BIOGRAPHY

Mel Chin was born in Houston to Chinese parents in 1951. He worked in his family's grocery store, and began making art at an early age. Chin's art, which is both analytical and poetic, evades easy classification. Alchemy, botany, and ecology are but a few of the disciplines that intersect in his work. He insinuates art into unlikely places, including destroyed homes, toxic landfills, and even popular television, investigating how art can provoke greater social awareness and responsibility. Unconventional and politically engaged, his projects also challenge the idea of the artist as the exclusive creative force behind an artwork. “The survival of my own ideas may not be as important as a condition I might create for others' ideas to be realized,” says Chin, who often enlists entire neighborhoods or groups of students in creative partnerships. In “KNOWMAD,” Chin worked with software engineers to create a video game based on rug patterns of nomadic peoples facing persecution. Chin also promotes “works of art” that have the ultimate effect of benefiting science or rejuvenating the economies of inner-city neighborhoods. In “Revival Field,” Chin worked with scientists to create sculpted gardens of hyperaccumulators—plants that can draw heavy metals from contaminated areas—in some of the most polluted sites in the world. Chin received a BA from Peabody College in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1975, and has received several awards and grants including Cal Arts Alpert Award in the Visual Arts, Rockefeller Foundation Grant, Joan Mitchell Foundation Award, Creative Capital Grant, and the Nancy Graves Foundation Award, among others. He lives and works in North Carolina.