

# Safehouse Temple Door



Installation view, *Mel Chin: Safehouse Temple Door*,  
at Sweet Water Foundation's Civic Arts Church, 2021

Photo by Ben Premeaux, courtesy  
S.O.U.R.C.E. Studio

***Safehouse Temple Door* is Chicago's newly commissioned significant icon, inspiring the U.S. Government to deliver a lead-free future.**

2019 MacArthur Fellow [Mel Chin](#) and the University of Chicago's Smart Museum of Art are proud to present *Safehouse Temple Door*, a newly commissioned public artwork at [Sweet Water Foundation's](#) (SWF) Civic Arts Church—a community design center and gallery space for workshops, field lessons, and events at The Commonwealth. The *Safehouse Temple Door* is a functioning 10-ft steel bank-vault door installed on the facade of the historic building, a site that will serve as one of several activation points for the [Chicago Fundred Initiative: A Bill for IL](#), a creative collaborative action focused on lead contamination in water, soil, and housing. *Safehouse Temple Door* was fabricated and engineered at the University of North Carolina Asheville [STEAM Studio](#).

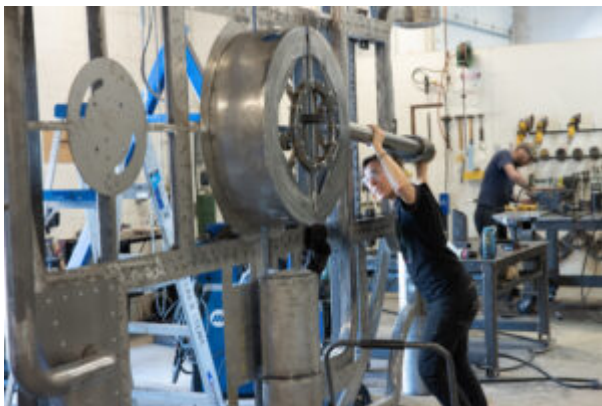


Photo by UNC Asheville

***Safehouse Temple Door* fabrication and engineering at UNC Asheville STEAM Studio.**

Still present in America and largely invisible, the costs of lead poisoning are staggering. Learning capacities of children are compromised, resulting in behavioral and medical

maladies that can last a lifetime. A creative intervention into this crisis, the Fundred Project was conceived by Chin to bring forth the voice of thousands of people as drawings of cash to Congress. This extensive collection of voices is a physical, undeniable embodiment of individual lives worth urgent legislation and a step toward counteracting a persistent and invisible threat.

Since its launch in 2008, the Fundred Project, a key programming pillar of S.O.U.R.C.E. Studio, has been activated across the country with numerous city-based initiatives, each with values that align with local partners to catalyze creative actions amongst teachers, students, parents, arts organizations, artists, scientists, lead advocates, and policy makers.

S.O.U.R.C.E. Director and longtime Fundred organizer Amanda Wiles spoke to the project's legacy and its continuation in Chicago, "Beginning with Mel's vision, the Fundred Project has sparked myriad creative collaborations addressing lead poisoning on a local and national level. We are here to support Fundred engagement in Chicago and while the *Safehouse Temple Door* connects to the project's origins, it also takes on a new purpose at the Sweet Water Foundation."

Initiated by Chin, the Fundred Project began in New Orleans at the *Safehouse* (2008-2010), a former home in the lead-laden St. Roch neighborhood. The "cash," or "Fundreds" acts as creative currency—many drawn by children—to represent the expressed value of ending the invisible threat of lead poisoning, whether it comes from water, soil, paint, toys, or dust. Nearly half of a million individually hand drawn dollar bills have already been collected. In a statement by Chin about



the health and environmental crisis, “A person, a child, their mind, their health, matters. We found lead undoing these basic human rights thirteen years ago in New Orleans and we find its harm here again in Chicago.”



Photo by UNC Asheville

**Mel Chin working with UNC Asheville staff and students on the *Safehouse Temple Door* project.**

This new version of *Safehouse* is designed as a permanent installation to be actively integrated into the philosophy and programming at Sweet Water Foundation. Commissioned in conjunction with the Smart Museum’s city-wide exhibition, *Toward Common Cause: Art, Social Change, and the MacArthur Fellows Program at 40*, Abigail Winograd, the project’s curator notes, “For four decades, Mel Chin has been a pioneer of community-based, socially-engaged artistic projects aimed at confronting the most pressing issues of our time. The Fundred Project and the *Safehouse Temple Door* represent direct democratic action and social sculpture at its most profound.

The placement of *Safehouse Temple Door* is located in a former church that served as a significant space for the community for decades, and is the first activation of the space as “Civic Arts Church” by Sweet Water Foundation. A poignant and fitting

gesture, the bank-vault installation intersects with the mission of SWF as well as the Fundred Project: to address environmental racism and practice neighborhood regeneration with action-oriented solutions. A sign of “big business” and gentrification, a bank vault has many meanings—it can represent unequal wealth distribution, housing foreclosures, and predatory lending aimed at racially segregated communities. The installation intervenes in this narrative as a potent catalyst for transformative justice.

On the collaboration and regeneration efforts, Emmanuel Pratt, Co-Founder and Executive Director of SWF discusses the *Safehouse* as a project that plays in perfectly with the organization’s collective focus on creating an urban acupuncture network. The SWF’s practice of Regenerative Neighborhood Development seeks to “actively re-story and reconstruct” The Commonwealth—as the neighborhood is referred to by its residents—into “economically and ecologically productive and sustainable community assets.”

The Fundred Project only works with participation. Visitors are invited to create Fundreds as part of SWF programming and visit the Fundred Project installation and drawing table at the [Hyde Park Art Center](#), presented as part of *Toward Common Cause* from July 17–October 24, 2021.

### **Tours available Wednesdays, 1–4 pm**

Reservations are required to receive a tour of the *Toward Common Cause* installations and Sweet Water Foundation’s dynamic Regenerative Neighborhood Development campus,

known as The Commonwealth. [Make a reservation to visit.](#)

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Video was produced by S.O.U.R.C.E. Studio and videographer Ben Premeaux of the Smart Lab.

This announcement was also published on the [S.O.U.R.C.E. Studio website.](#)

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Written by S.O.U.R.C.E. Studio  
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October 31, 2020 1:00-2:30pm

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