

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 three ambitious commissions that includes Chin's first augmented reality project



Installation view, *The Funk & Wag from A to Z* (2012)

April 8 - Aug 12, 2018

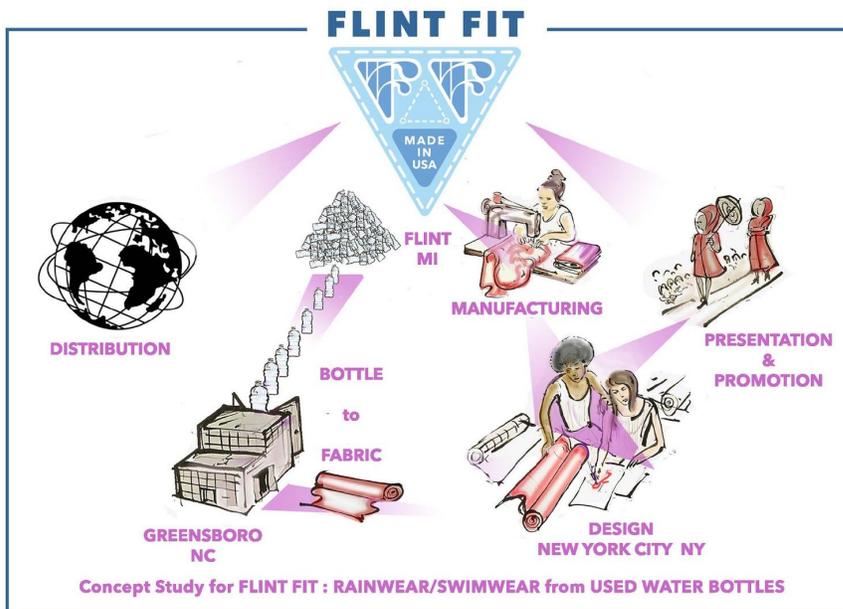
Opening: April 8, 2018

Queens, N.Y. - *Mel Chin: All Over the Place* is the first major presentation in New York City of conceptual artist Mel Chin in more than 20 years. Co-produced by the Queens Museum and No Longer Empty, the career survey will span Chin's nearly four decades of artistic practice and include three ambitious new commissions. *All Over the Place* will spread out over a number of exhibition sites in New York City including the Queens Museum; Times Square; Broadway-Lafayette subway station, where Chin's permanent work *Signal* is installed; as well as other locations currently in discussion.

All Over the Place features more than 70 works, including drawings, paintings, sculptures, installations, videos, documentation, and public works. The exhibition will be organized around key themes that have resonated throughout Chin's career, celebrating his practice of constant mutation and evolution, and taking a non-chronological approach to his work over time. *All Over the Place* is curated by Queens Museum Director Laura Raicovich, and Manon Slome, Co-Founder and Chief Curator of No Longer Empty.

Chin's extraordinary range of artistic approaches and unusual use of media allows his work to be malleable and largely unclassifiable. Environmental injustice, history, cartography and ecology are some of the disciplines that intersect in Mel's politically charged work that investigates how art can promote social awareness, animate representation and even bringing about scientific technology. His formal configurations are layered with philosophy and psychology in investigations combining the scientific, mythic and alchemic. Chin's work includes projects that require multi-disciplinary, collaborative teamwork in order to posit community-based solutions to ecological and socio-political crises, as well as individual works

linking cross-cultural aesthetics and complex ideas. As a result of this teamwork, Chin's work challenges the idea of the artist as the exclusive creative force behind an artwork.



Project plan, *Flint Fit* (2017)

All Over the Place introduces three newly commissioned projects, *Flint Fit*, *Unmoored*, and *Wake*. For *Flint Fit* (2017), Chin has organized a complex triangulation of places and processes. Thousands of empty plastic water bottles that residents of Flint, Michigan have been forced to use in response to lead crisis, will be collected with support from [Culture Lab Detroit](#), and sent to a processing facility in Greensboro, North Carolina. There, they will be transformed into thread and fabric. Renowned fashion designer and Michigan native Tracy Reese will design the Flint Fit collection inspired by the concept of water. Her creations will be brought to life with the sustainable bottle fabric and the help of [Saint Luke's N.E.W. Life Center](#), a nonprofit in Flint that provides local employment for women, who will oversee the sewing and manufacturing of the garments via their commercial sewing program. The Flint Fit Collection will be unveiled at a fashion show at the Unisphere outside the Queens Museum, and the prototypes will be on display alongside a model of Flint's watershed, made by Chin, and the Museum's watershed model of New York City.

Unmoored (Summer 2018) is the artist's first augmented reality (AR) project, situated in Times Square. It is an exploration of AR's capacity to form unprecedented phenomenon for mass public absorption, which will magnify climate scientists' collective projection of a diluvian future. The hundreds of thousands of people that pass through Times Square every week will be able to look up through the screens of their phones and tablets, using a downloadable app, and witness the presence of an unrivaled spectacle.

In a major partnership with [Times Square Arts](#), a new project, *Wake* (Summer 2018) is being commissioned. The artwork will draw audiences in via a significant sculptural component at the heart of Times Square, evoking the hull of a shipwreck crossed with the skeletal remains of a

marine mammal, bleached by erosion and time. Visitors will be able to move through the work and encounter the animatronic 21 ft. female figure facing the structure accurately derived from a figurehead of Jenny Lind, the operatic superstar of her time. Her likeness was once affixed to the clipper ship USS Nightingale, that was among those ships that took harbor and were part of the historic commerce of New York City. She will lean precariously forward, face turned skyward, echoing visitors and their upward gazes to the billboards in Times Square.

“With our populous 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,¹” 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.”

The artwork 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.

Chin is developing these new works with the students of Engineering and New Media at the University of North Carolina Asheville while he is the Black Mountain College Legacy Fellow.

“Mel Chin is deeply deserving of this sprawling city-wide celebration of his work. Mel has devoted his career to investigating 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—all notions that we are committed to exploring at the Queens Museum,” said Laura Raicovich. “Works like *Flint Fit*, which deliver sustainable solutions while confronting devastating social and political conditions, 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 Chin provide new ways to see these circumstances and take action.”

“No Longer Empty is thrilled to be working again with Mel Chin for this important and timely showing of his work in New York. In this nightmarish political climate, where power turns a blind eye to corruption and social injustice, we need, more than ever, the voices of artists like Mel who bring attention to the urgency of climate change, to the criminality of lead poisoning of our most vulnerable populations and who are willing to eschew personal fame for the power of collaborative action. I am truly honored to be co-curating this exhibition with Laura Raicovich and the team of the Queens Museum,” says Manon Slome, Chief Curator and Co-Founder of No Longer Empty.

¹ Walter Benjamin, *Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century*

“Times Square Art’s commission of *Wake* in collaboration with the Queens Museum and No Longer Empty is the inauguration of a three-year project that provides an enormous platform to artists and connects Times Square with cultural institutions around New York City. Mel Chin’s installation, *Wake*, is a significant launch of a public art initiative that engages with timely social issues and reinforces Times Square as a place of culture and creativity,” says Debra Simon, Director of Public Art at Times Square Arts.

The entirety of the Queens Museum’s temporary exhibition space will be dedicated to *All Over the Place*, with work from Chin’s 40-year career organized thematically in the following sections.

Democracy and Its Discontents

- *Our Strange Flower of Democracy* (2005): A flowering, hanging, to-scale bamboo sculpture of the devastating “daisy cutter” bomb, the Blu-82, which was used by the American army to blast helicopter landing zones in the jungles of Vietnam and the deserts of Afghanistan as an anti-personnel and psy-ops weapon. This work will be installed in the Museum’s central Skylight Gallery.
- *9-11/9-11* (2007): A film that simultaneously considers the 2001 terrorist attacks of the World Trade Center and the U.S.-supported military overthrow of Chilean President Salvador Allende that took place on the same day 28 years prior. The film will be projected onto a suspended screen above Downtown Manhattan on the Museum’s renowned 10,000 sq ft architectural scale model, the *Panorama of the City of New York*.

Alternative Knowledge

- *Qwerty-Courbet* (2001): Chin’s version of Gustave Courbet’s *L’Origine du Monde* embeds functioning computer keyboard pieces, corresponding exactly to the masterpiece, into the gallery wall. It invites visitors to touch the art and type a message that will be displayed on a nearby screen, hidden behind a curtain of red velvet.
- *The Funk & Wag from A to Z* (2012): A mausoleum-esque meditation on reviving images, this room-scale piece is made from the complete set of a vintage encyclopedia remounted as floor-to-ceiling volumes. Page after page presents contradictory layers and logic of personal imagination, and public information, in black and white. Every image was extracted from a 1950s *Funk & Wagnall’s Universal Standard Encyclopedia*, and reconfigured in collages to unleash the potentiality of images trapped by historical context.

Environment

- *Sea to See* (2014): A contemplation on the 100th Anniversary of the Panama Canal refocuses on the oceans instead of the Canal. Massive twin-hemispheres of glass seem to hold back the cascading flows of data reconfigured as animation, offering two unique cinematic portraits—of the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans. Utilizing multiple sets of scientific data, *Sea to Sea* seeks to compel a deep interest in the science of the oceans’ fragile natures.
- *L’Arctique est Paris: The Arctic is Paris* (2015): A film created during the 2015 Climate Change convention features a dreamscape of Parisian poodles pulling a Greenlandic Inuit subsistence hunter on his sled through the French capital. In parts delightful and

sobering, the film carries the gravity of the Inuit's message, his witness to climate change foretelling the collapse of his culture, and his pursuit to convey the environmental connections between Greenland, Paris, and the world.

- *Flint Fit* (2017)

This section will also extend past the museum's walls into Times Square through *Unmoored* (2017).



Installation view *Sea to See* (2014)

Obscure Objects of Desire

- *Night Rap* (1993): This is an actual police officer's baton retrofitted with an electronic microphone. The nightstick has the capacity to do damage associated with unchecked brutality, or, when switched on, to amplify creativity.
- *Cabinet of Craving* (2012): This spider-like sculpture, with its vitrine belly, crouches in a pounce-ready posture. It is an amalgamation of Chinese and Victorian furniture, adapted ancient motifs, national symbols, and associations. The combination of materials—black lacquer, carved oak, antique English bone ware, a footed silver tray—connects the desires that drove one empire's craving for rare capital and another's dealing in complete colonial subjugation. This is a refined nightmare of addictions that shaped historical destinies.

All Over the Place will develop extensive educational programs to complement the exhibition at the Queens Museum, in Times Square, and at other sites. This will include programming as part of [Open Engagement](#)—an annual conference on the intersections of art and social justice—which will take place at the Queens Museum in 2018 exploring the pertinent theme of Sustainability.

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About Mel Chin

Mel Chin, from Houston, Texas, is known for the broad range of approaches in his art, including works that require multi-disciplinary, collaborative teamwork and works that conjoin cross-cultural aesthetics with complex ideas. In 1989, he developed *Revival Field*, a project that was a pioneer in the field of “green remediation,” the use of plants to remove toxic, heavy metals from the soil. From 1995 to 1998, Chin formed a collective that produced *In the Name of the Place*, a conceptual public art project conducted on the popular prime-time TV series, *Melrose Place*. In *KNOWMAD*, Chin worked with software engineers to create a video game based on rug patterns of nomadic people facing cultural disappearance, and his hand-drawn, 24-minute film, *9-11/9-11*, won the prestigious Pedro Sienna Award—the “Oscar” of Chile—for best animation in 2007. A 10-year effort, called *Fundred*, focuses on the value of individual representation and its capacity to push for the prevention of childhood lead-poisoning through art-making. Chin is also well-known for his iconic sculptures and installations, works that often address the importance of memory and collective identity, and for inserting art into unlikely places, including destroyed homes, toxic landfills, and most recently, for working with advanced augmented reality (AR) technology, investigating how art can provoke greater social awareness and responsibility.

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 schoolchildren, 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. 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.

Visit www.nolongerempty.org

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