

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

LA WEEKLY

Chris Burden: Dead Man and a Hot Dog Stand

By Chris Burden *Thursday, Sep 22 2011*

I moved from Boston to attend Pomona College. After I changed my major from architecture to sculpture and started building big things outdoors, I decided to stay in California. I realized if I went to graduate school back East, I wouldn't be able to work outside in winter.



Broad Contemporary Art Museum (BCAM) east facade, installation of Urban Light, Chris Burden, Palm Garden, Robert Stein
January 2008
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Urban Light, top, by Chris Burden, a favorite with LACMA visitors

In L.A. back then, there was maybe one-fifth as many artists as there are now. A small group of ex-graduate students found a little space on the Venice Boardwalk and we worked on it the whole year, planning to use it as an exhibition venue. At the end of the year they all lost interest and I inherited the space. It had been an empty hot dog stand. The landlord lowered the rent to \$80 a month from \$90 because the former renter was a drug dealer. At the time, there were two major artist enclaves, Venice and Pasadena. The beach artists were closer to the Hollywood crowd, and the Pasadena artists had bigger studios.

A good friend of mine lived on Navy Street in Venice. My studio was on Oceanfront and Brooks. I could call him from my studio, get on my bike and be at the front door of his studio before he could walk there from his living quarters at the back. On Market Street there were Larry Bell, Rob Irwin and Rob Cooper. Between Market and my studio were probably 30 artists I knew, and within a small radius probably 100 or 150 artists. You didn't have to drive for an hour to socialize.

I felt the Venice art community was tremendously supportive; they were my intended audience. Ed Moses and Tony Berlant gave me valuable advice on marketing my first salable

object, a handmade book of my performance photos. Chuck Arnoldi enabled us to rent the hot dog stand that became my studio. He also encouraged Riko Mizuno to give me my first exhibition in L.A. — my performance *Deadman* in 1972.



PHOTO BY TED SOQUI
Chris Burden

Deadman took place at 8 p.m. on Nov. 12 on La Cienega Boulevard. I lay down and was covered completely with a canvas tarpaulin. Two flares were placed near me to alert cars. Just before the flares extinguished, a police car arrived. I was arrested and booked for causing a false emergency. The trial took place in Beverly Hills. After three days of deliberation the jury failed to reach a decision and the judge dismissed the case.

I have a much bigger public now. The range of works I've done is broader. You don't have to be an art connoisseur to "get" *Urban Light*, my sculpture of lampposts in front of LACMA.

—As told to Marissa Gluck

Chris Burden has been an L.A. conceptual and performance artist since the 1960s.