

# GAGOSIAN

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Gagosian Presents Early Films and Performance Relics by Chris Burden

*Cross Communication* Opens in New York on March 14, 2023

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Chris Burden, *The TV Commercials 1973–1977, 1973–77/2000* (still), video, color, sound, 3 min. 46 sec., edited by Peter Kirby, Media Art Services. Artwork © 2023 Chris Burden/Licensed by the Chris Burden Estate and Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), New York

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*I set up these unexpected, dreaded situations as an attempt to control fate. Instead of letting things happen to me, I made them happen.*

—Chris Burden

**NEW YORK, February 28, 2023**—Gagosian is pleased to present *Cross Communication*, an exhibition of relics, films, and video works by Chris Burden, plus other materials that document his early performances.

In his performances and audio/video works of the 1970s and '80s, Burden challenged his own mental and physical limitations while exploring the construction of agency and intent. Fascinated by the mediation of visual language in television advertisements, and by the formulas for fame they seemed to represent, he sought to reflect the emergent violence and complexity of American society. Employing unconventional guerrilla tactics to question the broad acceptance of consumer culture, Burden confronted audiences with their own moral culpability. And over the course of his career, he moved from performances in which his own body functioned as the medium to spectacular large-scale sculptures and installations, a number of which use toy parts or actual vehicles.

Many of Burden's early performances find the artist placing himself in dangerous or uncomfortable situations that he invested with both visceral impact and metaphorical bite. In Super-8 footage of the notorious *Shoot* (1971), he is shown being shot in the left arm by a friend with a rifle, while in *220* (1971), he and three others perched on ladders in a flooded gallery, then dropped a 220-volt electric line into the water beneath. In *Back to You* (1974), a volunteer sticks pins into the artist's stomach and

foot as he lies on the floor of an elevator, while *Through the Night Softly* (1973) finds him crawling through broken glass on Main Street.

Other films reveal Burden tangling with elemental forces, testing his powers of endurance, or simply pushing his luck. In *Fire Roll* (1973), he extinguishes a burning pair of pants with his body and in *Icarus* (1973), he rises from beneath two flaming sheets of glass. In *Velvet Water* (1974), he makes repeated attempts to breathe liquid in place of air, while *B.C. Mexico* (1973) sees him survive eleven solitary days on a remote beach. *Bed Piece* (1972) shows Burden lying in a single bed, where he remained for some twenty-two days; in *Deadman* (1972), he is secreted beneath a tarpaulin in the altogether riskier location of Los Angeles's busy La Cienega Boulevard.

Burden's performances *Wiretap* (1977), *Send Me Your Money* (1979), and *Atomic Alphabet* (c. 1979–80)—represented here by audio recordings—are also documented by objects and what he referred to as “relics.” The photo etching *The Atomic Alphabet* (1980) lists twenty-six words related to atomic destruction intoned by the artist during the titular rant, and a relic of the 1979 performance preserves the leather jacket that he wore while doing so. Relics of *Solaris* (1980) include a card table and walkie-talkie that represented “mission control” during a performance in which Burden kayaked out into the open ocean, as if vanishing into outer space. The relic of his 1971 performance *Disappearing* is an empty vitrine that commemorates three days during which he simply vanished without notice or explanation.

*TV Ad* (1973), the earliest of Burden's TV commercial works, which originally aired on LA's KJH-Channel 9 every night for a month, includes footage of *Through the Night Softly*, while the ten-second spot *Poem for LA* (1975) conveys the still-pertinent messages “SCIENCE HAS FAILED,” “HEAT IS LIFE,” and “TIME KILLS.” *Full Financial Disclosure* (1977) regales viewers with details of the artist's annual income and expenses, and *Chris Burden Promo* (1976) wryly juxtaposes his name with those of Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Rembrandt, van Gogh, and Picasso.

**Chris Burden** was born in Boston in 1946 and died in Topanga, California, in 2015. Collections include the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; and Tate, London. Solo museum exhibitions include *A Twenty-Year Survey*, Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, CA (1988, traveled to Carnegie Mellon University Art Gallery, Pittsburgh; and Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, through 1989); *When Robots Rule: The Two-Minute Airplane Factory*, Tate Britain, London (1999); *Tower of Power*, Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna (2002); *4 Magnolia Double Lamps*, South London Gallery (2006); Middelheim Museum, Antwerp, Belgium (2009); *Three Ghost Ships*, Portland Art Museum, OR (2011–12); *Extreme Measures*, New Museum, New York (2013–14); *The Master Builder*, Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA (2014); and *Ode to Santos Dumont*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2015).

In 2022, Gagosian published *Poetic Practical: The Unrealized Work of Chris Burden*, documenting sixty-seven projects of varying scope and ambition that the artist was unable to complete during his lifetime.

Extended through June 24, 2023

## **CHRIS BURDEN**

*Cross Communication*

Opening reception: Tuesday, March 14, 6–8pm

March 14–April 29, 2023

Park & 75, 821 Park Avenue, New York

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