

Contact

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Mary Rubin (408)277-5144 x 16
San Jose Office of Economic Development
Office of Cultural Affairs
mary.rubin@sanjoseca.gov

Steven Brewster (415) 577-8851
San Jose Office of Economic Development
steven.brewster@sanjoseca.gov

Internationally-recognized Artist Mel Chin to Receive Commendation from San Jose City Council

*Completion of final public art for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library recognized as major
achievement for City's public art program*

SAN JOSE, CALIF.—(May 3, 2007)—Internationally-recognized artist Mel Chin will receive a commendation from the San Jose City Council for his public artwork at Downtown San Jose's Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library. The commendation will be presented by Mayor Chuck Reed and San Jose Councilmember Forrest Williams at 1:30 p.m., on Tuesday, May 8, 2007, San Jose City Hall, 200 East Santa Clara, in the City Council Chambers.

Chin, in San Jose for the dedication of the final *Recolecciones* sculptures, is being recognized for the integrity and innovation of his design approach, commitment to the quality of *Recolecciones*, and his invaluable contribution to the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Library and the City of San Jose.

According to Barbara Goldstein, director, San Jose Public Art Program, distinctive public art is crucial to maintaining a City's appeal and cultural health. "San Jose is a creative community that strives to pioneer innovation within and across technology, business, society and the arts. By promoting and developing continuing engagements with world-class artists, San Jose can carve its place as a unique creative and cultural center of Silicon Valley. We feel the Chin work at the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library definitely fulfills that positioning," Goldstein said.

As part of the City's commitment to the arts, the San Jose Public Art Program commissioned Mr. Chin in April 1999 to create an artwork for the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library—the U.S.'s first joint city-university library project developed by the City of San Jose and San Jose State University (SJSU). For the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library, he took a non-traditional approach for a non-traditional

library creating a collection of 34 artworks, collectively titled *Recoleciones* (the Spanish word for “recollections”), sited throughout the library, designed to inspire exploration and surprise.

Chin is known for his site-specific approach to each project and creating works in a broad range of media and scale, including objects, temporary installations and permanent public artworks. Chin’s original narrative sketch for the project proposed to focus on the special, unprecedented characteristics of the building and its public and to be guided and inspired by the book collection within. “Some very complex interchanges go on in libraries, and all the more so when a library is designed, like this one, to serve two non-identical publics, the citizens of San Jose and the teachers and student of San Jose State University.” Chin’s interest was to inspire with this artwork a “community of the curious.”

As the finale of the *Recoleciones* collection Chin will dedicate the final sculptural installations called *Raza Writers* and *Migration*. *Raza Writers*, three customized tables, designed and fabricated by local artists selected through an area-wide competition, celebrates Latino culture and the car culture that originated with Latino youth in California. *Migration*, located throughout the library, begins with the ascension of thousands of brilliantly colored cast metal Monarch butterflies along the blue wall of the library’s southeast stairwell. The butterflies escape the stairwell and migrate towards the book stacks resting on the ceiling marking the location of significant books by Latin American authors of various disciplines and further reinforces the concept of “circulation”—both books and knowledge—as a major goal of the library.

Chin's artistic process is highly collaborative in nature; he has worked with biologists, psychologists, geologists, medical doctors and television producers. Chin’s innovative approach to democratizing the design process—while researching, designing, and fabricating the *Recoleciones* artworks he involved hundreds of individuals locally and nationally, including community members, artisans, building trades people, students, SJSU faculty and library personnel.

He has previously spoken about his impetus in art making: “Making objects and marks is also about making possibilities, making choices—and that is one of the last freedoms we have. To provide that is one of the functions of art,” said Chin.

In more than 25 community forums throughout San Jose, he facilitated discussions on a wide spectrum of personal and civic issues that served to inspire the artwork concepts. In some cases, artworks were the implementation of creative concepts delivered by students of SJSU and the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art.

His chief collaborators on *Recoleciones* were Haun Saussy, former chair of Asian Languages at Stanford University, currently Bird White Housum professor of Comparative Literature at Yale University; Robert Batchelor, assistant professor of History at Georgia Southern University, and artist James Millar.

For more on *Recoleciones*: <http://www.sjlibrary.org/mlkart/index.htm>.

About Mel Chin

Mel Chin—the son of Chinese parents and designated by PBS as one of the most important artists working in the visual arts today—is internationally recognized and known for creating artworks in a broad range of media and scale, including objects, temporary installations and permanent public artworks. Since the 1970s, Chin has produced artworks that join cross-cultural aesthetics with complex ideas including art that addresses political and ecological issues. His interests include creating work that addresses issues of habitat devastation, restoration, and sustaining the planet's biodiversity. One of his most recognized artworks is "Revival Field," where 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. His current project is *9/11-9/11* (2006), his first animated film based on his graphic novella of the same name written in 2002, is a fictional love story set in Santiago, Chile, 1973 and New York City, 2001. Chin is the creator/director working with a 2-D, Chilean animation team. Currently a resident of North Carolina, he received a bachelor of arts from Peabody College in Nashville, Tenn., in 1975, and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1988 and 1990.

About the San Jose Public Art Program

The City of San Jose Public Art Program seeks to build community identity by initiating artworks and exhibitions that enhance the civic landscape. The Public Art Program is part of the City of San Jose Office of Cultural Affairs, a division of the Office of Economic Development. For more information, please visit www.sanjoseculture.org.

About the City of San Jose's Office of Economic Development

The City of San Jose's Office of Economic Development (OED) is committed to a vital, competitive San Jose economy that increases prosperity for people and companies and enhances City revenues. The Office guides the City's economic strategy, provides assistance for business success, helps connect employers with trained workers, and provides art, sporting and cultural resources to our community. For more information, please visit, www.sjeconomy.com.

About the City of San Jose

From its founding in 1777 as California's first city, San Jose has been a leader, driven by its spirit of innovation. Today, San Jose stands as the largest city in Northern California and the Capital of Silicon Valley—the world's leading center of innovation. The city, the 10th largest in the U.S., is committed to remaining a top-ranked place to do business, work, live, play and learn. For more information, visit, www.sanjoseca.gov.

####