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Press contacts: Devon Britt-Darby (Blaffer Art Museum), [dlbritt@uh.edu](mailto:dlbritt@uh.edu); Connie McAllister (CAMH), [cmcallister@camh.org](mailto:cmcallister@camh.org); Rose Rougeau (Asia Society), [rrougeau@asiasociety.org](mailto:rrougeau@asiasociety.org)

MAJOR MEL CHIN SURVEY TRAVELS TO FOUR HOUSTON MUSEUMS ON JAN. 17  
WORKS ON VIEW RANGE FROM INTIMATE DRAWINGS TO AMBITIOUS SITE-SPECIFIC PROJECTS

HOUSTON—Blaffer Art Museum, the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, Asia Society Texas Center and the Station Museum of Contemporary Art are proud to collaborate on the Houston presentation of *Mel Chin: Rematch*, the most expansive survey of Chin's work to date and a homecoming for one of the city's most renowned artists.

Organized by the New Orleans Museum of Art, the traveling retrospective will launch its Houston run on Saturday, January 17, 2015 with a roving opening at all four venues. Chin will present a staggered series of artist talks throughout the day, starting with Blaffer at noon, Asia Society at 2 p.m., and CAMH at 4 p.m., followed by a party at the Station from 6-9 p.m. *Mel Chin: Rematch* continues through March 21 at Blaffer, and through April 19 at CAMH and Asia Society Texas Center. The website <http://rematchhouston.com> will serve as an online portal to the Houston presentation's four components.

Working across media including sculpture, video, drawing, painting, collage, land art and performance art, the Houston-born Chin has adopted mutability as his operating premise over his four-decade career, with works ranging from intimate sculptures and drawings steeped in the legacy of Dada and Surrealism to ambitious site-specific, research-driven, collaborative projects involving scientists, fellow artists and community members.

"Operating in the legacy of Marcel Duchamp, Chin allows his ideas to dictate the form of his art, yet he looks toward biological and evolutionary models as the underlying framework for his practice," writes exhibition curator Miranda Lash, curator of contemporary art at the Speed Art Museum in Louisville, Kentucky. "Chin describes his willingness to change as a survival strategy, no different from that of a cell, or a virus, which, upon encountering danger or an obstacle, adapts in order to continue reproducing."

While some of Chin's best-known works reflect his concern for social justice, the exhibition corrects a common misunderstanding of his mission—that he is out to save the world or make people behave a certain way. On the contrary, he has said that he views art as "a catalytic force" that fosters the availability of options in order "to allow things to happen."

Avoiding a chronological presentation, the retrospective's 60 artworks highlight thematic strands that underscore Chin's broad range of subject matter, materials and formal approaches. Chin describes the survey as an opportunity to revisit, reframe and battle his previous conceptions. "Points of view established in the past are no longer up to date," he says. "It's time for a rematch."

**Rematch at Blaffer Art Museum**

The 31 works on view at Blaffer Art Museum include documentation of Chin's major science-based projects, most famously *Revival Field* (begun in 1990), in which he worked with agronomist Rufus Chaney on monumental "sculptures" that used phytoremediation—the use of metal-accumulating plants to absorb toxins from contaminated soil—as a reductive technique, similar to the way a sculptor carves away marble. Chin used the term "invisible aesthetics" to describe the transformation occurring under the soil and between various collaborators and civic agencies in what became the first replicable field test of its kind.

Chin's research on soil again bore fruit when he turned his attention to lead contamination levels in New Orleans, where dust from paint scraping and gasoline exhaust have settled into the ground and remained concentrated at unhealthy levels around nearly two-thirds of the city's households.

Alarmed by the link between lead poisoning and violent crime, particularly given New Orleans's high murder rate, in 2006 Chin devised *Operation Paydirt/The Fundred Dollar Bill Project*, an ongoing interdisciplinary endeavor that continues to generate thousands of children's drawings in an effort to garner funding and support for the development of an effective nationwide method for the remediation of lead contaminated soil. The project has led to collaboration with the Environmental Protection Agency and a major grant in 2011 from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to scientists who are testing soil remediation methods in New Orleans.

Other works on view at Blaffer include *In the Name of the Place: GALA Committee* (1995-97), for which Chin collaborated with the TV series *Melrose Place* to insert socially-engaged artworks into the show's sets and props; selections from Chin's *Erased Currency* (1997) and *Drawn Currency* (2006-08) series; key assemblages introducing recurring themes and materials in Chin's oeuvre; and the large-scale installation *The Funk and Wag from A to Z* (2012) a surrealist arrangement of collages culled from the Funk and Wagnalls encyclopedia.

### **Rematch at CAMH**

The presentation at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston focuses on 19 of Chin's discrete works from the early 1970s as well as his iconic animation *9/11-9/11* (2007) and the documentary *S.O.S Straight Off the Streets* (2004). Among the discrete objects featured are the early work *Bird in a Cage* (1976) and the most recent series of jewelry works entitled *Cluster* (2005-06). *Bird in a Cage* serves as both a tribute to Marcel Duchamp as well as a comment on the extinction of a species. The image is actually a portrait of Martha, the last known carrier pigeon who died in the Cincinnati Zoo in 1914. The more recent work, *Cluster*, bridges the disparate social and political conflicts of the U.S. Civil War with the civil war of Angola and the vast resources that hung in the balance in each instance of conflict. The series, comprised of four intricate pieces, looks at how the greed for material—whether human beings or precious minerals—has had the capacity to decimate both human life and the land from which it emerges.

Throughout his long career, Chin has seamlessly integrated activism into his artistic endeavors. Within this presentation, viewers can trace the multifaceted frameworks from which Chin explores social injustices that range from police brutality to genocide and the commodification of history to the blurring of historical fact. Chin compels viewers to acknowledge the gap that exists between the perspectives of those who inflict and those who have been affected. And, it is within this gap that Chin poses the plausibility of narratives and the conceptual impact of the visual object. As an artist, Chin is masterful in his use of various materials and forms. This presentation shows the artist's extraordinary and prolific talent and keen political prowess.

### **Rematch at Asia Society Texas Center**

Each of the six Mel Chin works on view at Asia Society Texas Center extends the artist's connection to the culture, history and aesthetics of Asia. *KNOWMAD* (1999) is an installation with interactive experiences centered on mapping, borders, nomadism and the encroachment of technology. The complicated political histories across both western and eastern Asia, and America's role in them, frame *Geometry of Wrath* (2005) and *Our Strange Flower of Democracy* (2005). *Scholar's Nightmare* (2001) and *Wheel of Death* (2002) draw on Confucian and Buddhist philosophies, and their ability to both order and blur reality, while *Magnolias in the Moonlight* (1976) draw out the yin and yang principles in nature, and its ongoing influence on artists.

### **Rematch at the Station**

The Station Museum of Contemporary Art will present an early immersive installation entitled *Degrees of Paradise* (1991), a study for the proposed *State of Heaven*, where an immense, floating, hand-knotted carpet, serving as a symbolic and sacrificial sky, will be placed under a directive that parallels the actual destruction of the ozone layer.

### **Catalogue**

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue, which includes essays by Miranda Lash; Eleanor Heartney, critic for *Art in America*; Patricia C. Phillips, Associate Provost at the Rhode Island School of Design; Patricia Covo Johnson, former critic for the *Houston Chronicle*; and Herb Tam, Curator and Director of Exhibitions at the Museum of Chinese in America; and poet Andrei Codrescu. The catalogue will also include an extensive illustrated chronology of Chin's career by Lisa Crossman, PhD, numerous entries on specific artworks, and a comprehensive bibliography.

### **About Mel Chin**

Mel Chin was born in Houston in 1951 and received a Bachelor of Arts from Peabody College in Nashville, Tennessee. He has had solo exhibitions at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (1989), Walker Art Center (1990), The Menil Collection (1991), and Station Museum of Contemporary Art, Houston (2006). Chin has received numerous awards and grants from organizations such as the National Endowment for the Arts, New York State Council for the Arts, Art Matters, Creative Capital, the Penny McCall Foundation, the Pollock/Krasner Foundation, the Joan Mitchell Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation, among others.

### **Organization**

*Mel Chin: Rematch* is organized by the New Orleans Museum of Art. Major support for the exhibition is provided by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the Creating A Living Legacy Program of the Joan Mitchell Foundation, Suzanne Deal Booth and David G. Booth, the Bertuzzi Family Foundation, Susan and Ralph Brennan, and Stephen Reily.

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