seeping detritus of human consumption.
- *Sea to See*, 2014, visualizes ocean data in the form of a walk-in video installation.

Installed in the Queens Museum's famed *Panorama of the City of New York* is Chin's *9-11/9-11*, 2007, a film and drawings inspired by the fact that the terror attack on New York City and the overthrow of the democratically elected president of Chile in 1973 both took place on the same date. The film is installed above the Twin Towers, which remain on the *Panorama*. Amidst The Neustadt Collection's display of Tiffany lamps, on long-term loan to the Queens Museum, Chin has inserted a lamp of his own that harkens to his work on lead poisoning. Finally, among the Museum's collection of 1939-40 and 1964-65 World's Fair ephemera, Chin's family photos of the 1939 and 1964 fair, as well as a very unusual typewriter, can be found.

"With our populace mired in the swamp of polarization on climate change and other realities, calling forth irrefutable parts of our past may be a way to encourage conversation about our shared future. Manifestations in unexpected venues, some as direct actions, and some as surreal provocations, can serve as catalytic structures if they have enough moxie to animate the necessary dialectics," explains Mel Chin. "To live means to leave traces, but we must also have a critical approach on top of that ephemeral evidence; conduct an investigation of oneself." He continues, "Be bold. Nurture the smallest forms of life and ideas. Job descriptions have not changed: rekindle the search for the buried questions, elevate nuance, unshackle some empathy, and free the devil in a detail. Onward to the entanglements on the streets, the interrupted silences in the museums, and the echoes of waves in the digitized air."

Hitomi Iwasaki, Director of Exhibitions/Curator at the Queens Museum says, "Mel's practice is in the truest sense artistic alchemy. It's a complex amalgam of symbolism and abstraction – drawn, painted, and sculpted, his artworks are laboriously produced, incredibly tactile physical entities. His work brings forth a view of the world both known and unbeknownst to us, and is a powerful wake-up call for us to use what we are all endowed with: vision and imagination, thoughts and emotion, expression and deliberation. It speaks to all of us, regardless of age and walks of life, of the current state of humanity. Following exhibitions of the work of Joan Jonas and Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *All Over the Place* continues the Queens Museum's tradition of presenting mature artists' work in depth for the first time in New York City."

#### ***All Over the Place: Beyond the Queens Museum***

*All Over the Place* unfolds over the spring and summer at multiple locations across the city. In a major partnership with [Times Square Arts](#), two new artworks will open on July 11 in Times Square, *Wake*, commissioned by Times Square Arts and *Unmoored*, developed in collaboration with Microsoft. *Wake* is a significant sculptural component at the heart of Times Square, which evokes the ribs of a whale or a shipwreck at the bottom of the sea. Visitors can move through the work and encounter the animatronic

24-foot-tall female figure modeled after Jenny Lind, operatic superstar of the 19th century, which was built in collaboration with students in the Engineering, Art & Art History, and Drama programs at the University of North Carolina at Asheville. The figure leans precariously forward, face turned skyward, echoing visitors and their upward gazes towards the billboards in Times Square. Her likeness was once affixed to the clipper ship USS *Nightingale*. *Wake* calls forth both the city's triumphs and the complicated layers of its past; a New York City that has become the center of trade, commerce, finance, entertainment, and tourism also has a complex history that included the shipping (by the USS *Nightingale*, among others) of guns and slaves that augmented this burgeoning city's economy. Prompted by a recent report of a whale killed by a collision with a ship, this work emerged from an observation that domination and exploitation of the seas continues today.

The physical presence of *Wake* serves as an entry point into *Unmoored*, Chin's first mixed reality (MR) project, also situated in Times Square. *Unmoored* explores a potential future where global warming has gone unchecked. Developed in collaboration with [Microsoft](#), the artwork creates a moving and surreal experience in Times Square that blends the physical world with the digital world.

"Times Square Art's commission of *Wake* in collaboration with the Queens Museum and No Longer Empty provides an enormous platform for Mel Chin and this spectacular installation that will engage visitors and locals to Times Square with an incredibly thought-provoking piece of public art that will be enhanced by the mixed reality of *Unmoored*. You will see many more initiatives of this kind that engage with timely social issues and reinforce Times Square as a place of culture and creativity in the years to come," says Debra Simon, Director of Public Art at Times Square Arts.

*All Over the Place* will also extend into the Broadway-Lafayette subway station where Chin's permanent installation *Signal* was completed in 1997 as part of MTA's Arts for Transit Broadway-Lafayette station rehabilitation. For this project, Chin's concept was to insert Native People's presence, as a living culture, onto the Dutch-derived tile infrastructure found in MTA stations. Broadway follows the Wickquasgeck Trail of the Native Americans that was stopped by the Dutch colonists' fort wall (Wall Street). For the installation Chin designed light "signals" patterned after "Council Fire" badges, masonic symbols reimagined by 18th Century Iroquois silversmiths. Stainless steel cones at the bases of structural columns burn, or light up, when trains approach. A key essential element was an authorized contemporary message from the First Nations that needed to come from the Haudenosaunee, or the Six Nations of the Iroquois. Chin appealed to G. Peter Jemison (Heron Clan-Seneca) to work with the Six Nations and use smoke colored tile on white to create the official wampum-belt-inspired statement. The message on the walls today affirms they are here, holding strong and extending peace.

On the occasion of *All Over the Place*, a program on May 13, 2018 at the Broadway/Lafayette site with members of the Six Nations will rededicate the piece and their contributions to the City of New York.

Accessible to anyone with an internet connection is new commission *Soundtrack*, a work of collaborative sound art initiated by Mel Chin with project curator Jace Clayton (aka DJ /rupture) who, along with four local artists, transform field recordings from the routes of the 1, 5, 7, E and F trains into compositions that bridge the mechanical and the human. It will be made available via the Queens Museum website and a listening station within Chin's exhibition.

## Special programs

Second Saturdays is a series of dynamic public programs presented alongside *All Over the Place*, which will run on April 14, June 9, July 14, and August 11. Each day will include a full day of events produced in conversation with *All Over the Place*'s four thematic sections at the Queens Museum. Experiences will range from panel discussions to performances, poetry readings, experimental lectures and workshops throughout the day.

Programming also includes [Open Engagement](#)—an annual conference on the intersections of art and social justice—which will take place at the Queens Museum from May 11 - 13 exploring the pertinent theme of sustainability.

## About Mel Chin

Mel Chin (b. 1951, Houston, TX) is a conceptual artist known for the broad range of approaches in his art, including works that require multidisciplinary, collaborative teamwork and works that conjoin cross-cultural aesthetics with complex ideas. Chin received a B.S. from Peabody College, Nashville, TN. His work has been widely exhibited nationally, and internationally, including at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; Menil Collection, Houston, TX; Storefront for Art and Architecture, New York, NY; The Fabric Workshop, Philadelphia, PA; Swarthmore College, Philadelphia, PA; Station Museum, Houston, TX; Frederieke Taylor Gallery, New York, NY; Museum Het Domein, Sittard Netherlands; Thomas Rehbein Galerie, Cologne, Germany; The Nave Museum, Victoria, TX; Asheville Art Museum, Asheville, NC; and New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans, LA, among others. Chin has received many grants and awards, including those from National Endowment for the Arts, The Pollock-Krasner Foundation, Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation, Creative Capital, New York Foundation for the Arts, Joan Mitchell Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, Guggenheim Foundation, among others, and several honorary doctorates. Chin lives in Egypt Township, North Carolina.

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Visual identity and design for *Mel Chin: All Over the Place* by LOT-EK.

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### **About the Queens Museum**

The Queens Museum in Flushing Meadows Corona Park features contemporary art, events of hyperlocal and international impact, and educational programs reflecting the diversity of Queens and New York City. Changing exhibitions present the work of emerging and established artists, both local and global, that often explore contemporary social issues, as well as the rich history of its site. In November 2013, the Museum reopened with an expanded footprint of 105,000 square feet, a soaring skylit atrium, a suite of daylight galleries, nine artist studios, and flexible event space. The Museum works outside its walls through engagement initiatives ranging from multilingual outreach and educational opportunities for adult immigrants, to a plethora of community led art and activism projects. The Museum's educational programming connects with school children, teens, families, seniors as well as those individuals with physical and mental disabilities. The Queens Museum is located on property owned in full by the City of

New York, and its operation is made possible in part by public funds provided through the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.

Visit [www.queensmuseum.org](http://www.queensmuseum.org). Follow us at @queensmuseum.

### **About No Longer Empty**

No Longer Empty activates engagement with art and social issues through site-responsive exhibitions, education, and public programming located in distinctive urban settings. This approach creates participatory platforms for art and exchange that explore the layered histories and critical issues of each unique place. Since 2009, NLE has welcomed over 165,000 visitors, including 16,000 children to our transformed sites, from storefronts to landmarked buildings including a mansion in the Bronx, a historic bank in Queens, an iconic music store in the East Village, former officers' houses on Governors Island, and a new affordable living complex in Sugar Hill, Harlem.

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### **About Times Square Arts**

Times Square Arts collaborates with contemporary artists to experiment and engage with one of the world's most iconic urban places.

Times Square Arts, the public art program of the Times Square Alliance, is the largest public platform for innovative contemporary performance and visual arts. With 312,000 daily visitors to New York City's Times Square, it is one of the highest profile public arts programs and since its inception, Times Square Arts has featured works by a diverse group of more than 150 prominent and emerging artists.

Visit [www.TimesSquareNYC.org/arts](http://www.TimesSquareNYC.org/arts)