



*The Funk & Wag from A to Z* (detail), 2012. Excised printed pages from *The Universal Standard Encyclopedia*, 1953–56, by Wilfred Funk, Inc., archival water-based glue, paper, 524 collages. Courtesy the artist.

## Related Programs

*Free and open to the public unless otherwise noted.  
For a complete list of programs, please visit [camstl.org](http://camstl.org).*

### Artist Talk: Mel Chin

Saturday, September 6, 11:00 am

*Interpreter on site for the hearing impaired.*

### Fundred Dollar Drawing Workshops

Fridays, October 3, November 7, and December 5

7:00–8:00 pm

### Film Screening: *On Company Business*

Friday, November 21, 7:00 pm

### Member Book Club: *Blood Meridian*

Thursday, December 4, 6:00 pm



*Night Rap*, 1994. Polycarbide plastic, steel, wireless transmitter, microphone element, and batteries. Courtesy the artist.



Contemporary Art  
Museum St. Louis  
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# Mel Chin Rematch

Since the 1970s, Mel Chin has influenced a generation of artists and curators interested in conceptual art and political awareness. His oeuvre encompasses a wide variety of media including sculpture, video, drawing, painting, land art, and performance art. Avoiding a trademark style, the common thread through Chin's practice is his conceptual rigor, thoughtful historicism, and concern for social justice. He challenges traditional definitions of ownership and authorship by creating artworks that are often site-specific and collaborative, involving many artists and community members. His land-based work *Revival Field* from the early 1990s advanced the science of using plants to extract toxic metal from soil. Decades later his ongoing project *Operation Paydirt* (begun in 2008) addresses pollution by engaging scientists and the public in finding a solution to childhood lead poisoning. On a parallel track to his site-specific work, Chin has produced a body of sculpture and drawing steeped in the legacy of Dada and Surrealism, particularly the strains of chance, eroticism, and societal critique.

Over the course of his nearly four-decade career Chin has adopted mutability as his operating premise. Mimicking the survival strategy of a virus, he is continuously evolving his methods to adapt to new challenges. In keeping with his desire for self-reexamination, Chin regards this retrospective exhibition as a "rematch" between his past and present selves. He believes that exploring different options in his work expands the potential for himself and others to consider new ideas. These catalytic moments of discovery, whether they occur in the gallery or beyond the museum's walls, are when freedom can begin.

Gallery Guide  
Contemporary Art  
Museum St. Louis

September 5–  
December 20, 2014



**Mel Chin** (b. 1951, Houston) 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). He 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. Chin received a Bachelor of Arts from Peabody College in Nashville, Tennessee.

*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 Reilly.



### Audio Tour

Download the CAM app at [camstl.org/app](http://camstl.org/app) or ask for an iPod at the front desk to hear directly from the artist and curator on the audio tour.



# It's Not Over: An Interview with Mel Chin

On the occasion of CAM's presentation of *Mel Chin: Rematch*, September 5–December 20, 2014, Director Lisa Melandri sat down with Mel Chin to talk about his practice, what it means to be a conceptual artist, and his thoughts on career retrospectives. The following are excerpts from their conversation.

**LM** *Rematch* was organized for the New Orleans Museum of Art, but it's traveling to a lot of different places. I'm always curious about the genesis of the retrospective of an artist. How do you feel about the timing of it? Do you feel like saying, "I'm not dead yet?"

**MC** I feel more like saying, "I'm sorry." [Laughs.] If you live long enough, you've probably offended somebody. And if you make work long enough, you're no fool—you're self-critical. No matter how many people might say, "We love this or that," you've accumulated enough self-criticism to review the work. So the most expedient thing to say is "I'm sorry for what I've done."

And you don't always quite get there with touring exhibitions—you're going to expect one thing from one place and something else from another. The first thing you can expect from a retrospective is that it's not going to have everything, and it's from the vision of a curator who is your soul mate for a while. I respect that.

**LM** I remember seeing this show come across my desk and thinking this would be very good for St. Louis. This is a city with a lot of socially engaged practice; this is a city where some of the issues that you deal with explicitly in your work are very specific to our day-to-day lives. I'm curious about what you think about socially engaged artwork, collaboration, and what that means.

**MC** Sometimes we understand art as a celebration of individual genius and enterprise—that's what we're traditionally trained to do. At the same time, we need to recognize that work can move beyond that in terms of being more incorporated within the fabric of the society...maybe a new direction—a new hope, I guess—or a new possibility for the creative process.



*Safehouse Door*, 2008–10. House fragment, stainless steel, steel, wood, lead-encapsulation paint, and automotive body paint. Courtesy the artist.

*Presentation Pallet for the Fundreds of America*, 2013. White oak, bronze, silk, brass, pigment, patina, and 6,000 lbs of hand-drawn currency by the people of America. Courtesy the artist.

*Operation Paydirt* and the *Fundred* project, for example, are about representing the population most affected by lead poisoning. By asking people to draw their own Fundred dollar bills, we're asking for your expression. We recognize the value of your imagination—not mine but yours. And the project moves from an individual perspective to a whole coalition of partners that create a new aesthetic—a sociological aesthetic, an environmental aesthetic.

**LM** Well, this is also why we call you a conceptual artist—because that's what we do with artists whose object-making we can't quantify. What's interesting is you're somebody who makes some of the most exquisitely crafted things I've ever seen, but we still call you a conceptual artist.

**MC** That's the expanding field of conceptual art. If something is concept-based, why would we limit it to the traditional definition? I saw that early, even when I was trying to make political statements—you know, in New York in the '80s, Barbara Kruger was doing it; she was kicking it. I realized there were other ways to make art.

Another way of imparting information is using aesthetic, formal gestures to lure somebody in to slowly discover what it might be about. So, if you make something memorable—crafted by using these tools—you can expand the message. It's all about the concept *and* the content.

I love the evocative power of—and the psychology that's imbued in—something that is supremely crafted. There are cultural realities locked within that clay or that wood that can be expressed. If you can use it to remark on something, whether it's politics or a concept, then it's a powerful tool. You have to make that, and you have to live with it, and you look at it and say, "Does this really convey it?" It's a question for me: how do I put my concept into a work that makes it different from what I already know. It's always about pursuing what you don't know.

**LM** Why is the show called *Rematch*?

**MC** It's the battle within my own self—a constant conflict. It's not about winning but about revisiting and reframing and battling your previous conceptions. You're not going to finish, you're not going to win—your tombstone will say "I Knew This Would Happen," and that's it. But in the moment you have, that's what you do.

**LM** So your tombstone will say "I Knew This Would Happen," and you made a shirt for CAM that says "Get Rich or Die Trying" with the "Get Rich or" crossed out. So you're just going to die trying?

**MC** Yeah! Because after a lifetime of trying to follow the rules of the game to get rich, everybody should know that it's only for the few and lucky. So, what the hell, I'll take the last part then—I'll just die trying. But I also think of it as non-monetary wealth, as the passion it takes to conceive of ideas—rich in the sense of being able to contribute to the incredible stream of thought that constitutes our world. It's almost a call to those who have tried for so long and have not "made it," so to speak—whatever "making it" means, by the way. And even so, it's not over.

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