

T O T A L



P R O O F



# Introduction

In 1995, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles (MOCA) invited artist Mel Chin to participate in a group show titled *Uncommon Sense*, which aimed to explore new possibilities for public engagement in the greater Los Angeles community. Chin responded by forming a collective that came to be known as the GALA Committee. In a radical reimagining of the space and method for artistic intervention, the group of artists conspired with Aaron Spelling's production team to integrate a body of politically provocative artworks into the set of the primetime soap opera *Melrose Place*. Over two seasons, the GALA Committee inserted over one hundred works as props into the show. They called this project *In the Name of the Place*.

Building upon Chin's interest in viral methodology as a means to transmit ideas for social transformation, the pervasive landscape of syndicated mass media would become a powerful site for the collective's sustained public artwork. If GALA's work was the virus, *Melrose Place* was the host, and the ten million weekly viewers were the intended carriers of this infection of ideas.

Countering the dominant construct of the individual artist, GALA playfully and powerfully brought together art historical references, current social and political events and *Melrose Place* plotlines and characters. The insertions, which began as an infiltration of a host, ultimately became a symbiotic relationship of reciprocal influence and adaptation. *Melrose Place* scripts were distributed in advance to GALA members who then created pieces to address specific plot points and themes. Meanwhile, *Melrose Place* writers developed characters (most notably Sam, a painter) and storylines in response to GALA's presence. The ultimate example of this viral corollary was a scene written into the television show in which Amanda and Kyle attend a fictional opening of the actual *In the Name of the Place* installation at MOCA.

With covert, charged information and images embedded into its sets, *Melrose Place* became a new type of invasive entity while still functioning and recognizable as the wildly popular soap opera of its time, dedicated to entertainment through sexual intrigue and exaggerated personal drama. Through the transmission of television, the DNA of the project filtered into its audience watching on air and in re-runs, and continues to exert its influence.

*In the Name of the Place* was not meant to be subversive; rather, it sought to utilize the reach of commercial television to promote a generational transfer of ideas and expand its potential for complex, multi-dimensional content. Inspired by the efficacy of viral transmission, and a trust in collaboration, GALA created a blueprint for cooperative expression with the intent that it could spur a new model for the communication of ideas.

**TOTAL PROOF:** *The GALA Committee 1995-1997* presents, for the first time in New York, a comprehensive exhibition of *In the Name of the Place*. Designed as a reinterpretation of a Spelling-era TV set, the exhibition features the show's most significant locales, including a site-specific rendition of the infamous *Melrose Place* pool. In addition to the works, the show highlights GALA's working method through archival documents—facsimile communiqués, sketches and other ephemera—which attest to the complexities of this project and the broad network of anonymous artists that powered this pioneering intervention.



# GALA Committee Members

David Adams  
Elizabeth Adams  
Eric Andersen  
Emily Arthur  
Katie Bauman  
Cameron Bernie  
David Blanchard  
John Borthwick  
Barron Brown  
Alan Bush  
Heather Champ  
Heeyeon Chang  
Mel Chin  
Lance Clarke  
Roymont Clements  
Kathleen Hillseth Clinesmith  
Karina Combs  
Melissa Conroy  
John Crowe  
John Cupit  
Lesley Dill  
Heather M. Eastman  
Diane Edison  
Brian Ellison  
Evan Firestone  
Mark Flood  
Joe Girandola  
Terry Glispin  
Nuala Glynn  
Jason Grier  
Garrison Gunter  
Elizabeth Huber  
Chip Hayes  
Frank Irving  
Kim Jensen  
Bryan Jernigan  
Karin Johansson  
M. Dana Jones  
Cheryl Kaplan  
Kendal Kerr  
Kat Kinsman  
Koichi Kimura  
Jeff Knowlton  
Leo Knox  
Bernie Koersen  
H. Lan Thao Lam  
Ed Lambert  
Elizabeth Langford  
Jon Lapointe  
Tom Lawson  
Kristi Leonard

Donna Marcantonio  
Diana McIntosh  
Mara Lonner  
Wendy Lundin  
Steve Maleski  
Thomas Mann  
Stephen McRedmond  
Carol Mendelsohn  
Georgia Metz  
Tamara Mewis  
James Millar  
Steve Miller  
Tamalyn Miller  
Tess Miller  
Dallas Moore  
Margaret Morgan  
Jerry Murphy  
Helen K. Nagge  
Yana Nirvana  
Gail Patterson  
Kim Patterson  
**Constance Penley**  
Joseph Pizzorusso  
Chuck Pratt  
Elizabeth S. Puckett  
Dan Pugh  
Martha Rees  
Carl Robertson  
Guadalupe Rodriguez  
Sandra Rodriguez  
Jeff Roe  
Kathleen Rogan  
Haun Saussy  
Sanjit Sethi  
Maura Sheehan  
Jocelyn Shipley  
Eric Shriner  
Deborah Siegel  
Rachel Slowinski  
Frank South  
Rachael Splinter  
Eric Swangstu  
Troy Swangstu  
Janice Tanaka  
Valerie Tevere  
Joseph Tucker  
Kathy Vargas  
Tony Velasco  
Jim Wade  
John Watts  
David Wilson



## Red Bull Studios New York Announces ***TOTAL PROOF: The GALA Committee 1995-1997*** The First Comprehensive New York Exhibition of *Melrose Place's* Covert Conceptual Artworks



Amanda (Heather Locklear) and Kyle (Rob Estes) on a date at MOCA (*Melrose Place*, Season 5, Ep. 28).  
On the left: *Fireflies—The Bombing of Baghdad*  
by the GALA Committee.

On View September 30 - November 27, 2016  
Private Preview: September 29, 6-9pm

Red Bull Studios New York is proud to announce the first comprehensive New York presentation of the GALA Committee's *In the Name of the Place*, a covert conceptual artwork deployed on the primetime television show *Melrose Place* from 1995-97. ***TOTAL PROOF: The GALA Committee 1995-1997*** will be open to the public September 30 through November 27, 2016.

The GALA Committee's site specific intervention with *Melrose Place* is one of the most elaborate and well orchestrated collaborations in contemporary art and television history. In 1995, invited by co-curators Julie Lazar and Tom Finkelpearl to participate in a group show at the Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles (MOCA) titled *Uncommon Sense*, artist Mel Chin gathered a team of artists, along with faculty and students from the University of Georgia (UGA), Athens, GA, California Institute of the Arts (CalArts), Los Angeles, CA, and Grand Arts, Kansas City, MO, to form the GALA Committee. Realizing that a powerful site for a public artwork wasn't necessarily a physical place, but network television, they arranged with *Melrose Place* producers to create artworks as props for the popular primetime soap opera. Over several seasons, the artists produced a range of conceptual artworks and objects that updated art historical movements like Dada, Surrealism, and Agitprop, commented on social and political realities, deepened the content of unfolding plotlines, and elevated the form and content of a '90s pop-culture mainstay.

Flying under the censor's radar, aware of the power of images and their placement, the group made scores of props that appeared on the sets, reflecting and critiquing social norms. Unrolled condoms (an image still forbidden by the FCC) appeared on a set of sheets in the bedroom of a particularly promiscuous character. In another scene, mimicking the popular Absolut Vodka advertising of the time, GALA's ad featured a liquor-bottle shaped impact crater as damage to the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, site of the 1995 Oklahoma City Bombing, a domestic terrorist attack that killed 168 people. The work raised questions about alcohol abuse, homegrown terrorism, and the dangers of persuasive corporate advertising. Bypassing the opportunity to dismantle and critique *Melrose Place*, the GALA Committee's interventions were placements of additional levels of content, rather than commercial products, seeking to expand the highly controlled boundaries of sponsored primetime television. The GALA Committee furthered a progressive agenda as urgent today as it was twenty years ago.

After the GALA Committee worked for three years with *Melrose Place* (unpaid by Spelling Entertainment and independently funded by MOCA, Grand Arts, The Rockefeller Foundation and sustained by CalArts and UGA), the artworks were finally exhibited in the *Uncommon Sense* exhibition at MOCA,





the commissioning institution. The exhibition itself was featured and named on Season 5, Episode 28 of *Melrose Place*, breaking down the fourth wall that demands the separation between fantasy and reality. After the MOCA show, the works were auctioned at Sotheby's, Los Angeles, in a sale titled *Primetime Contemporary Art: Art by the GALA Committee as Seen on Melrose Place*, an auction organized by the GALA Committee, resolving the project's narrative arc. All money raised was donated to two women's education charities in California and Georgia that supported women aged 18-49, the same target audience as *Melrose Place*. The works can still be seen in the reruns of *Melrose Place* through international syndication, something the GALA Committee forecasted as the viral capacity of mass media.

**TOTAL PROOF:** *The GALA Committee 1995-1997* will exist as part archive, part film set. Red Bull Studios New York will be built out to resemble certain reoccurring sets from *Melrose Place*'s televised version of '90s Los Angeles, with the GALA Committee's objects displayed in situ. Accompanying these works will be a variety of archival documents—communiqués, sketches, and other ephemera—attesting to the vast network of communication (and collaboration) which powers televised entertainment, and the GALA Committee's historic intervention. A sunken *Melrose Place Convo Pool* designed by Mel Chin will be a prime space to discuss the ramifications of "the generational transfer of ideas" developed by the work of the GALA Committee.

Exhibition design by LOT-EK.

Max Wolf, Curator  
Programming Manager, Red Bull Studios New York

Candice Strongwater, Associate Curator  
Programming Coordinator, Red Bull Studios New York

Exhibition programming is free and open to the public:

**October 17, 7-9pm**

*Fun Problems with Smart People: A Book Opening*

To celebrate the occasion of **TOTAL PROOF: The GALA Committee 1995-97** and the newly published twenty-year survey of Grand Arts – one of the commissioning institutions that supported GALA's *In the Name of the Place* – join transcendental tour guide Speed Levitch for a dynamic cruise through creative practice, as artists, writers, and thinkers from the Grand Arts constellation take the stage to puzzle out heady questions of risk, magic, pleasure, ghosts, and what comes after art. With musings by Mel Chin and the GALA Committee, Michael Jones McKean, artist interviews by Maria Buszek, and guest appearances Rosemarie Fiore, Filip Noterdaeme, Stephen Lichty, and many others featured in *Problems and Provocations: Grand Arts 1995-2015*. Presented by Fathomers and Red Bull Studios New York.

**November 12, 7-9pm**

*Now & Then: In Conversation with The GALA Committee*

Nearly twenty years after the GALA Committee's historic collaboration with *Melrose Place*, the panel reunites GALA and the project's key members to discuss *In the Name of the Place*. Speakers include Mel Chin, *Melrose Place* producer and writer Frank South, cast member Rob Estes, LA MOCA curators Julie Lazar and Commissioner Tom Finkelpearl, GALA's Project Coordinator Jon Lapointe, **Constance Penley**, Joe Girandola and Lesley Dill, with many other GALA members in attendance. Documentation of the panel will be available online and can be found at [redbullstudiosnewyork.com](http://redbullstudiosnewyork.com).



Courtesy of the Artist.



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220 West 18th Street, NY  
[www.redbullstudiosnewyork.com](http://www.redbullstudiosnewyork.com)

### About GALA Committee

GALA Committee artists include David Adams, Elizabeth Adams, Eric Andersen, Emily Arthur, Katie Bauman, Cameron Bernie, David Blanchard, John Borthwick, Barron Brown, Alan Bush, Heather Champ, Heeyeon Chang, Mel Chin, Lance Clarke, Roymont Clements, Kathleen Hillseth Clinesmith, Karina Combs, Melissa Conroy, John Crowe, John Cupit, Lesley Dill, Heather M. Eastman, Diane Edison, Brian Ellison, Evan Firestone, Mark Flood, Joe Girandola, Terry Glispin, Nuala Glynn, Jason Grier, Garrison Gunter, Elizabeth Huber, Chip Hayes, Frank Irving, Kim Jensen, Bryan Jernigan, Karin Johansson, M. Dana Jones, Cheryl Kaplan, Kendal Kerr, Kat Kinsman, Koichi Kimura, Jeff Knowlton, Leo Knox, Bernie Koersen, H. Lan Thao Lam, Ed Lambert, Elizabeth Langford, Jon Lapointe, Tom Lawson, Kristi Leonard, Donna Marcantonio, Diana McIntosh, Mara Lonner, Wendy Lundin, Steve Maleski, Thomas Mann, Stephen McRedmond, Carol Mendelsohn, Georgia Metz, Tamara Mewis, James Millar, Steve Miller, Tam Miller, Tess Miller, Dallas Moore, Margaret Morgan, Jerry Murphy, Helen K. Nagge, Yana Nirvana, Gail Patterson, Kim Patterson, **Constance Penley**, Joseph Pizzorusso, Chuck Pratt, Elizabeth S. Puckett, Dan Pugh, Martha Rees, Carl Robertson, Guadalupe Rodriguez, Sandra Rodriguez, Jeff Roe, Kathleen Rogan, Haun Saussy, Sanjit Sethi, Maura Sheehan, Jocelyn Shipley, Eric Shriner, Deborah Siegel, Rachel Slowinski, Frank South, Rachael Splinter, Eric Swangstu, Troy Swangstu, Janice Tanaka, Valerie Tevere, Joseph Tucker, Kathy Vargas, Tony Velasco, Jim Wade, John Watts, and David Wilson.

### About Mel Chin

Mel Chin 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. He developed *Revival Field* (1989-ongoing), a project that pioneered the field of "green remediation," the use of plants to remove toxic, heavy metals from the soil. A current project, *Fundred Dollar Bill/Operation Paydirt*, focuses on national awareness and prevention of childhood lead-poisoning through art-making. Mel 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 even popular television, investigating how art can provoke greater social awareness and responsibility.

Mel's work is exhibited in the U.S. and abroad, and was documented in the popular PBS program, *Art 21: Art of the 21st Century*. A traveling retrospective exhibition, *Rematch*, was organized by the New Orleans Museum of Art in 2014/2015. Recent commissions include *Sea to See* by the Mint Museum, Charlotte, NC; *Co-Cobijos*, a work for the Mission San Jose in San Antonio, Texas, and *The Tie That Binds*, for Los Angeles' Public Art Biennial, Current: LA Water, 2016. Recent exhibitions include *Degrees of Separation*, Station Museum, Houston, Texas; *The Value of Food*, St John the Divine, NYC; *Mel Chin/Works* at Thomas Rehbein Galerie, Koeln, Germany; *Fade/In* at the Swiss Institute, NYC. He is the recipient of multiple awards. Mel lives and works in Egypt Township, North Carolina.

### About Red Bull Studios New York

Red Bull Studios New York is an experimental, non-commercial art space that supports and fosters bold ideas, offers new opportunities to artists, and challenges the boundaries of exhibition making. The program provides emerging and established artists with a platform to realize ambitious, museum quality exhibitions. Recent projects include *We All Love Your Life* by George Henry Longly (2016); *BIO:DIP*, a two-person solo show with Nicolas Lobo and Hayden Dunham (2016); *Scenario In The Shade* by Justin Lowe, Jonah Freeman, and Jennifer Herrema (2015); *NEW INC: End-Of-Year Showcase* presented in collaboration with the New Museum (2015); *Alone Together* by Ryder Ripps (2015); *Spaced Out: Migration to the Interior*, a group exhibition curated by Phong Bui and The Brooklyn Rail Curatorial Projects (2014); *Living* by Peter Coffin (2014); and *DISown: Not for Everyone*, by art collective DIS and curator Agatha Wara (2014). Upcoming in Spring 2017 is Bjarne Melgaard's solo exhibition, *The Casual Pleasure of Disappointment*.

### Press Contact:

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Director, Cultural Counsel  
marcella@culturalcounsel.com

### #GALACommittee



*Baby Mobile with Wrapping Paper* by Gala Committee.

Based on television remote control. The special gift wrap is rendered in television static. Billy says to pregnant Alison, "Something for the baby, to keep you from going totally insane."



*RU 486 Quilt* by Gala Committee.

Homemade quilt with pattern of chemical structure of the drug RU 486 that was banned in the US until 2000. A pregnant Alison, who doesn't have a choice, works at home under the RU 486 Quilt.





## Exhibition Documentation



*TOTAL PROOF: The GALA Committee 1995–1997*  
Exterior view, Red Bull Studios New York, 2016



*TOTAL PROOF: The GALA Committee 1995–1997*  
Exterior view, "Shooters," Red Bull Studios New York, 2016







*TOTAL PROOF: The GALA Committee 1995–1997*  
Installation view, "D & D Advertising," Red Bull Studios New York, 2016



*TOTAL PROOF: The GALA Committee 1995–1997*  
Installation view, "Jane's Boutique," Red Bull Studios New York, 2016







*TOTAL PROOF: The GALA Committee 1995–1997*  
Installation view, Red Bull Studios New York, 2016



*TOTAL PROOF: The GALA Committee 1995–1997*  
“Integrity,” 95–97, Red Bull Studios New York, 2016





*TOTAL PROOF: The GALA Committee 1995–1997*  
 “Aedes Egypti Mosquito Brooch,” 95–97, Red Bull Studios New York, 2016



*TOTAL PROOF: The GALA Committee 1995–1997*  
 Installation view, “Bedroom,” Red Bull Studios New York, 2016







*TOTAL PROOF: The GALA Committee 1995–1997*  
 Installation view, "Shooters," Red Bull Studios New York, 2016



*TOTAL PROOF: The GALA Committee 1995–1997*  
 Installation view, "Convo Pool," Red Bull Studios New York, 2016





*TOTAL PROOF: The GALA Committee 1995–1997*  
Installation view, "Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA)," Red Bull Studios New York, 2016



*TOTAL PROOF: The GALA Committee 1995–1997*  
Installation view, "Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA)," Red Bull Studios New York, 2016







*TOTAL PROOF: The GALA Committee 1995–1997*  
 Installation view, "Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA)," Red Bull Studios New York, 2016



*TOTAL PROOF: The GALA Committee 1995–1997*  
 Installation view, "Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA)," Red Bull Studios New York, 2016





*TOTAL PROOF: The GALA Committee 1995–1997*  
 “TV Phage,” “Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA),” Red Bull Studios New York, 2016



*TOTAL PROOF: The GALA Committee 1995–1997*  
 Screenings of *Melrose Place*, seasons 1–7, Red Bull Studios New York, 2016





## Audio/Visual Component



Documentation of GALA Committee meeting, DVD, 1998, Kansas City, Grand Arts, filmed by the GALA Committee  
Documentation from Gwangju Biennial, 1997, DVD, filmed by the Korean Broadcasting System



Video excerpts from *Melrose Place*





**Oral histories recorded in September 2016.  
Conversations with:**

**1 Mel Chin (GALA)  
Helen Nagge (GALA)  
Eric Shriner (GALA)**

**2 Mel Chin (GALA)  
Sean Kelley (Grand, Arts, GALA)**

**3 Frank South (Melrose Place, GALA)**

**4 Carol Mendelsohn (Melrose Place, GALA)**

**5 Constance Penley (GALA)**

**6 Lesley Dill (GALA)**

**7 Kim Jensen (GALA)  
Jon Lapointe (GALA)**





## Melrose Place Video Excerpts



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[www.redbullstudiosnewyork.com](http://www.redbullstudiosnewyork.com)

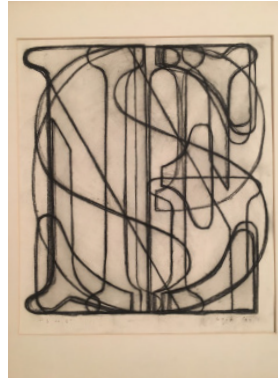
# Exhibition Checklist/Select Didactics



**The Ecology of GALA**  
Graphite and ink on drawing paper  
22.9 x 22.6 in. (framed)

A visioning diagram of the complete infective scope of the viral GALA Committee project, *In the Name of the Place*.

Courtesy of Wilhelm Schürmann



**S-G (after Johns)**  
Charcoal on paper  
21.5 x 17.5 in. (framed)

Courtesy of Jon Lapointe



**Logo Light**  
Steel, fluorescent tubing, metal tape, electrical components  
28 x 11.75 x 5 in.

Reproduction courtesy of Joe Girandola



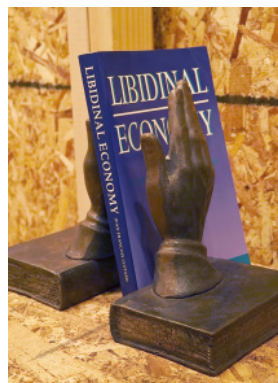
**RGB**  
Acrylic paint on canvas board  
14 x 11 in. each (framed)  
(three pieces)

Courtesy of Suzanne Deal Booth



**Behind the Blue Dots**  
Digital image  
13 x 16 in. (framed)

Courtesy of Constance Penley



**Libidinal Economy**  
Book  
Approx. 11 x 8 x 1 in.

*Libidinal Economy* by philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard is a 1974 book considered a pivotal text in the study of the politics of desire. Used in the scene in a run-down hotel where Michael looks for Jane, who he suspects has become a prostitute.





***Praying, Boasting, Lying Hands***  
Cast iron and bronze  
6 x 7 x 5 in. each (two pieces)

Derived from a 16th century drawing by Albrecht Dürer, this variable sculpture can express belief, deceit or quantitative information.

Courtesy of Mel Chin Studios



***Grecian Formula***  
Digital image  
16.25 x 18.25 in. (framed)

Since antiquity, love and betrayal remain a classic formula for storytelling.

Courtesy of Wilhelm Schürmann



***Peter Burns' Loving Cup***  
Wood, golf balls, paint,  
cast zinc, brass  
16 x 8 x 8 in.

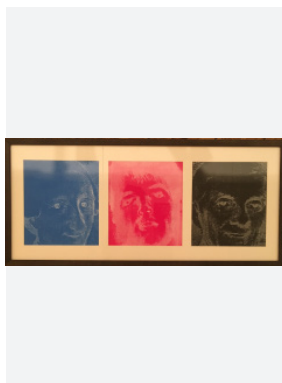
Reproduction courtesy of  
Joe Girandola



***Habit Form***  
Acrylic paint on shaped canvas  
37.5 x 24.25 x 1.75 in.

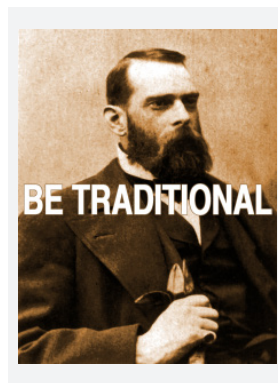
Modeled after the geometric, color-saturated works of painter Ellsworth Kelly, *Habit Form* is an abstracted graph showing the number of hours that viewers, ages one to twenty, spend watching television.

Courtesy of Jon Lapointe



***We Three Kings***  
Silk screen on paper  
Approx 12 x 30 in.

Reproduction courtesy of  
Mel Chin Studios



***A.P. Ryder Bottled Water Campaign***  
Digital image  
24 x 16 in. each (four panels)

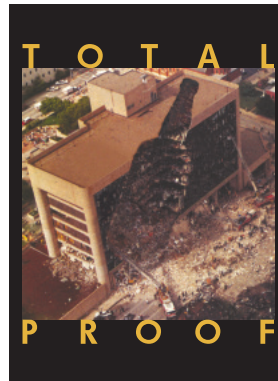
Reproduction courtesy of  
Joe Girandola





**Family Values Campaign**  
Industrial vinyl on aluminum  
(four panels)  
20 × 30 in., 30 × 20 in.,  
20 × 16 in., 16 × 20 in.

Courtesy of Wilhelm Schürmann



**Total Proof**  
Digital image  
25 × 29 in.

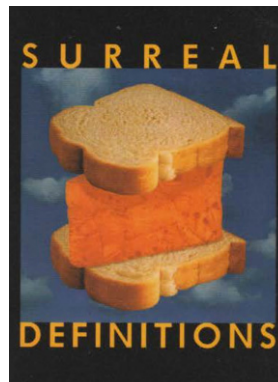
In *Total Proof*, a larger-than-life liquor bottle forms the impact crater on the destroyed Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, the site of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing. The piece was deemed “too controversial” for public broadcast, marking a turning point in the collaboration between GALA and *Melrose Place*, resulting in full transparency between the artists, writers and producers; scripts were provided to GALA in advance.

Courtesy of Andreas Schmeer



**It's a Set Up**  
Digital image  
24 × 19 in.

Reproduction courtesy of  
Joe Girandola



**Surreal Definitions**  
Digital image  
49 × 19 in.

Courtesy of Mel Chin



**Sam's Early Paintings—  
Maryland Series  
The Cove**  
Acrylic on canvas  
13.25 × 17 in. (framed)

Courtesy of Mel Chin



**Sam's Early Paintings—  
Maryland Series  
Lighthouse with Beached Boat**  
Acrylic on canvas  
13.25 × 17 in. (framed)

Reproduction courtesy of  
Eric Swangstu

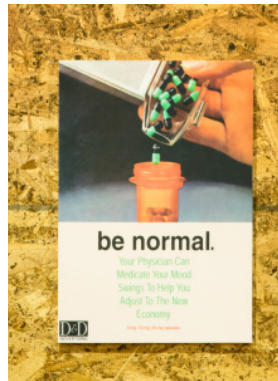






**Sam's Early Paintings—  
Maryland Series  
The Broken Bridge**  
Acrylic on canvas  
13.25 x 17 in. (framed)

Reproduction courtesy of  
Eric Swangstu



**Be Normal**  
Digital image  
10 x 7 in.

Reproduction courtesy of  
Joe Girandola



**Domestic Brand Cereal Box**  
Paper, ink, cereal, digital image  
9 x 6.5 x 2 in.

Reproduction courtesy of  
Mel Chin Studios



**Dr. Charles Drew**  
Charcoal on paper  
24 x 20 in. (framed)

Courtesy of Wilhelm Schürmann



**Bowling Bomb and Bag**  
Bowling ball, wood, cotton, cord,  
pigment on vinyl bag  
24 x 14 x 14 in.

Continuing the Desert Storm  
theme, Kyle's bowling bag is  
printed with the slogan "Don't Ask,  
Don't Tell" and the interior is lined  
with fabric depicting a cross-hair  
view from a U.S. bomber. The  
bowling ball is retrofitted with a  
fuse, mounted into the thumbhole.

Courtesy of Sean Kelly



**Gun Purse**  
Metallic ink on silk  
5 x 8 in.

Reproduction courtesy of  
Joe Girandola





**Bullet Pens**

Castings, brass, tubing,  
pen parts, .38 Special  
6 x 3.5 in.

The pen is mightier  
than the sword.

Reproduction courtesy of  
Joe Girandola



**C\*A\*S\*H**

Silk screen on Desert Storm  
camouflage fabric, ink, wood  
12.25 x 17.5 in. (framed)

With a nod to the hit show  
*M\*A\*S\*H*, this work reveals one of  
the camouflaged motives of war.

Courtesy of Jon Lapointe



**Eye Chart**

Digital image  
21 x 14 in.

This eye chart in Michael's  
office repeats the phrase "I don't  
understand. Why?" in languages  
from eleven countries, ranked by  
literacy studies conducted by the  
U.N. at the time.

Reproduction courtesy of  
Joe Girandola



**M1A1 Steak Knife with Pentagon  
Cutting Board**

Acid etched high carbon steel knife  
with wooden board  
14.75 x 2.175 x .75 in.  
11 x 17 in. (approx.)

Reproduction courtesy of  
Mel Chin Studios



**Cause and Effect Rain Coat**

Silk screen print on cotton fabric  
38 in. length

Reproduction courtesy of  
Joe Girandola



**Germ Tie**

Handmade silk tie with hand  
printed ink pattern  
53 x 3 in.

Courtesy of Lan Thao Lam



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**Archisexual Prints with Magnetic Fig Leaves**

Digital image on steel with magnetic fig leaves  
14 × 11 in. each (framed)  
(two panels)

Reproduction courtesy of Joe Girandola



**Seamstress Distress**

Bolts of hand printed cotton  
8 × 10 in., 6 × 8 in., 10 × 9 in.  
(two pieces)

Courtesy of Mel Chin



**Aedes Egypti Heavy-Metal T-Shirt**

Transfer iron-on, cotton T-shirt  
Size large

Courtesy of Wilhelm Schürmann



**Aedes Egypti Mosquito Brooch**

Silver, glass, steel  
3.75 × 1.75 × 7.5 in.

Images of the *Aedes Egypti* mosquito, a carrier of Yellow Fever, appear on a brooch for Jane and a T-shirt worn by a heavy metal fan. Jane uses the brooch to stab a lifeless Richard, confirming his death. The piece inspired conversation on a *Melrose Place* internet chat room, eliciting remarks about the "Egyptian Brooch" being akin to a "mummy's curse" and a prediction that Richard would return.

Courtesy of Wilhelm Schürmann



**Spotted Reason**

Silk screen print on cotton fabric, wood  
64 × 60 × 1.5 in.

*Spotted Reason* is inspired by the pattern of the Spotted Owl, an endangered species native to California. The wing-like contour is modeled after the haunting owl in an etching by artist Francisco Goya. GALA suggests "the sleep of reason" produces environmental destruction. Etching, at the time of Goya, was a way to widely distribute images, and GALA saw television as serving a similar function.

Courtesy of Wilhelm Schürmann



**Little Southern Devil (LSD) after David Smith**

Hand-hammered copper, brass and steel  
60 × 12 × 7 in.

A devilish coatrack hints at the work of abstract expressionist sculptor David Smith.

Courtesy of Wilhelm Schürmann



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220 West 18th Street, NY  
www.redbullstudiosnewyork.com





**Sam's Late Paintings—  
Sunny L.A. Series  
Marilyn Monroe's House**  
Acrylic on canvas  
36 x 24 in. (framed)

GALA was asked to create "optimistic," "California lite" paintings, similar to the works of David Hockney. The GALA delivered the darker side of L.A. with *Sam's Sunny L.A. Series*. Inspired by an archival police photograph, this work is an interpretation of Marilyn Monroe's home the day after her fatal drug overdose.

Courtesy of Wilhelm Schürmann



**Ready Made Brick**  
Rubber, wood  
Approx. 48 x 8 x 2 in.

Courtesy of Wilhelm Schürmann



**Readymade Shovel**  
Rubber, wood  
3 x 5 x 8 in.

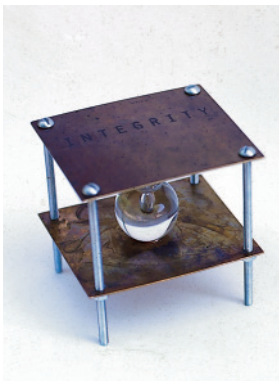
Courtesy of Andreas Schmeer



**Burning Churches Window**  
Metal tape, paint, glass, wood  
33.5 x 19.5 in.

In response to the rampant arson committed against African-American churches during the 1990s, GALA created this faux stained-glass window, reminiscent of those found in churches across the United States. Abstracted images of burning churches, engulfed in triangular flames, are embedded into the geometric patterns.

Courtesy of Wilhelm Schürmann



**Integrity**  
Hand blown glass, engraved brass plate, steel  
4.5 x 5 x 5 in.

Reproduction courtesy of Joe Girandola



**Yoni Stadium with Laced Lingam**  
Masonite, pine, joint compound, acrylic varnish, carved granite  
32.5 x 29.5 x 4 in.

Based on an ancient Indian symbol for feminine procreative energy known as the *yoní*, this miniature stadium inverts the arena of male-dominated sports, while the *Laced Lingam* sits as a counterpart.

Reproduction courtesy of Joe Girandola





#### **Against PETSA**

Acrylic fabric and stuffed animal parts on wood board  
24 x 18 in. each (eight panels)

By creating eight abstract compositions from stuffed animal parts, GALA mock protests an imagined animal rights group, People for the Ethical Treatment of Stuffed Animals (PETSA).

Courtesy of Wilhelm Schürmann

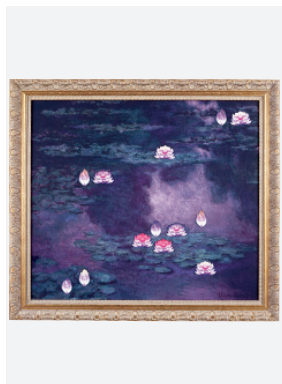


#### **Chinese Takeout**

Ink, paper cartons, paper bags  
Various sizes

Kimberly and Michael's takeout food arrives in bags and cartons emblazoned with the Chinese symbols for "human rights" and a new phrase appearing in the Chinese vernacular in reaction to Tiananmen Square, *dong luan*, which roughly translates as "turmoil and chaos."

Courtesy of Wilhelm Schürmann



#### **Magnetic Monet**

Wood, plate steel, magnetized rubber, digital printout on paper  
26.5 x 29.25 in. (framed)

Reproduction courtesy of Joe Girandola



#### **Government Issue**

U.S. Postal Service mailbag with AK-47 clip  
25 x 18 x 6.5 in.

Reproduction courtesy of Mel Chin Studios



#### **Sunday Afternoon on the Ground**

Digital print on canvas  
16 x 20 in.

This "Pointillist" painting, made for Amanda's living room, is yet another colorful reference to police violence and racial tension at the time.

Courtesy of Constance Penley



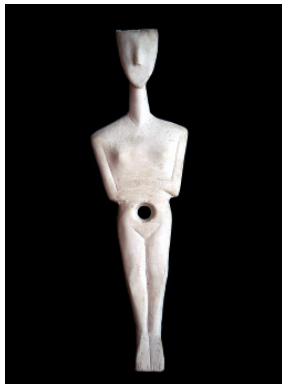
#### **Cubans**

Branded wood, brass, tobacco  
2 x 10 x 8 in.

Courtesy of Wilhelm Schürmann



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***Cycladic Idol***

Hydrostone  
16 x 5 x 1 in.

Courtesy of Wilhelm Schürmann

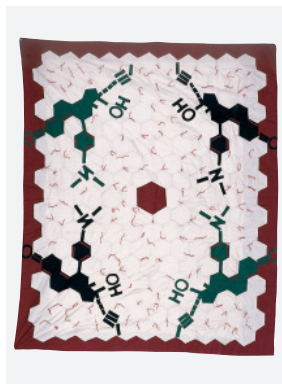


***Baby Mobile with Wrapping Paper***

Wood, plastic, metal eye screws,  
nylon cord, tissue paper  
22 x 13 x .5 in.

Billy says to Alison, "something for the baby, to keep you from going totally insane," as he gifts her "the greatest baby sitter in the world."

Courtesy of Wilhelm Schürmann



***RU-486 Quilt***

Applique on quilted cotton fabric  
62 x 53 in.

Alison, pregnant with Jake's child, comforts herself under a quilt printed with the chemical structure RU-486, also known as the abortion pill. Although Alison ultimately has a miscarriage, GALA inserts speech about reproductive choice into network television.

Courtesy of Wilhelm Schürmann



***Ear Pillows***

Silk screen ink on cotton  
18 in. square (three pillows)

Courtesy of Jane Garrity



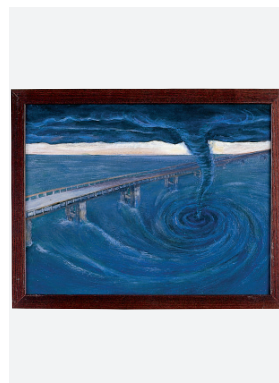
***Sam's Early Paintings—***

***Maryland Series***

***Sam's World***

Acrylic on Canvas  
13.25 x 17 in. (framed)

Courtesy of Wilhelm Schürmann



***Sam's Early Paintings—***

***Maryland Series***

***Revenge of the Bay***

Acrylic on Canvas  
13.25 x 17 in. (framed)

Reproduction courtesy of  
Eric Swangstu



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**Sydney Doll**  
Silk screen ink on cotton  
14 x 7 x 2.5 in.

Courtesy of TQ Gaskins



**Safety Sheets**  
Silk screen ink on cotton sheets  
15 x 15 x 4 in.  
Queen-sized

Peter's mistress dreams of safe sex as she sleeps on these custom sheets. One of GALA's first insertions that made camera, *Safety Sheets* are patterned with a graphic of unrolled condoms, an image still banned from public broadcast by the Federal Communications Commission.

Courtesy of Wilhelm Schürmann



**Cat Clock**  
Plastic, clock, wood, steel  
13 x 7 x 5 in.

For a scene where time is of the essence and a poisoned character is either dead or alive, the Schrodinger's Cat clock is for the scientists who watch *Melrose Place*.

Reproduction courtesy of Mel Chin Studios



**Birth Control Pillbox**  
Plastic sculpting medium  
3 x 3.5 x .75 in.

Courtesy of Mel Chin



**House Lamp**  
Georgia pine, cloth shade, paint, electronics  
30 x 14 x 14 in.

A reference to an influential conservative politician of the time, *House Lamp* is a portrait turned to the profile of former U.S. Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich. The lampshade is patterned with images of abnormal brain scans and the lamp's base is modeled after *Head of Mussolini* by sculptor Renato Bartelli.

Reproduction courtesy of Joe Girandola



**Barbie Mask**  
Wood, pigment  
8 x 6 x 2 in.

Courtesy of Wilhelm Schürmann





#### **Shooters**

Wood, blown glass, metal, carved granite, commercial glass, paint, electric components, glassware  
Approx. 12 x 16 x 8 ft.  
73 bottles

*Melrose Place* characters often frequented their local bar Shooters. GALA designed 75 unique bottles that compose a sobering visual history of the production and consumption of alcohol in America.

Courtesy of Wilhelm Schürmann



#### **Background Information**

Digital images on board  
12 x 9 in. each (framed)

*Background Information* consists of four framed, enlarged details from the Beatles' *Abbey Road* album cover. This iconic cover fanned a conspiracy asserting that Paul McCartney was dead. Aided by the media, the theory spread virally.

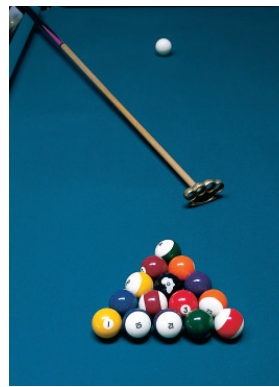
Reproduction courtesy of Joe Girandola



#### **Africa Is the Eight-Ball**

Pool balls, enamel paint, plastic rack  
12 x 13 in.

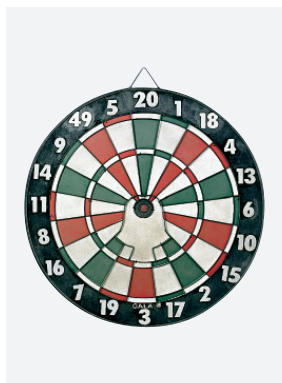
Courtesy of Wilhelm Schürmann



#### **Sissy Stick**

Cue stick, cast brass  
60 x 5 in.

Reproduction courtesy of Joe Girandola



#### **Target Audience**

Paper, steel, plastic, pigment  
18 in. diameter

GALA alters a traditional dartboard to reflect the target audience of *Melrose Place*, women aged 18-49. Through its aesthetic and thematic content, the show propagated particular lifestyles in the name of glamor, beauty and success. *Target Audience* likens the show to a dart, intentionally and aggressively piercing its target.

Courtesy of Wilhelm Schürmann



#### **Viral Clock**

Wall clock, image on paper  
14 in. diameter

Courtesy of Mel Chin





**Pool Toy**  
Cast synthetic polymer,  
monofilament, enamel on soccer ball  
28 x 9 x 9 in.

Submerged in the *Melrose Place* pool, this oversized replica of a sperm cell represents the biological drive beneath romantic relationships. Like a fishing lure, this "spermie wormie" is invisible when under water.

Courtesy of Constance Penley



**For LeAse—Hawthorne Courts**  
Commercial printed sign  
47 x 24 x 1.5 in.

Courtesy of Michael Heins



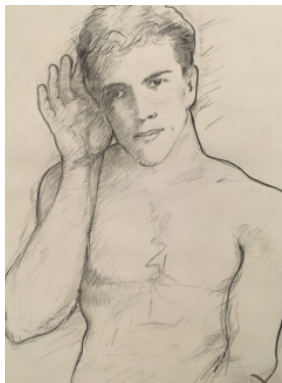
**Prostitute Ancestors**  
Digital images  
12 x 10 x 1 in. each (framed)

Courtesy of Constance Penley



**HIV Pillow with STD Video Sleeve**  
Ink on cardboard, hand printed  
cotton, pillow  
15 x 15 x 4 in. square pillow  
7 x 4 x 1 in. VHS sleeve (two pieces)

Reproduction courtesy of  
Joe Girandola



**Billy's Sketch**  
Pencil on drawing pad  
14 x 11 x 1 in.

Billy's pose in this sketch by Sam echoes Tibetan religious iconography of the seated Buddhist saint Milarepa, who is often depicted holding his hand to his ear listening to Buddhist teachings. The sketch is made for a flirty scene between the two in Sam's studio.

Courtesy of Wilhelm Schürmann



**Witches Broom**  
Shaped, burned and  
branded broom  
55 x 9 x 4 in.

Courtesy of Pamela L. McHaney

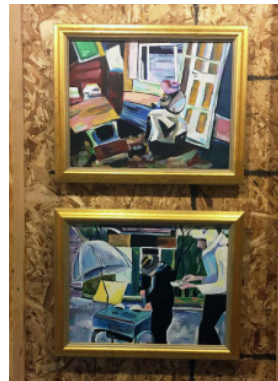






**Sam's Late Paintings—  
Sunny L.A. Series  
O.J.'s Brentwood House**  
Scan  
37.25 x 49 x 3 in.

Courtesy of Constance Penley



**Paintings for John Waters,  
Mortville Pies and Sunday Services**  
Oil on panels  
12 x 16 in. each (two panels)

Reproduction courtesy of  
Eric Swangstu



**Non Quare, Non Dicere  
(Don't Ask, Don't Tell!)**  
Silk screen ink on U.S. Army  
regulation size duffel bag  
27.5 x 10.5 x 13 in.

Courtesy of TQ Gaskins



**Father Son Trophy**  
Wood, metal  
16 x 6 x 4 in.

Reproduction courtesy of  
Joe Girandola



**Sam's Late Paintings—  
Sunny L.A. Series  
Chateau Marmont**  
Scan  
37 x 25.125 x 3.75 in.

Courtesy of Constance Penley



**Pacifier Candlesticks**  
Bronze, beeswax  
9.5 x 4.75 x 3.5 in. each  
(two pieces)

Two cast bronze candlesticks in the shape of baby pacifiers suggest that Jake is "pacifying" social mores by proposing to pregnant Alison to create a traditional nuclear family.

Reproduction courtesy of  
Joe Girandola





**Breast Cancer Ribbon Pillows**  
Silk screen ink on cotton, pillows  
18 in. square (two pieces)

Reproduction courtesy of  
Joe Girandola



**Diet Pill Necklace**  
Dexatrim pills, elastic  
string, varnish  
1 x 5 in.

Courtesy of Mel Chin



**Freud/Ruth Photograph**  
Digital images  
11 x 8.5 in.

Reproduction courtesy of  
Mel Chin Studios



**Kervorkian/Burns Photograph**  
Digital images  
10 x 8 in.

Reproduction courtesy of  
Mel Chin Studios



**Chroma Key Blue**  
Acrylic on canvas  
24 x 24 in.

Courtesy of Wilhelm Schürmann



**Script Stack**  
Paper, steel  
40 x 8.5 x 11 in.

A season's worth of *Melrose Place* scripts are arranged as a totemic stack. GALA members received copies of the scripts in advance to develop and create set props relevant to specific plotlines, themes and issues.

Courtesy of Wilhelm Schürmann



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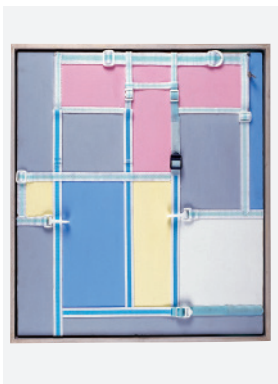
**Sam's Late Paintings—  
Sunny L.A. Series  
Viper Room**  
Acrylic on canvas  
24 x 36 in. (framed)

Courtesy of Wilhelm Schürmann



**Auction Paddles**  
Paint, wood, paper  
11.125 x 6 x 1.25 in. each  
(two pieces)

Courtesy of Wilhelm Schürmann



**Restraining Order**  
Acrylic and nylon straps on wood panel  
24 x 18 in. (framed)

A pink and baby blue "Mondrian," made for control freak Kimberly's inner child.

Courtesy of Wilhelm Schürmann



**Brief Appearances**  
Briefcase, mirror, aluminum, Styrofoam, joint compound, thread, pigment  
13 x 17 x 3 in.

The interior of a briefcase has been transformed into an oversized make-up compact, complete with mirror and powder-puff, to sustain Peter's extreme vanity.

Courtesy of Wilhelm Schürmann



**Uncommon Constructivism**  
Acrylic on canvas  
36 x 42 in. (framed)

Inspired by the early geometric compositions of Kazimir Malevich, *Uncommon Constructivism* is a modified blueprint of the exhibition layout of *Uncommon Sense*.

Courtesy of Wilhelm Schürmann



**The Hoods**  
Acrylic on canvas  
16 x 20 in. each (four panels)

Courtesy of Carol Mendelsohn







**TV Tube (after Johns)**

Bronze, steel  
10 × 11 × 4.75 in.

Courtesy of Wilhelm Schürmann



**Fireflies—The Bombing of Baghdad**

Acrylic on canvas  
72 × 96 in.

Made at the request of a *Melrose Place* producer, this large-scale painting appears in the scene when Kyle, a Marine Gulf War veteran, attends the fictionalized MOCA opening with Amanda. Stylistically and thematically, the work references abstracted, celestial paintings by artist Ross Bleckner that deal primarily with loss.

Courtesy of Wilhelm Schürmann

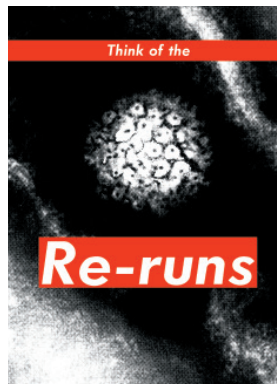


**TV-Phage**

Cathode ray tube, deflection yoke,  
TV antennas  
Extended: 21 × 32 × 21 in.  
Closed: 12 × 14 × 14 in.

*TV-Phage* takes etymological root in the word “bacteriophage,” a virus that parasitizes bacteria by reproducing inside of it. The small sculpture is a metaphor for infecting its viewers. This piece became the iconic representation of GALA’s interaction with *Melrose Place* when it appeared in the MOCA scene with Amanda and Kyle.

Courtesy of Wilhelm Schürmann



**Think of the Reruns**

Digital image  
23.5 × 19.5 in. (framed)

Reproduction courtesy of  
Joe Girandola



**Convo Pool\***

wood, upholstery fabric,  
hardware, vinyl  
22 × 16.5 × 2.25 ft

\*A work conceived for the Red Bull Studios New York exhibition to honor the association between *Melrose Place* and the GALA Committee. Mimicking conversation pits of the past, *Convo Pool* offers an opulent, cushioned sanctuary, a place to reflect. *Melrose Place* meets New York in a watery oasis edged by a landscape of palms.

Adhering to *Melrose Place* set design, the pattern of tile that edged the pool has been faithfully reproduced on printed and quilted fabric; satin cushions fill in for the water.

The pool is conceived as a *yonis* structure with plush seating lining the edges and a *Faulty Landscape* of moveable ottomans floating in the center. When nestled together, puzzle-like, they form the iconic Duchampian image, but visitors are invited to fracture the form by shifting the seating components. *Convo Pool* interactively facilitates close encounters or intercourse of the verbal kind. *Pool Toy* affectionately known on the set as “Spermie Wormie” floats above, a buoyant reminder of the biology that propelled the action of *Melrose Place*.

—Mel Chin, 2016



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SO, MAYBE SAM  
AFTER ALL.  
OR MAYBE NOT.

MAURA SHEEHAN  
65 West Broadway, # 2  
New York City 10007

Ph/Fax: 212 • 406 • 2150

NOW, DID I HEAR YOU CORRECTLY, DID  
YOU SAY YOU WERE TALKING OF ACTUALLY  
PUTTING A VIRAL IMAGE IN 3D ON, IN  
ORDER TO HAVE IT FLOAT LIKE:  
LEVITATE, LIKE SWIM INSIDE THE  
PICTURE PLANE, AS WELL AS THE BOX;  
THE OPTICAL AQUARIUM OF THE T.V.  
SET. NOW THAT'S SO CELLULAR, THE 1<sup>ST</sup> UTTERL  
OPTICAL ORGANISM, ITS THE BIG BANG  
FOR THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF  
PIXAL. WHY DO I KEEP HEARING WIND  
CHIMES AND SEEING MOBILES AS A  
WAY TO MIMICK AND APE THE VIRAL  
EXPERIENCE AS "PARTICLES"  
PIXALS "IN SPACE." LIKE THE PESKY  
PIXALS BROKE FREE OF THE VISUAL  
STORY LINE AND ARE ACTING OUT, PURPLE ROSE OF  
VIRALLY, OF COURSE  
ACTUALLY THIS ECHO AND  
REINFORCES THE MAGNETIC  
MONET, THOES WATTERLILLIES ARE  
ALSO: "MIMMICKING THE VIRAL

OR...



# COM

FRIENDS OF MEL  
NEWSLETTER

LA Edition

ISSUE # 6 - 3/04/96

THE  
GALA  
COMMITTEE

LOS ANGELES

## EPISODE UPDATE

If you caught Melrose last week, you know what I'm talking about. Opening shot: Peter's bedroom. For at least 30 seconds, the opening shot began with an extreme close-up of Gala's condom bedding ensemble. The sheets in question remained present for the duration of the entire opening scene, appearing in various sizes depending upon the position of the camera. Also present was Corina's orange portrait of Peter in the Supreme Court Rotunda. Congratulations to all for this first, bona fide success in terms of product visibility. Internet clues we planted two weeks past concerning the bed sheets have been noticed. This week, cyber fans were discussing the strange "chromosome shapes" on Peter's new linens. It's a matter of time till they make the rubber connection. People noticed what we did. Who woulda thunk it? Allison's office will debut in about three weeks. We inserted far more items in Ms. Parker's office compared to our effort for Dr. Burns' boudoir. The pay-off should be that much more thrilling.

## PROJECTIONS

Melrose's first season is described as the "troubled first season". What made the show an international hit was its ability to adapt, learn from its mistakes, identify what worked well. We should follow this model. What are our strengths? GalaLA prides itself as an idea mogul. CALARTS is the bastion for critical thought in the western hemisphere (that's what the catalogue says). We are not known for our fabrication facilities. Students come here to learn theory, not welding. GalaGA is staffed with artists who are highly skilled craftspersons, to boot. Judging the quality of their output, GalaGA is also a very tight team who know how to communicate with each other so that the job gets done properly. We here in LA could learn from their example: they acknowledge their strengths, delegate production responsibility, and share ideas freely. The CALARTS Art school course load and exhibition pressure is grueling, I sympathize. We are an idea oriented school, let us utilize this strength. There seems to be some strange resistance to developing well thought out project ideas. Please remember our mission is to break down notions of single authorship in favor of a true collaborative effort: the power of the group versus the isolation of the individual. Essentially, this is an exercise in eliminating traditional notions of proper authorship and the accompanying red tape which ensues.

## MELROSE FACTOID

SLAIN PRIME MINISTER OF ISRAEL  
IZZHAK RABIN MET  
ACTOR ANDREW SHUE  
(BILLY) IN 1992.  
RABIN TOLD SHUE  
THAT HE AND HIS  
WIFE WERE HUGE  
FANS OF MELROSE  
PLACE.

## LOVE

I finally moved into a house in Saugus, ending two years of pseudo homeless studio camping. My roommates are responsible, quiet animators/ Tatum managers. Thank you all for bearing with me and the project for the past two months. My living situation to date has been difficult for us all. Hopefully, my newly rented stability will foster an efficient environment to see this project through. Call me @ (805) 263 0932. The answering machine works, my pager still functions, my car is repaired & registered. I look forward to the successful completion of this project and to continued work with the fine people of GalaLA. It's time to get tighter.





33 CONTINUED: 2

33

SYDNEY

So this is your famous window display.

The stylishly-dressed mannequin is posed with a paintbrush  
in front of a Hockney-like painting. (X)  
(X)

SAMANTHA

Yeah...

(nervous -- to Jane)

Do you like my painting?

SYDNEY

(amazement)

You painted this?

SAMANTHA

(tentative pride)

Yeah, it's a picture of Marilyn (X)  
Monroe's house, she used to put these (X)  
stuffed animals all over her front (X)  
lawn, I don't know, she was trying to (X)  
find her inner child, I think... (X)

SYDNEY

Inner children is simply not what (X)  
this store is about. You said style, (X)  
you said glamour -- we get stuffed (X)  
animals. (X)

Sam, bristling, turns to big sister to settle the squabble.

SAMANTHA

What do you think, Jane?

Jane makes a great show of considering the painting --  
partly to relish getting a little dig back at Syd.

JANE

I kind of like it. Why don't we keep  
it up for a while, see what kind of  
feedback we get.

Sam raises her eyebrows triumphantly at Syd, and exits --  
and we're out on Syd, fuming at her nouveau-sibling.

34 EXT. D AND D - ESTABLISHING - DAY

34

35 INT. D AND D - BILLY'S OFFICE - DAY

35

End of day. Craig knocks at the open door and enters  
enthusiastically, then stands there patiently until Billy  
finishes notating a document, and looks up with annoyance.

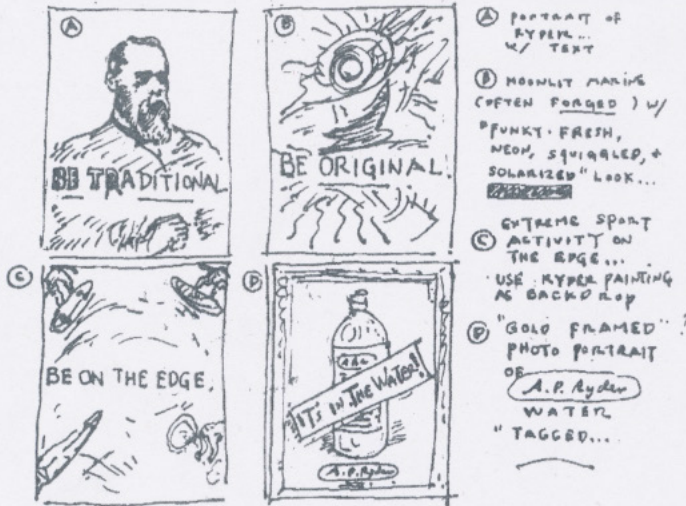
BILLY

Yeah?

(CONTINUED)



# It's in the Water



"As when water still  
Closes o're a corpse  
On the dread sea  
And the burier walks  
Close again to me."

-From an untitled poem by American painter  
AP Ryder.

Episode 6 of Melrose Place contains a story-line where Amanda will pitch an ad campaign to a bottled water company- an idea she steals from Craig Field, son of D&D's owner and Amanda's new nemesis.

GALA invented the "AP Ryder" company and the subsequent campaign. This is the first major instance where GALA directly affected dialogue and story.

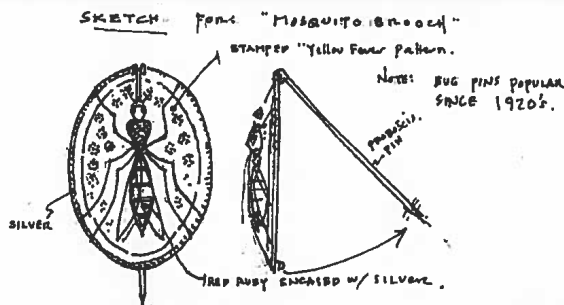
The name comes from American painter AP Ryder- truly an original artist. Ryder was active in the late 19th and early 20th century. He was a pioneer of abstraction and psychological allusion. He touched upon notions of Surrealism more than 50 years before Breton's manifesto. The script called for a campaign for a stodgy, traditional water company which Craig decides should be brought into the 20th century- acknowledging the Gen-X crowd. GALA felt this campaign could be a vehicle for the "Abbey Road Effect". Viewers who know Ryder will question why Melrose used the name of an artist. Within the design of the campaign and the bottle, there exists information pertaining to the industrial poisoning of global water supplies. Story boards for this campaign will be a major focal point for the conclusion of Episode 6.

## Double Fault

Kyle's Restaurant has 75 new plates for it's patrons. The image on the plate (crudely reproduced on the right) is of the Los Angeles metropolitan area; incorporating the coast line and Catalina Island. The dark lines are major plate tectonic faults. The square icons represent major earthquakes. Areas of high violence (the gun icon) and riots (the flame icon) are also represented. This piece raises questions concerning eco-terrorism and eco-racism.



# Dead Men Don't Move



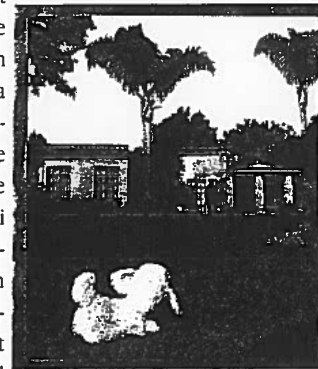
Richard Hart, the man who raped Jane, is a conniving bastard who will finally get what's coming to him. In last season's cliffhanger, Jane avenged her dignity by killing Richard with the aide of her sister, Sydney, and a shovel. Or so they thought. . . The closing shot-straight out of George Romero- showed Richard's not-quite-dead-yet hand emerging from his premature shallow grave in the Angeles National Forest. To paraphrase Sam Clemens, the details surrounding Richard's death were greatly exaggerated. Jane reports Richard's disappearance to the police as to remove her from sus-

picion. Upon investigation, the police discover Richard's financial woes and deduce his disappearance to be self inflicted. Investigators believe Richard is on the lamb from the IRS and various parties to whom he owes cash. The sisters are in the clear until Richard, crazed from his claustrophobic earthen retreat, decides to blackmail the sisters. With one murder attempt firmly under their designer belts, Sydney and Jane eventually get it right. Jane sticks Richard's corpse in his cute butt with an antique silver brooch, just to make sure he's really dead this time. Enter THE GALA COMMITTEE.

The above sketch shows our silver brooch (approximately 2 inches long). The bug is a Egypti Mosquito. It sits on an oval field with Yellow Fever microbe decorating the landscape. According to national disease estimates, Yellow Fever will be making a comeback in the next twenty years. Much like Richard, it will rise from the dead. The brooch has overtones of infection, resurgence, and intrusion. All these themes are poetically site specific to the scene in which the brooch will be displayed.

## NEWS FROM KANSAS CITY

Nine painters from the Kansas City branch office of GALA 'MO are in the midst of a truly collaborative venture. Encompassing theoretical input from all branches of GALA, the *Paintings of Sam* are under way. Incorporating Spelling Production's vision of "Hockneyesque" paintings of LA paired with the voice of an newly arrived easterner who wishes to reinvent herself after experiencing a traumatic past *sounds* easy enough (insert sarcasm here). This is yet another example of the amazing productivity possible through artistic collaboration. The canvases will be of LA exteriors; not so much famous as *infamous*. They will have the formal glitz and happy colors of a Hockney, but the underlying context will be all GALA- serious social issues subversively contextualized: The home where Marilyn Monroe overdosed- The Ambassador Hotel where RFK took his fatal jaunt through the kitchen- The Viper Room- Nicole Brown's Home- The Menendez Estate- Roman Polanski and Sharon Tate's home. These locations are sites of gruesome folklore; a collective trauma for a media linked village. Instead of depicting these locales with their legendary baggage, we are taking a conceptual step backward. The exteriors will invoke a time *before* the trauma. A strange dichotomy will result between the collective knowledge of terrible acts and the subsequent tranquil representation of these sites. GALA 'MO will insert subtle clues alluding to the atrocities, such as small orange bushes outside Nicole Brown's home. The first painting will be Marilyn Monroe's home, pictured above. This will be the image displayed in Jane's Boutique window. It will be taken by Sydney and will launch the whole "Jablonski" incident.





# PRODUCT UPDATE:

DATE: 09.06.96

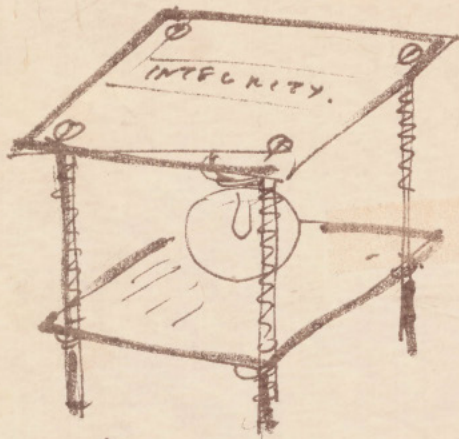
NO:

FROM: THE GALA COMMITTEE

TO: DEBORAH SIEGEL / KIM PATTERSON

RE: "INTEGRITY COLOGNE"

FOR: CRAIG'S OFFICE / DESK ORNAMENT



NOTES: THIS IS BASED ON AN ARTWORK  
BY M. DUCHAMP 1916

ENTITLED: "WITH HIDDEN NOISE"

IN THIS WORK... ALL IS REVEALED...

Q. HOW MUCH INTEGRITY\* IS THERE  
IN THE ADVERTISING WORLD?

\* ON THE SMELL OF IT???

X gala



# PRODUCT UPDATE:

DATE: 2/3/97

NO: 39

From: THE GALA COMMITTEE  
To: Carol Mendelsohn

RE: Product Approval C.C > Deborah Siegel

FOR: Beach House Art Collection

PAGES: 2

## Episode 26 and Beyond...

### "Megan and Michael's Beach House Art Collection"

In our first proposal, we discussed a "goddess/whore" motif. This idea would be better articulated in a broader critique. We have adopted the following conceptual guidelines: Historical sexual iconography, objects of desire/worship/reverence, the mechanics/politics of intimacy, and how sexual roles can be dictated through structures which culture does not consider inherently sexual.

We have discussed these ideas with Deborah and she is receptive to them. She has given us the estimated number and dimensions of artworks needed for this site.



1. **The Yoni:** The Yoni is an ancient Indian reverent abstraction. We creating abstract drawings inspired by classical Yoni imagery. Also, we are broadening the Yoni motif to comment on western fascination with sports and competition. For this, we propose a bas-relief wall piece which depicts an aerial representation of a football stadium. The male compliment to the Yoni is the Lingam; an elongated polished river stone. Our Lingam would have a football shape.



We propose a drawing which depicts the convex Yoni shape. The shape would be composed of tiny lines of text listing hundreds of euphemisms and slang for sexual organs. The idea is that language is a system of control.



2. **Sexuality in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction /Some Assembly Required:** Architectural drawings are a popular decorative motif used on the show. We propose several "schematic drawings" which expose underlying sexual structures in mundane objects. These include instructional drawings for the assembly of boxes (insert tab "A" into slot "B"), renderings of nuts, bolts and coupling devices (traditionally described as being either "male" or "female"), pistons, engines, etc. Furthermore, we are considering schematic drawings which show assembly methods for popular children's toys; toys which dictate sexual roles to children (Barbie Dream House, GI Joe Battle station, etc.) The act of assembly questions whether sexual roles, like the toys, are human fabrications or "nature's way."





# ARTFORUM

## **“Total Proof: The GALA Committee 1995–1997**

RED BULL STUDIOS | NEW YORK  
220 West 18th Street, Street level  
September 30–November 27



The GALA Committee, Target Audience,  
1995–97, paper, steel, plastic, pigment, 18" diameter.

If primetime is the ultimate venue for product placement, then shouldn't it also work for plugging art? So wondered Mel Chin, who in 1995 contacted the set decorator of the sexy Los Angeles soap *Melrose Place* with an offer to make props for the show. She agreed, and Chin, with a network of artists collaborating under the moniker “The GALA Committee,” began a two-year project of churning out artworks for the series. In return for their unpaid labor, they demanded just one thing: the license to respond, subtly, to social issues.

In “Total Proof,” more than ninety-four of the group's pieces are on view for the first time in New York, staged in rooms built to resemble the original sets. TV monitors scattered throughout the galleries add to the Universal Studios effect and screen clips of Committee items in their natural habitat—peeking out from behind Heather Locklear's blond mane, or clasped in the well-manicured hands of her costars.

Like the show's different plotlines, the works range in drama and intent. RU 486 Quilt, 1995–97, a blanket embroidered with the abortion pill—made for a character grappling with an unplanned pregnancy—issues a bold political statement. Other objects are far more tongue-in-cheek: When the show's creators requested “optimistic, California-lite” paintings for a budding artist introduced during the fourth season, the Committee delivered Hockney-style canvases based on archival police photographs of famous Angeleno crime scenes. Some of the cleverest props took aim not at current events but at TV itself. A dartboard titled Target Audience, 1995–97, features only numbers between eighteen and forty-nine, in reference to the program's target age demographic—it's the same group that, for a time, became unwitting consumers of Conceptual art.





# e-flux

McKenzie Wark

## Digital Provenance and the Artwork as Derivative



Installation view TOTAL PROOF: The GALA Committee 1995-1997, Red Bull Studios New York, 2016. Photo: GALA Committee/Red Bull Studios New York

Unlike Hito Steyerl, I don't think art is a currency.<sup>1</sup> I think it's a derivative, which is not quite the same thing as a currency. A currency can store value or act as a means of exchange. A derivative does something different. It manages and hedges risk. What we need, then, is a theory of art as a derivative. Let's start with this paradox. Art is about rarity, about things that are unique and special and cannot be duplicated. And yet the technologies of our time are all about duplication, copies, about information that is not really special at all. At first, it might appear that the traditional form of art is obsolete. If it has value, it is as something from a past way of life, before information technology took over. But actually, what appears to be happening is stranger than that. Let's look at some of the special ways in which art as rarity interacts now in novel ways with information as plenty, producing some rather striking opportunities to create value.

By way of illustration, I want to talk about some art from twenty years ago. Some time in the mid-Nineties, the artist Mel Chin was watching television. He saw the actress Heather Locklear on the screen, but what the artist saw was not the actress, he saw the space in which she appeared: the television screen itself. What he saw there was the biggest art gallery in the world. So he contacted the set decorator for the show, whose name was Deborah Siegel. He proposed that the set should include work by artists. The artists would not be paid. They took this idea to the producers, who approved. Probably because of the not getting paid part.

So Chin formed a group called the GALA Committee. GALA stood for Georgia and Los Angeles, and would involve artists and art students from both locations. The work was all made collaboratively. For two years, GALA worked with the scriptwriters and made art that appeared on the show, usually in the background, but sometimes thematically related to stories going on in the show and sometimes relating to things from real life. GALA made about two hundred objects, the majority of which ended up on the show. The show was *Melrose Place*, one of the most iconic soap operas of its era. The GALA art was on it for two seasons, four and five.

The writers eventually wrote the art into the show. One character was an artist. The Heather Locklear character, who ran an advertising agency, signed the real Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art to her made-up ad agency, and there were scenes in the show filmed at the real MOCA, showing a real exhibition of the GALA art from the show itself. The GALA art was then auctioned at Sotheby's Beverly Hills, where a real consortium of collectors from Germany bought the art. The proceeds were donated by GALA to charities.

Now: here is the detail I want to point out about all this. In the Sotheby's auction catalog, there is a list in the back that details the episodes of the show in which each work appeared. What is this list about? One word for it is provenance. What makes each piece authentic is that it appeared on a set for a television show, was videotaped on that set, and those images ended up in a show that was broadcast to millions of people. It is actually still being broadcast, as *Melrose Place* is still in syndication somewhere on the planet even to this day. The provenance of the work is a really strange kind of product placement.



There is a retrospective of the GALA Committee work on right now in New York, which is what made me think of it as an example to talk about.<sup>2</sup> I think it's a nice anticipation of where we ended up in the relationship of art and information. For those who have read their Walter Benjamin, it is an interesting wrinkle in the relation that is supposed to hold between the work of art and reproducibility.<sup>3</sup> In Benjamin, reproducibility is supposed to undermine the aura of the work, its ritual seclusion, its provenance, and its standing as a unique piece of private property. But with the GALA work, what we have, dare I say, is a rather more dialectical relation between art and information.

It is the reproduction of the work, electronically rather than mechanically, that perversely enough makes it rare. The image of the GALA work in the TV show is what Hito Steyerl calls a poor image, a wretched image, compressed and degraded and available on the internet for anyone.<sup>4</sup> But the GALA work itself is not. And its provenance comes, not from the singular place of its creation and persistence, but from the ubiquity of the image of it. It's a kind of network or distributed provenance, perhaps.

Far from making the work of art obsolete, the reproducible image gives it a new kind of value. It is not quite the case that the original and the copy become indistinguishable. But it is the case that their relationship can be reversible. The copy can precede the original. You see a reproduction of something and that makes you want to go see the thing of which it is the copy. That's a common enough occurrence, something Jean Baudrillard drew our attention to.<sup>5</sup> But the thing to pay attention to is that the copy creates the provenance of the original, not the other way around. The copy not only precedes but authenticates the original.

The copy can create value for the work, or in some cases for the artist rather than the work. This would be the Banksy story. The thing about Banksy that matters the most is the copies of the pieces that circulate on the internet. That is what establishes their provenance. These appear to be works made illegally in public, but that in itself is not all that interesting or important. There's lots of street art. It is just that this street art is authenticated by the circulation of its images. Those poor images are what create value, in this case for a visibly invisible artist.

A visibly invisible artist is something of a provenance anomaly, the scene of a crime. While there has been speculation for some years now that Banksy is "actually" a man named Robin Gunningham, the Daily Mail brought forensic methods from criminal investigation to bear on the question, trying to correlate known Banksy works in London with places Gunningham is known to frequent.<sup>6</sup> It is an example maybe of counter-provenance, of layering a potentially criminal authentication over an art world one.

Sometimes the preceding image that authenticates the work is not of the work but still precedes it. As an example, I'd like to look at *The Island* (Ken) by the group that calls itself DIS. This was at the New Museum. I did a little talk-performance with this piece, and in the process of writing it I did a studio visit and talked to the artists.<sup>7</sup> They told me that the process that resulted in this work started with an idea about high-end kitchens and bathrooms. Googling that generated a series of advertisements based on the search terms, for companies offering such high-end appliances. So DIS simply chose the most high-end-seeming companies and approached them about making the pieces. So in this case, the provenance of the work comes from a Google search.

This is what the Google algorithm, customizing itself for this particular computer used by DIS, thinks is the real thing when it comes to fancy appliances. Yet, when I searched for "high-end shower" I got slightly different results, tailored algorithmically to me, or rather to my computer. The signature is in this case the algorithmically generated search, and can be expected to differ in some way in each instance. Here we have a difference from the GALA work, which depends on the uniformity of the broadcast model of simulation.

The artwork is now a derivative of its simulation. Of course there are many different kinds of simulations. It could be the JPEG of a particular work sent by a dealer to a collector, attached to a text message. The collector reads the text, looks at the JPEG, makes a decision about the artwork. But actually, the artwork is a derivative. It was the JPEG that mattered, as it is the JPEG on which the transaction depends. The collector might decide to buy or not buy the work, to reserve it, to see it later in person, and so on. As in other fields, the main thing traded here is the derivatives. The simulations are not worth much at all, or are such poor images that they might as well be free gifts.

Not just individual artworks, but art itself is now a derivative of its simulation. A key to this development is the rise of art fairs and biennials. The art fairs are more directly about selling artwork derivatives of their simulated images. They are mostly about the commercial dealers who trade in the derivative contracts that are artworks themselves. But the other side of this is the biennial, whose function is to simulate contemporary art itself. The artwork is a derivative of its simulation, or rather of its simulations, plural. This is the way the actual, particular artwork can still work as a sort of hedge. An artwork is a risky proposition. It might in the long run turn out to be worth no more than any random bit of painted canvas. But if the artwork can be a portfolio of different kinds of simulation of itself, it is possible to manage the risk.

An artwork can be a derivative of the simulation of itself, where its image precedes it and authenticates it through its circulation and exposure. Here GALA is the example. An artwork can be a derivative of the simulation of its artist. Here Banksy is a slightly aberrant example, where its the simulation of the artist's absence that creates provenance. An artwork can also claim provenance from celebrity. This is one of the things going on in the commerce between the art world, fashion, and pop music. Those mass simulation forms think they gain something from the provenance of the artwork as a rare and singular commodity, and maybe they do. But I think really the secret is that it is the artwork that acquires its provenance from proximity to Jay Z or Kanye or Björk. The artwork becomes a derivative of contact with the body behind the simulation of the pop star or fashion star. An artwork can also be a derivative of intellectual provenance. It helps if the intellectual is dead. Hence Thomas Hirschhorn's Gramsci Monument, which derives its provenance from a famous dead Communist thinker. If one must use living intellectuals, famous critical thinkers are the best. The derivative work acquires commercial value from these intellectuals' lack of commercial interest in value. So get Antonio Negri if you can. The DIS people had to settle for me as I come a lot cheaper.

An artwork can of course be a derivative of previous artworks, but a certain boredom is settling on this well-worn method, which in the end delights nobody but art historians, who become consultants to provenance as evaluators of quotation. The historians quote precedents so the gallerist may quote prices.

In any case, it tends also to mask the way in which the artwork has changed. Artworks in our time are derivatives because that is how our economy works. In a previous era, one which prized manufacturing, artworks were distinguished by their manufacturing techniques. So, for example, works by Impressionists, Surrealists, or so-called Action Painters could be treated as special, non-alienating commodities made by some other manufacturing process besides the workshop or the assembly line.



This started to change in the Sixties. Through Edie Sedgwick, Warhol discovered both how simulation could create provenance and how the artwork could be the derivative that would be a portfolio of simulation values. But it was perhaps minimalism's "dematerialization of the artwork" that really put an end to the industrial model of art and paved the way for the birth of the financial model of art, of the artwork as a derivative that functions as a portfolio of simulation values. The artwork, like any other financial instrument, needs nothing to exist beyond its *documentation*.

The dematerialization of the artwork was not the dematerialization of the art worker. But one might speculate as to whether that might be the next step. Could the labor of art be automated? There was already a lovely image of this in William Gibson's novel *Neuromancer*, in which an artificial intelligence makes Joseph Cornell boxes that are if anything better than actual ones.

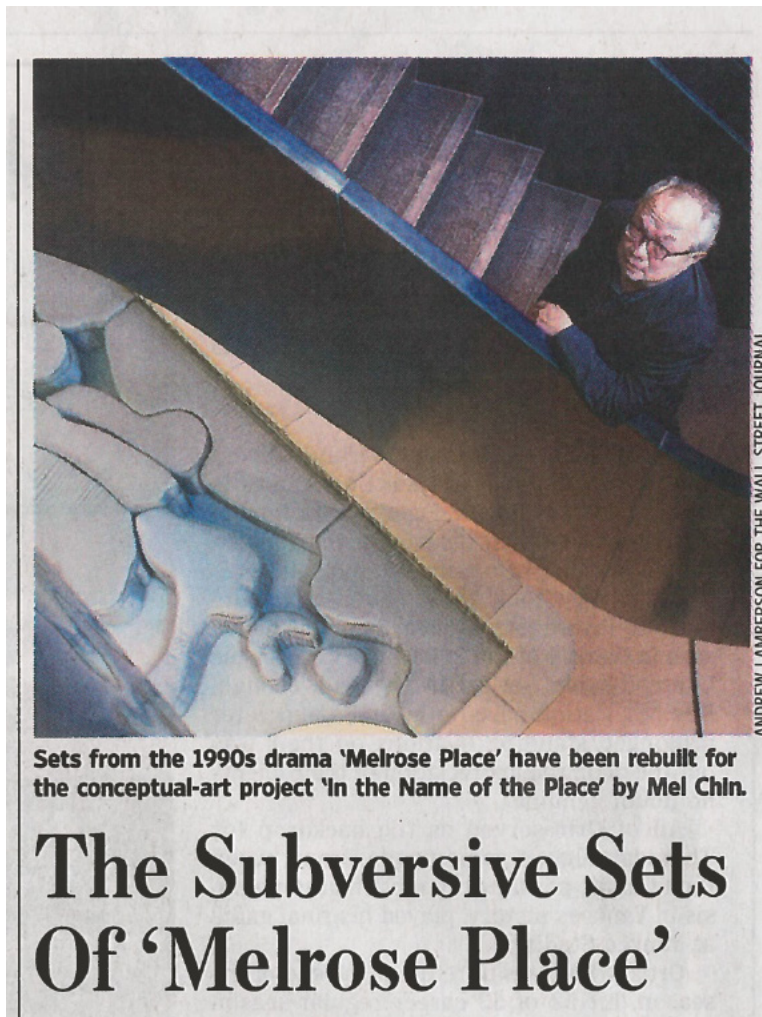
So in short, I think what is most interesting about the relation between art and information is the reciprocal relation between art as rarity and information as ubiquity. It turns out that ubiquity can be a kind of distributed provenance, of which the artwork itself is the derivative. The artwork is then ideally a portfolio of different kinds of simulated value, the mixture of which can be a long-term hedge against the risks of various kinds of simulated value falling—such as the revealing of the name of a hidden artist, or the decline of the intellectual discourse on which the work depended, or the artist falling into banality and overproduction.

Since art became a special kind of financial instrument rather than a special kind of manufactured article, it no longer needs to have a special means for its making, or even perhaps special makers. Indeed, curators now rival artists for influence the way DJs rival musicians. Both are a kind of portfolio manager of the qualitative. The next step after the dematerialization of the artwork may be the dematerialization of the art worker, whose place could be taken by new kinds of algorithmic functions. These would still have to produce the range of simulations that might anchor the artwork as a derivative of their various kinds of sign value.





# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.



Sets from the 1990s drama 'Melrose Place' have been rebuilt for the conceptual-art project 'In the Name of the Place' by Mel Chin.

## The Subversive Sets Of 'Melrose Place'



Red Bull Studios New York  
220 West 18th Street, NY  
[www.redbullstudiosnewyork.com](http://www.redbullstudiosnewyork.com)

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, NOVEMBER 2016

By ANDY BATTAGLIA

Mel Chin's conceptual-art project "In the Name of the Place" draws inspiration from an unlikely subject: the 1990s soap opera "Melrose Place."

At Red Bull Studios in Chelsea, sets from the television show, a spinoff of "Beverly Hills, 90210," have been rebuilt for an exhibition opening Friday. On display are dozens of artworks that doubled as episode props, many with coded messages.

Mr. Chin got the idea after chancing upon the show in its heyday and finding a set designer willing to smuggle his creations into scenes. It was a smart move, said Frank South, a "Melrose Place" writer and producer at the time. "The way to do it was not to tell anybody."

The secret works included a quilt patterned with the chemical composition of RU-486, the morning-after pill (it kept a pregnant character warm in one scene), as well as Chinese-takeout bags with political messages stamped on them in a language lost to many U.S. viewers of prime-time TV.

Around 200 of these pieces were created by the GALA Committee, a collaborative effort led by Mr. Chin that included art students from the University of Georgia and the California Institute of the Arts.

Eventually, Mr. South said, "Melrose Place" writers and cast members got in on the action. The exhibit features some of their correspondence with the artists, including a fax that shows a drawing of a postal worker whose mailbag bears a machine-gun clip.

"The piece is in reference to the rash of job-related violence committed by postal

employees over the past decade," the fax reads.

Rob Estes, an actor on "Melrose Place," said his favorite pieces include a set of bed sheets with a graphic-design motif based on unrolled condoms and an elaborate scene in which his character visited a museum that was showing works by the GALA Committee.

The exterior of Red Bull Studios on West 18th Street has been refashioned with some "Melrose Place" touches, including the decorative tile from the apartment complex where most of the main characters' lives, fights and trysts played out. Visitors will have a chance to wander through re-created rooms and settings from the show, including a Shooters bar whose bottles feature fake labels commenting on the history of alcohol in the U.S., and a swimming pool that has been refashioned as a conversation pit filled with plush blue chairs.

### Artist Mel Chin planted coded artworks on the set of the show.

"You enter through a fantasy," Mr. Chin said, "and come into this art show about reality that was conducted in another fantasy."

Mr. South said when his bosses at the show found out, they were concerned, but then intrigued.

"I went up [to late "Melrose Place" executive producer Aaron Spelling] and explained it was supposed to be subtextual and unconscious," Mr. South recalled. "He said, 'Well, did it cost us anything?' I said it was all this set decorating we got for free."

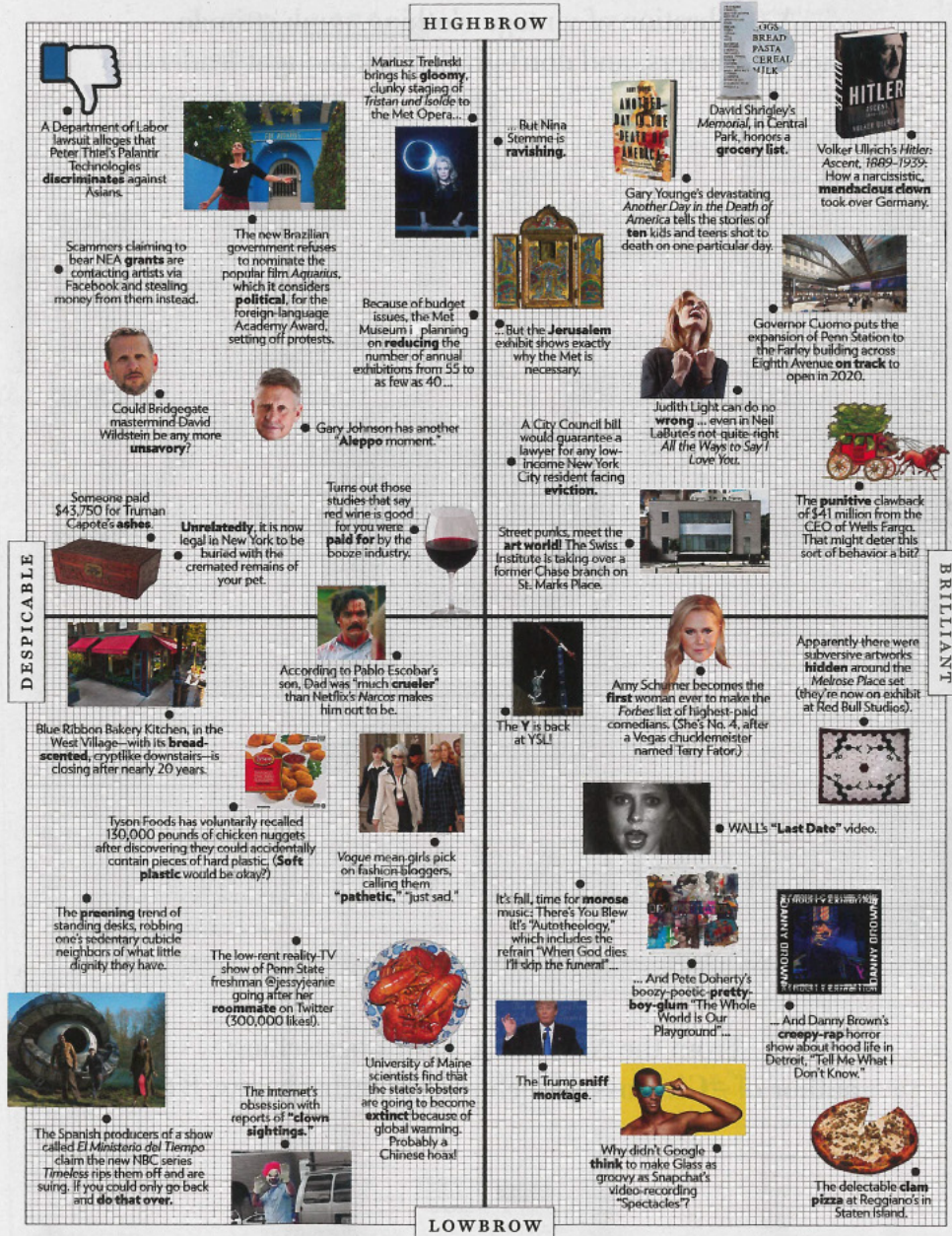




# NEW YORK

## THE APPROVAL MATRIX

Our deliberately oversimplified guide to who falls where on our taste hierarchies.





# BLOUINARTINFO

## Think of the Re-Runs: The Surreptitious Activist Art on 'Melrose Place'

BY TAYLOR DAFOE | OCTOBER 03, 2016



Installation view of "TOTAL PROOF: The GALA Committee 1995-1997"  
(Photo by Lance Brewer)

When you think of *Melrose Place*, the primetime TV melodrama that ran from 1992 to 1999 on FOX, you probably don't think of "art," let alone heady conceptual and activist art. But it was there, right next to Heather Locklear.

From 1995-97, an artist collective known as GALA Committee, led by Mel Chin, used the show as a vehicle for *In the Name of the Place* a multi-year conceptual art project—the first to use a major network program in that way. For the project, GALA created thousands of political art props, from pillows to posters to clothing and so on, to employ on the show. The works often appeared in the background, and were hard to pick out. The show had millions of viewers, but only few people ever knew about the project. Even the majority of the cast and crew were unaware.

Now, the props, plans, and other ephemera that made up *In the Name of the Place* are back on display, this time in an exhibition at Red Bull Studios New York. The show, titled *TOTAL PROOF: The GALA Committee 1995-1997*, features hundreds of the surviving items, installed alongside sets recreated from *Melrose Place*.

In the early 90s, Mel Chin was teaching at the University of Georgia, and working out of Los Angeles. He formed the collective GALA (GA plus LA) Committee from the artists in his circle, many of which weren't as well known as he. The goal was to create a dialogue about alternate ways for art to be displayed and distributed. It turned into much more. Chin reached out to Deborah Siegel, the set decorator of *Melrose Place*, with the idea of the project. Amazingly, the studio went along with it, with the stipulation that no money change hands.

GALA's props ranged from the cheeky, such as Domestic Brand cereal (spelled "Serial"), to the more menacing, like a gaudy necklace made of strung-together diet pills. Most objects are both ironic and critical: a bedside birth control case with a clay carving of a fertility goddess, or a dartboard with a woman's face in the bulls eye, called "target audience."

Prominent political issues of the early-to-mid '90s are everywhere. For instance, HIV pillows with STD video sleeves. The lacy decoration lining a bright pink throw pillow is actually the breast cancer ribbon. A set of hanging works made from deconstructed stuffed animals, called "Against PETA" (People for the Ethical Treatment of Stuff Animals), both provides a serious commentary on animal rights—an important issue at the time, and pokes fun at the aggressive activist tactics of PETA in the 80s and 90s. And Desert Storm was big theme: items such as a bomb-shaped bowling ball and pen-holder that looks like the chamber of a revolver invoke this. And appropriately, for a project that traffics in the language of subliminal imagery, subtle psychoanalytic tropes themselves are everywhere: an ornate room divider is patterned with Rorschach blots; a framed photo on a side table, the kind that might feature a picture of an old relative, features an amalgamated image of Sigmund Freud and Dr. Ruth Westheimer—a radio and TV sex therapist from the 80s.



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BLOUIN ARTINFO, OCTOBER 2016

Finally, art historical jokes run throughout, be it in the form of a Monet-look-alike with movable magnetic figures, a Calder-like mobile in the form of a telephone, or a poster done in Barbara Kruger's iconic black and red graphic style, which reads: "Think of the Re-Runs." The invocation of Kruger is especially effective, as the ethos of the pictures generation is everywhere in the exhibition—the humor, the gesture of appropriation, and most importantly, the legal risk.

Whether or not GALA's *Melrose Place* props were successful is still debatable. Looking at them in a gallery setting, their political potency is undeniable, but on the show itself, they were subtle at best. And not all of the props actually saw screen time. They was just the way it had to be—the show, a huge moneymaker for the network at the time, was already risking its livelihood by letting such an experiment take place.

After the fifth season of the show wrapped, the GALA Committee's collection of *Melrose Place* works were included in a 1997 group exhibition at L.A.'s Museum of Contemporary Art, where they were installed in a set recreated from the TV show. Titled *Uncommon Sense*, the exhibition was curated by Julie Lazar and Tom Finkelpearl (who is now the commissioner of the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs).

To complete the interplay, in the next season of *Melrose Place*, Heather Locklear attends the opening of "Uncommon Sense" at MOCA.

*TOTAL PROOF: The GALA Committee 1995-1997*, is up now through November 27, 2016.





## How *Melrose Place* Was Reborn as a New York Art Show



Recall *Melrose Place* and you may remember crazy Kimberly blowing L.A.'s most sex- and scandal-drenched apartment complex sky-high, or revealing that head scar in the bathroom mirror; the countless pool fights, slaps, the not-dead Richard's hand shooting out of the ground...

At its best, *Melrose Place* was a weekly maelstrom of sex, skimpy clothing, gossip, bar fights, murder, and marriage proposals.

It was also, for two seasons at least, a subtly transgressive piece of conceptual artwork, one that was subliminally laced with winking references to American military power, racial privilege, the subjugation of women, and the global slave trade.

That's because between 1995 and 1997, dozens of conceptual artists were given relatively free rein over show's props, and so took off the set's walls the anodyne art work that usually peppered the show, and instead laced the sound stage with work that would ordinarily never have made it past the censors at the Federal Communications Commission or network executives.

"We wanted to enter the world covertly, the way business does and the military does, but we weren't there for power, we weren't there for control like they were," said Mel Chin, the artist who engineered the original idea back in the '90s. "We were there to engage in ideas and progressive politics and examine how those ideas can be transmitted."

Chin was standing in front of Red Bull Studios New York, an art gallery that has gathered all the art work from the intervention for a show set to open this week, *Total Proof: The Gala Committee, 1995-1997*.

As he spoke, a handful of assistants painstakingly recreated the entrance to the original *Melrose Place* building, complete with painstakingly hand-painted Spanish tiles.

Neighbors of the gallery space on 18th Street between Seventh and Eighth avenues, who were fans of the show, have been walking past both bemused



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THE DAILY BEAST, OCTOBER 2016



and thrilled to see not just the recreation of the famous apartment complex entrance, but also the sign in the window signaling Shooters bar. The idea for the original artistic intervention came to Chin when he was asked to contribute to a Los Angeles County Museum of Art show about L.A. He was dividing his time between Los Angeles and Georgia, flying back and forth across the country, and somewhere over Kansas the idea hit him: “L.A. is in the air,” he realized, meaning that Los Angeles existed as a fantasy projection beamed out across billions of television sets around the world. “It is in microwave transmissions traveling across America. That is the L.A. we need to be interested in.”

Once back in Georgia, he was flipping through channels on the television one night when the perfectly blonde, perfectly Californian image of Heather Locklear, the star of *Melrose Place* appeared on screen. Locklear’s character, Amanda, turned her head away, revealing a banal piece of art work hanging on the wall.

“And I thought what if that art work was replaced with a message of significance.”

Board members and higher-ups at the museum thought about using their connections to get in touch with Aaron Spelling, the famed producer who created the show and its counterpart, Beverly Hills 90210.

But Chin instead grabbed a couple of fanzines and found the name of the show’s set decorator, Deborah Siegel. He contacted her, and after she apologized for the dreck that was usually on the walls, agreed to his plan.

The idea, Chin said, was to use *Melrose Place* like a host, and he and his collaborators’ art work—which they donated for free—would be the virus, unwittingly infecting millions of viewers every week.

A bedspread was covered in condom shaped designs. A comforter mimicked the DNA of the RU-486 abortion pill, which was being hotly debated at the time. Chinese food containers were printed with the message “human rights” and “turmoil” written in Mandarin.

The presence of the art was supposed to work on viewers without them knowing what the art meant for the most part, to develop an appreciation of art without knowing they were seeing “art.”

Soon after the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, Chin’s co-op of artists—they called themselves “The GALA Committee,” since they were recruited largely from Georgia and Los Angeles—created a piece of artwork that blared the words “Absolut Proof” in reference to the vodka brand ad campaign, and featured a photograph of the bombed-out Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building to make a statement about the dangers of alcohol versus the far-more imagined dangers of terrorism.

That one tipped off the show’s producers, coming so soon after the bombing, and as the show writers were fiddling with the infamous episode in which Kimberly blew up the apartment complex.

Fortunately for Chin and his gang of collaborators, the show’s executive producer, Frank South, was a former performance artist in New York. When Siegel came to his office to tell him what was going on, “I was just completely astonished,” South told *The Daily Beast*. “It was like someone was whispering to me, ‘Remember where you came from.’ And I just said, ‘Oh this is so great.’”

Eventually, the show’s producers and writers and the artists began to collaborate more openly, with the artists receiving scripts weeks in advance and South directing the camera crew to pick up on the artwork that could easily be overlooked.

At Shooters, the bar where the *Melrose Place* gang would go to knock back a few drinks and conspire in all sorts of overwrought shenanigans, the artists painted the labels of every bottle of alcohol, often with messages about the history of alcohol in America. (A bottle of Budweiser, for example, was renamed “Be-Wiser.”)

*Melrose Place* was not allowed to show two gay characters in a relationship kissing—there was one planned but it was edited out—but on one set was placed a yellow sign that “Brave New Family” and showed two men with a baby.

South even created an artist character on the show to better incorporate what GALA was doing. After a few episodes, Chin asked the show’s writers why the artist was painting in the style of David Hockney, which no young artist in L.A. would have been doing in the 1990s.

They said the camera picked up the color work, so the GALA crew made paintings in Hockney-esque colors but with serious themes, like a painting of the hotel where Robert Kennedy was shot.

“In Los Angeles, artists were pretty much divided into two camps,” said **Constance Penley, a GALA Committee member**. “Some thought, ‘Oh my god, you are working on a TV show?’ And the others thought, ‘Oh my god, you are doing this for free.’”

Although the job did have its perks, **Penley said**, “We were the only people in the country who knew what was going to happen with Kimberly’s brain tumor, or Allison’s pregnancy, or who was going to murder whom next week.”

The show’s actors were largely either uninterested, or oblivious, and the artists were told “to stay away from the talent,” Chin said, although he did recall Grant Show, who played Jake Hanson on the show, calling his cast members over to see what they had done with the labels at Shooters, and South recalled one actor—he couldn’t recall which one, wondering why the bowling bag he was carrying had a ball with a big fuse like a comic strip bomb in it. Eventually, all of the artwork that the GALA members created ended up in a show at the Museum of Contemporary Art in L.A., and in a layers-on-top-of-layers TV moment, two of the TV show’s characters went on a date to the art show.

The *New Yorker* wrote about the moment, which was when Aaron Spelling first heard about it.

He summoned South, who was certain he was in for a dressing down, to his office.

South recalled that Spelling said, “You have been doing this for two years and you never told me?”



South explained that he didn't want to burden Spelling with it.

"How much is this costing us?" Spelling demanded.

Well, nothing, South replied, at which point Spelling gave it his blessing.

"Just don't keep secrets from me, and don't do anything to hurt my show," he said. Which Chin said, they never would have done. Unlike others in the art world, there was no disdain from his crew toward trash TV.

"It is never about judging anything in culture as frivolous or campy. There is meaning out there to be had. And if we can make it more meaningful and compelling, then that is good job for artists to have."

Once the famous MOCA date between Locklear and co-star Rob Estes's characters happened, the secret was out. For the virus to be effective, it had to work secretly, and so it was time for the experiment to end.

Plus, Chin said, he and his collaborators were exhausted after having produced work week after week for free. The work was auctioned off and scattered to the winds, until Red Bull Studios gathered it back together for *Total Proof: The Gala Committee 1995-1997*.

Looking back on it, Penley said she was struck by how so much of what they dealt with back then remains the concerns of artists and television viewers today: "Sexuality, domestic terrorism, racial violence, global public health issues. I would have thought they would have resolved themselves by now." The artists say such an experiment wouldn't be possible today. Social media would kill the stealth part of it, and television has become a high art form, with millions of armchair critics decoding each scene for clues.

But Chin made a career out of putting art in unexpected places, places that caught passers-by by surprise. "Art is not about manipulating things into being. It is about creating cataclysmic platforms that don't exist into being," he said standing by a remake of the *Melrose Place* pool in the Red Bull gallery. "The future can be like this. This was a deeply considered conceptual art work produced during prime time television. There is not just one thing to say about it."



# The Creators Project

Si alguna vez viste *Melrose Place* fuiste parte de un experimento artístico masivo

Paula Velasco — 24 oct 2016



Capturas de *Melrose Place*

Es probable que si no tienes más de 25 no hayas visto *Melrose Place*, pero esta telenovela americana albergó un gran secreto artístico por dos años. El show, que sucede en el mismo universo que *Beverly Hills 90210*, se trata de un grupo de jóvenes adultos que viven en *Melrose Place*, Los Ángeles. Aparte de su extraordinario estilo californiano noventaero, el show era una ebullición de drama digna de cualquier producción latinoamericana.

La historia interesante comienza en 1995, cuando el artista y profesor Mel Chin discutía con sus alumnos sobre los espacios alternativos en los que podía insertarse el arte, ya que pensaban que los museos no lograban la apertura necesaria. Pensando que Los Ángeles era la Meca del entretenimiento, Chin aterrizó en *Melrose Place*. El show era el lugar perfecto para insertar el arte, ya que de manera directa o indirecta llegaría a la gran audiencia de éste.

Chin habló con la diseñadora de escenografía, Deborah Siegel y le planteó un concepto ligeramente perturbador. Él le proporcionaría obras de arte gratuitamente y ella tendría que meterlas en la escenografía. Las obras tendrían mensajes de temas que normalmente eran tabú en los shows de la época como el aborto, la política exterior, tendencia de armas, alcoholismo, etc. Siegel aceptó la propuesta y ahí comenzó uno de los experimentos sociales artísticos más grandes de la historia.

Las obras fueron realizadas por el colectivo que Chin construyó. El GALA Committee, formado por más de 100 artistas de Georgia y Los Ángeles hicieron cientos de obras que pasaron desapercibidas por el público y los productores, en un tipo de product placement artístico clandestino. Como si esto no fuera lo suficientemente *Truman Show*, el colectivo se enlazó con los guionistas y crearon un personaje. Se creó a la artista Samantha Reilly, la cuál les permitió insertar obras más fácilmente. Las obras, al estilo de Hockney, parecían ser paisajes normales pero en realidad eran las escenas de actos violentos como el suicidio de Marilyn Monroe, el hotel donde Robert Kennedy fue asesinado y el chalet de O.J Simpson.

Las intervenciones no sólo se enfocaban en cuadros, sino que llegaron a todos los rincones de la escenografía. Sábanas con motivos de condones desenrollados y formulas químicas de la pastilla del siguiente día, una caja de comida china con "Derechos humanos" y "protesta y caos" en referencia a los hechos de la plaza de Tiananmen en el 89'. El comité resaltaba las paradojas en el entretenimiento y la censura televisiva, pues muchas de las tramas del show eran, sin ser moralistas, bastante jodidas. Los personajes hacían explosivos caseros, robaban bebés y cometían adulterio (y esa era sólo una de ellas). Después de dos años de estar insertando mensajes en la televisión, el colectivo decidió terminar todo de la mejor manera posible.

El Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Los Ángeles (MOCA), uno de los patrocinadores del proyecto, decidió que era hora de exponer todas las obras de la inserción. Se construyó una decoración que acuerdo al show y una semana antes se hizo un episodio que mostraba a uno de los personajes asistiendo a una inauguración en el mismo museo. *Art News* lo explica bastante bien: Una agencia de publicidad de un personaje ficticio estaba promocionando una exposición real en un museo real que acogía obras reales que habían aparecido en el mundo ficticio de una serie televisiva. Que tal está eso como para romper la cuarta pared.

La exposición ahora está en el espacio Red Bull de los Ángeles, y lleva el nombre de "Total Proof" y se acaba el 27 de Noviembre. Ahora sabes que si alguna vez viste *Melrose Place* fuiste parte del experimento artístico más masivo de las últimas décadas. Buena anécdota para las fiestas ¿no?

Algunas de las intervenciones están en este video. Si quieres saber más sobre la exposición puedes ir aquí, y si quieres saber más del GALA Committee, puedes ir al sitio de Mel Chin.





## Wie Künstler "Melrose Place" unterwanderten



© Gala Committee

Konzeptkunst zu einem Millionenpublikum zu bringen, diesen Coup landete der Künstler Mel Chin, der sich in den 90ern zusammen mit einer Gruppe von Studenten und Künstlern zu einem Kollektiv zusammenschloss: dem Gala Committee. Von 1995 bis 1997 gelang der Initiative unter Beihilfe Frank Souths, dem ausführenden Produzenten von "Melrose Place" und der Drehbuchautorin Carol Mendelsohn im Set der Primetime-Serie ein spektakuläres Mimikry der Kunst. Unbemerkt vom Publikum wurden zwei Staffeln lang über 200 readymade-artige Objekte voll politischer und gesellschaftskritischer Botschaften in die Handlungsstränge eingewoben.

Chinesische Takeaway-Boxen und Faxnachrichten wurden zum Träger politischer Nachrichten, genau wie Bettbezüge mit Motiven aufgerollter Kondome, die nach den Standards der Medienaufsichtsbehörde Federal Communications Commission (FCC) nicht verbreitet werden durften. Die Flaschenetiketten von Hochprozentigem waren bissige Bemerkungen zur unrühmlichen amerikanischen Geschichte des Alkohols. Eine ikonische Absolut-Wodka-Anzeige, eingearbeitet in eine Darstellung des 1995 durch einen Anschlag zerstörten Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma, übte Kritik am rassistisch motiviertem Terrorismus.

Der Seriencharakter Samantha Reilly schließlich übermittelte als Malerin ihre Botschaften über ihre pastellfarbenen Gemälden à la David Hockney, die mit Anspielungen auf die herrschende Gewalt in Los Angeles gespickt waren.

Eine Decke, die der schwangeren Darstellerin Alison Parker in einer Szene Wärme spendet, bemusterten die Künstler des Gala Committees mit der chemischen Formel des Wirkstoffs Mifepriston – Inhaltsstoff der Abtreibungspille. Der Quilt war ein Kommentar auf die damalige Medientabusierung von Schwangerschaftsabbrüchen, denn zur Blütezeit des US-Massenfernsehens war es für einen weiblichen Seriencharakter quasi undenkbar, auf dem Bildschirm eine Abtreibung zu durchleben: "Entweder sie bekommt das Baby oder sie muss eine Treppe runterfallen", wird Constance Penney, eine der Künstlerinnen des Gala Committee in der "New York Times" zitiert. "Wir wollten das Thema Freiheit in der Familienplanung auf die Agenda setzen."

Durch die Mittel des Subtextes, des Subtilen und Doppelbödig-Unterbewussten realisierte das Gala Committee die Subversion als künstlerisches Prinzip – nonchalant und par excellence.

Nach drei Jahren der verdeckten Sabotage im Dienste der Schwulen- und Frauenrechte und des stillen Protests gegen Diskriminierung und Medienzensur wurden die Arbeiten vom Museum of Contemporary Art (MoCA) in Los Angeles mit dem Titel "Uncommon Sense" ausgestellt. In New York nun ist das erste Mal eine umfassende Auswahl von 100 Arbeiten im *Melrose Place* inspirierten Setting zu sehen.

Frank South und Carol Mendelsohn beschlossen damals, die durch Mel Chin und das Gala Committee an sie herangetragene Idee der verdeckten Serienmanipulation durch die Kunst weder mit dem Produzenten Aaron Spelling noch dem Sender zu besprechen. Als South und Mendelsohn irgendwann doch aufflogen, schien Spelling die Aufmerksamkeit durch Akteure der Kunstwelt zu gefallen: "Aber macht nichts, das meine Serie gefährdet", soll seine Antwort gewesen sein.

# The New York Times

## THE Arts

The New York Times

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2016

### The Plot to Add Art To 'Melrose Place.' Yes, Really.



The conceptual artist Mel Chin, who helped form a group to supply art and props with coded cultural messages on the TV show "Melrose Place." On Friday, at the Red Bull Studios New York, 100 objects from that effort go on display in an exhibition.

By WILLIAM GRIMES

Twenty years ago, the conceptual artist Mel Chin cold-called the offices of "Melrose Place," Aaron Spelling's wildly popular prime-time soap opera, with a proposition. What if a task force of artists supplied free artworks and props for the show's apartment-complex set, with coded cultural messages on pressing topics like reproductive rights, American foreign policy, alcoholism and sexual politics?

Deborah Siegel, the show's set decorator, listened to this absurd offer and had an instant reaction. "I thought it sounded really interesting," she said in a recent interview. "So I met with him."

This was the beginning of a conceptual artist's dream, an ongoing intervention into the very heart of American mass culture. In late 1995, Mr. Chin and a team of 100 mostly unknown artists, called the Gaia Committee, began a two-year experiment, placing objects on the set of "Melrose Place." They took their cues from scripts provided in advance and in some instances worked with the writers to modify plot lines and develop characters.

On Friday, at the Red Bull Studios New York in Chelsea, 100 objects from the committee's work go on

Continued on Page 5



Heather Locklear and Rob Estes in "Melrose Place." An episode in 1997 featured an exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, which included works made for the set.



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THE NEW YORK TIMES, SEPTEMBER 2016



# The New York Times

## The Plot to Add Conceptual Art To 'Melrose Place.' Yes, Really.

From First Arts Page

display in the exhibition "Total Proof: The Gala Committee 1995-1997."

The exhibition, through Nov. 20, will be, appropriately enough, a rerun. Viewers of "Melrose Place" saw a version of it in April 1997, in a television episode featuring an actual exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, "Uncommon Sense," which included many of the works produced for the set.

In it, Heather Locklear, as the hard-charging advertising executive Amanda Woodward, has just taken on the museum as a client and brings her love interest, Kyle McBride (Rob Estes), to the opening for a stimulating evening of art talk.

Much of it takes place in front of a Ross Bleckner-like painting that alludes to the American bombing of Baghdad. That work was ordered by Carol Mendelsohn, the show's head writer. This fictional opening, filmed two weeks before the museum's opening, was one of the great meta moments in television history.

Mr. Chin is by now a well-known figure, a skilled organizer of socially provocative works that can last for years. In a recent project typical of his approach, "The Tie That Binds," he used native plants to create eight drought-resistant gardens along the Los Angeles River. Visitors were invited to take away a blueprint for one of the gardens and replicate it at home, furthering the cause of water conservation.

The "Melrose Place" idea began when Mr. Chin was shuttling back and forth between the University of Georgia, where he held a temporary professorship, and the California Institute of the Arts, where he was conducting a workshop. "We discussed pop culture and Hollywood," said Valerie Tevere, one of his Cal Arts students and now an associate professor of art at the College of Staten Island. "How might artists work with TV. What sort of things could hap-

pen?"

Mr. Chin had never heard of "Melrose Place." "I was not watching much television at the time," he said in a recent interview at Red Bull Studios.

But if he was not watching, he was thinking, prompted by Julie Lazar, the director of experimental programs at the Museum of Contemporary Art, and Tom Finkelpearl, a guest curator and now New York's commis-

**Taking cues from scripts provided in advance.**

sioner of cultural affairs, who approached him to take part in "Uncommon Sense."

Mr. Chin recalled that while on a flight from Atlanta to Los Angeles, he looked out the window and thought "Los Angeles is in the air." The city existed in the trillions of electronic impulses its residents sent through the atmosphere and around the world, transmitting social content and cultural symbols. "Our world is transformed by covert information, political messages," Mr. Chin said. "How would

that work if it was art?"

Back home, Mr. Chin watched as his wife, Helen Nagge, flipped the remote and stopped on an arresting image. "I saw this large blond face filling the screen, with blue eyes," he said. It was Ms. Locklear. "When she moved, there was a painting behind her, and I said, 'That's the gallery!'"

Mr. Chin began assembling his troops. The name GALA fused the abbreviations for Georgia and Los Angeles, but eventually the committee absorbed dozens of artists around the country.

The team included students; professional artists; a media scholar (Constance Penley of the University of California, Santa Barbara); and an actual fan of the show, Mark Flood, an old friend of Mr. Chin's from his native Houston.

Mr. Flood wondered aloud whether the project amounted to a sellout. Mr. Chin told him, "We're not selling anything, we're getting in."

Frank South, an executive producer for the show, and Ms. Mendelsohn decided not to mention the project to Mr. Spelling or the network brass. Eventually, word leaked out. In 1997, The New Yorker ran a Talk of the Town article, "Agitprop," timed to the opening of "Uncommon Sense." Mr. South said, "I was busted."

Mr. Spelling, tickled at the idea of seeing "Melrose Place" in the museum world, took the news well. "Just don't do anything to hurt the show," he told his charges.

In early 1996, with the series in its fourth season, the artwork began to arrive, first in a trickle, then in a flood. As a safe-sex message, committee members designed "Safety Sheets" for the manipulative, womanizing Dr. Peter Burns: bedsheets in an all-over pattern of cylindrical shapes that, on close inspection, turned out to be unrolled condoms.

When Alison Parker (Courtney Thorne-Smith) became pregnant, the GALA Committee made her a quilt appliquéd with the chemical symbol for the morning-after pill

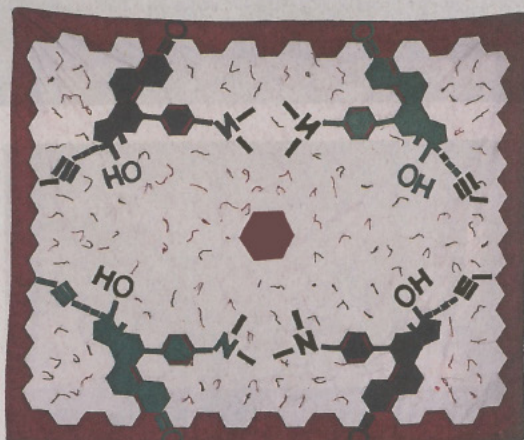


"Think of the Re-runs."





# The New York Times



PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE GALA COMMITTEE

When Alison Parker (Courtney Thorne-Smith) became pregnant, artists made her a quilt appliquéd with the chemical symbol for the morning-after pill RU-486.



"Cause and Effect Rain Coat," which makes reference to Waco, Tex., and Oklahoma City.

RU-486. "One of the things we wanted to do was to respond to the fact that in network TV, no matter how strong you are, you cannot have an abortion," Ms. Penley said. "You either have the baby, or you fall down the stairs. We wanted to put reproductive choice

back on network TV."

One of the sneakier placements — the committee referred to them as "product insertion manifestations" — came from the Cal Arts workshop. When Michael Mancini, a character played by Thomas Calabro, visits a hot-

sheet motel, he sees the clerk reading "Libidinal Economy," a work by the French poststructuralist Jean-François Lyotard.

"Total Proof," organized by Max Wolf with Candice Strongwater, takes its title from an altered photograph of the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in April 1995, with the damage reworked by the artists to mimic the shape of an Absolut vodka bottle. The work was initially deemed too disturbing to appear on the show, but somehow it ended up, in plain sight, on a wall at D&D Advertising, Amanda's company.

As the television project gathered steam, the producers turned to the committee to help invent the character of Samantha Reilly, an artist who, after graduating from the Rhode Island School of Design, heads out to Los Angeles and moves into the Melrose Place complex. Ms. Mendelsohn was flown out to Kansas City to brainstorm with 10 women on the committee who became known as the Sisters of Sam.

"We thought, she could be a Cindy Sherman, or a Kiki Smith, or a Barbara Kruger," said Ms. Penley, who envisioned a feminist conceptualist. But the producers demanded paintings in the David Hockney mode, with bright pastels.

"They said, 'Because the camera loves those colors,'" Mr. Chin recalled.

Hijacking the concept, the Gala Committee turned out a series of cheery-toned paintings on the theme of violence and death in Los Angeles.

The Gala Committee called it a day after the museum episode, but the series continued until May 1999. In a half-serious statement for a sale of many of the artworks at Sotheby's, Mr. Chin summed up the great intervention as the catalyst for "a profoundly radical transformation of worldwide art, entertainment, communication and government."

The reality was somewhat less dramatic. "We were exhausted, basically," Mr. Chin said. "It was very stressful, producing on deadline. The potentiality and the pictorial reality had been enlarged, so we decided to stop there. It was time to release it to the world. And think of the reruns."





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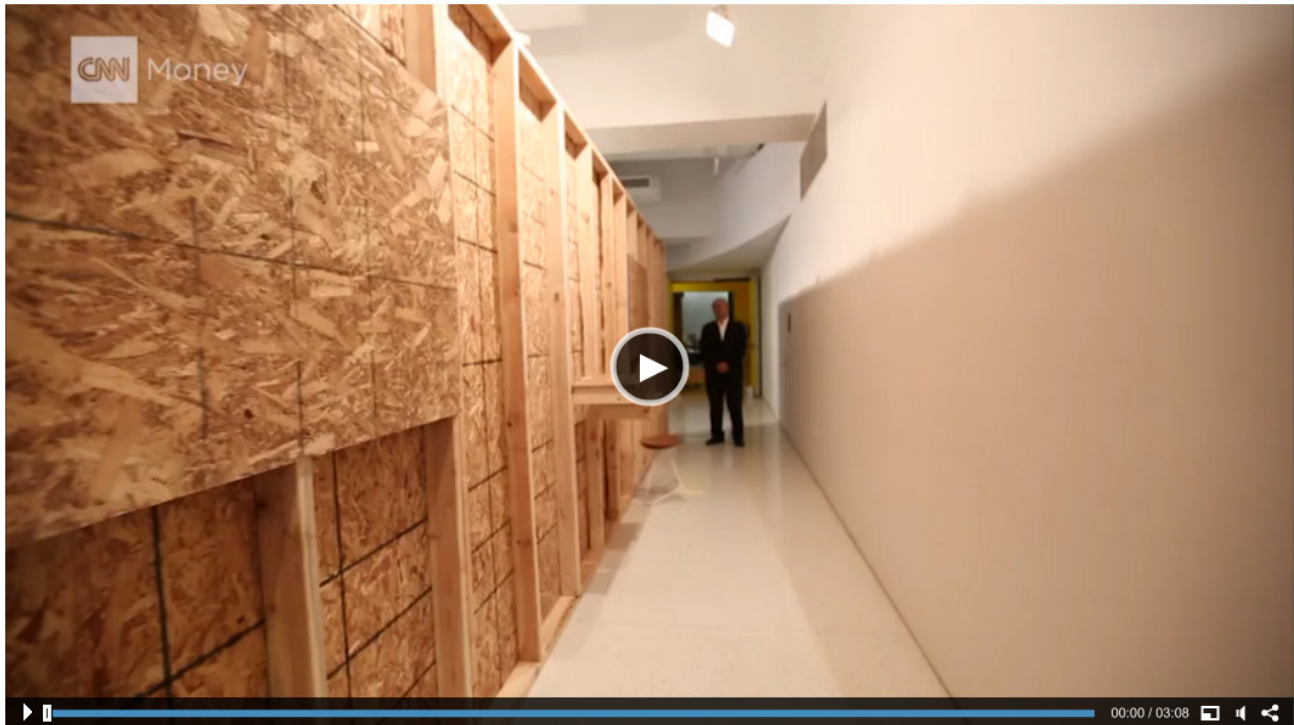
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CNNMoney Reports

# How I hid art in 'Melrose Place'

by Jon Sarlin @CNNMoney



Mei Chin and the artists of the Gala Committee led a "top secret" operation: hiding their art on the sets of "Melrose Place." Unbeknownst to millions of the drama's fans, every week their television sets became covert contemporary art galleries.



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CNN, SEPTEMBER 2016

# ARTNEWS

## REMEMBERING WHEN 'MELROSE PLACE' BECAME A CONCEPTUAL ART PROJECT: MEL CHIN'S GALA COMMITTEE RETURNS THIS FALL

BY *M. H. Miller* POSTED 08/01/16 11:00 AM



Stills from *Melrose Place* featuring works by the GALA Committee.  
Courtesy melchin.org

A small confession: one very dark summer not too long ago I watched all seven seasons of *Melrose Place*, the Fox television show that aired from 1992 to 1999 and was produced by Aaron Spelling. I did this at a rather embarrassing pace. This was primarily a mindless exercise, but I grew to admire the show's endless and implausible plot twists, as well as the distinct change of tone that occurs around the end of season two. The series began as a mere coming-of-age drama among a group of attractive twenty-somethings with low-level jobs mostly in the service industry around Los Angeles. They all live in the confoundingly manicured apartment building in the show's title, and come from diverse backgrounds. This being network television in the 1990s, diverse is defined as: there was one black woman who was written off the show before the end of the first season, and a gay social worker who helps navigate the cast through the issues facing the country at the end of the first Bush presidency. The show was topical to the point of absurdity and the use of condoms among the neighbors is a major recurring plot point. (A climactic moment of season one is when Jake, the bad boy with a heart of gold, tells the artistic and sensitive Jo, "I never wanted to hurt you, and now I might have given you AIDS.")

Ratings were always high, especially once Heather Locklear entered the mix in the middle of season one as a fiery ad executive, but the audience response didn't reach a popular culture fever point until the next year, when the series veered from its earnestness and became the most diabolical hour on television. Michael Mancini, the young doctor who is also the building's super, transforms from loving husband to the hopelessly underdeveloped Jane (played by supermodel Josie Bissett) into a murderous psychopath who is having an affair with another murderous psychopath (Kimberly, played by a creepy Marcia Cross, who deserved better than this) who helps him meddle in and destroy everyone's lives, including Jane's, of course, who becomes a much more interesting character once she turns into the Job of L.A. County. Alison, initially the show's wide-eyed protagonist, embarks on a string of misguided love affairs leading to a really pretty scary stalker and her eventual alcoholism. At the beginning of season four, Kimberly detonates a bomb and the apartment building explodes, but everything remains kind of inexplicably fine after that, as if nothing happened.



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ARTNEWS, AUGUST 2016



*Melrose Place* was not famous for its subtlety, but one of the things that was lost on me while I watched the show was the nearly subliminal presence of art works by a collective known as the GALA Committee, led by conceptual artist Mel Chin. The project was titled *In the Name of the Place*, and will be the subject of a retrospective exhibition at Red Bull Studios in New York this fall.

In 1994, Chin was teaching at the University of Georgia, and flying back and forth to L.A., where a lot of the collective was based (GALA stands for Georgia/Los Angeles). L.A. being the capital of the entertainment industry, Chin thought of the city as being “in the air, a microwave transmission sent out throughout the country.” He was spending a lot of time thinking of ways to provide an alternative to the way art was displayed, particularly in museums.

“And just by chance,” he told me in an interview, “my wife was flipping through the channels, and I came across the image of Heather Locklear. And she moved her head, and there was a painting. And I thought: that’s the gallery. The medium of Aaron Spelling had so much more impact on our culture than a museum exhibition.”

Chin sought out Deborah Siegel, *Melrose Place*’s set decorator, who took the idea of having the collective make works for the show to the network executives. Chin’s plan was for the works to appear on TV over a period of years, then to show them in a museum, after which they’d be auctioned off, with the proceeds benefiting various charities. Starting in season four, in February 1996, the work started to pop up on the series, in the background of scenes. A crucial part of the pitch was that the artists would receive no money.

“It’s like becoming a Kung-Fu master,” Chin said. “You gotta give up something. We decided to give up the cash.”

This obviously went over well with the studio executives, concerned with the bottom line, and the artists were able to get away with most of their ideas. Chin said of about 200 works that the group produced, roughly 70 percent were accepted. In one episode, when Alison gets pregnant, she wraps herself in a quilt that has printed on it the chemical structure of RU-486, the morning after pill. One important subplot deals with a character’s pretty domestic paintings, which are actually depictions of the sites of gruesome violence across L.A.—the Ambassador Hotel, where Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated, or Nicole Brown Simpson’s condo. An ad campaign overseen by Locklear’s firm on the show is the work of the GALA Committee. (It’s for a beverage company, and the tagline is: “It’s in the water.”) In one scene, Kimberly holds a Chinese takeout box, which has written on it, in Chinese characters, the words “Human Rights” and “Turmoil and Chaos,” a nod to the different interpretations among the West and China of the Tiananmen Square protests. Chin said his students and colleagues in Georgia would watch *Melrose Place* every Monday and take notes.

After filming ended on season five, the work appeared in the group show “Uncommon Sense” at L.A.’s Museum of Contemporary Art in 1997, which was organized by Tom Finkelpearl and Julie Lazar. The show looked specifically at unusual artistic collaborations. The GALA Committee’s work was installed inside a recreated set from *Melrose Place*.

“I wasn’t necessarily a *Melrose Place* watcher,” Finkelpearl, who is now commissioner of the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, told me. “But it was a huge show. It was super on the consciousness of other people.”

He said the idea for the project was not to publicize the presence of the works until after the fact, though rumors circulated on the then-nascent internet chat rooms devoted to the show. Even once the word got out that a group of artists had infiltrated primetime, Finkelpearl was surprised that Chin and the GALA Committee didn’t get more press.

“I mean, whose work actually gets on television?” he said. “Some of [the works] were onscreen quite a bit. Every time they were seen, they were seen by millions and millions of people. And then they went to MOCA, which is a major museum, but there’s not millions of people showing up there. This was probably the most viewed work of art that year, in the world. But it wasn’t well-known at the same time.”

The culmination of the project was an episode of *Melrose Place* where Locklear’s character signs MOCA as a client and attends the opening of “Uncommon Sense.” (“Looks like a bunch of dots to me,” she says, inspecting a painting in a scene that is filmed at the museum. She later admits, “I wanted to major in art, but it wasn’t practical.”) The paratextual implications of this reach John Barth levels of headache-inducing frustration. To be clear: a fictional character’s fake ad agency gives real publicity to a real museum that is exhibiting the real (secret) art that appeared in the fake world of the real show. The art world has come to increasingly pander to popular culture—the shoehorned appearances of various celebrities in museum programming come to mind—but for a brief moment in the late ’90s, high-brow and low-brow media were seamlessly integrated, to such an extent that very few people even noticed.

“Television is about product placement,” Chin said. “So the question was why don’t we place ideas on there, and open up the complexity [TV] can offer.”

Chin’s exhibition in the fall is giving the GALA Committee a kind of second life, but art exhibitions come and go. The persistence of television itself has kept Chin’s work in the ether. *Melrose Place*, as Chin said, was a kind of viral video before we had such a term to describe that which a person can’t look away from. And, like so many other ’90s television shows, it’s currently in international syndication.

“*Melrose Place* is still playing somewhere in the world,” Chin said.

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