

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

COMPLEX

**Everything You Need to Know About Chris Burden's Art Through His  
Greatest Works**

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In his forty-year career, Chris Burden has been shot, nailed to a Volkswagen, set on fire, electrocuted, and stabbed with pins, all in the name of art. He's shot bullets at a 747 by LAX, hijacked a television interview, built a self-navigating sail boat, and crawled over broken glass in a speedo on Main Street, Los Angeles. Constantly pushing boundaries and prodding at the breaking points of social mores, institutions, and his own body and psyche, Chris Burden has redefined what it means to make art. In an interview with Jim Moisan in 1979, Burden spoke about his early performance work, "It was more like a kind of mental experience for me—to see how I would deal with the mental aspect—like knowing that at 7:30 you're going to stand in a room and guy's going to shoot you... It was almost like setting up fate or something, in a real controlled way. The violence part wasn't that important, it was just a crux to make all the mental stuff happen."

Since the 1980s, Burden has become more invested in his sculptural works that hold the same pointed metaphoric power as his earlier performances. In a way, *Trans-fixed* (1974), where Burden had himself nailed to a Volkswagen in crucifix form, digs at the religious institution in the same way that *Exposing the Foundations of the Museum* (1986/2008) literally and metaphorically digs at the museum-as-institution. Across mediums and decades, Burden continues to perform this radical operation. Now he is seeing his first survey in New York, "Chris Burden: Extreme Measures," which opened at the New Museum on Tuesday. Familiarize yourself with the influential artist's career with *Everything You Need to Know About Chris Burden's Art Through His Greatest Works*.

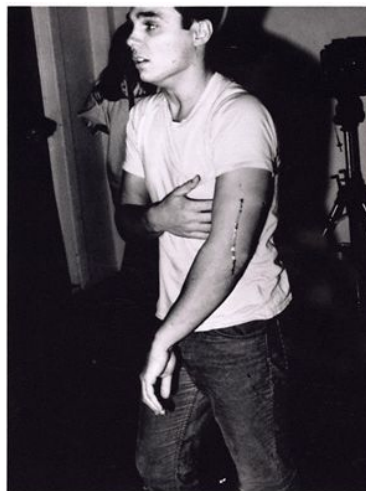


*Five Day Locker*

Medium: Performance at the University of California Irvine, Irvine, Calif.

Dates: April 26, 1971 - April 30, 1971

At the University of California, Irvine, Chris Burden locked himself in Locker Number 5 for five consecutive days. He rigged the locker above him to hold five gallons of bottled water, while the locker below him held an empty five gallon bottle. His then-wife, Barbara, slept on the floor in front of the locker some nights, "in case I really flipped out or something," the artist wrote in a 1975 untitled statement. *Five Day Locker* marked the beginning of Burden's early body works, where his performances centered around physical feats putting his own body under duress. Burden says of his early performances and of *Five Day Locker* specifically, "It's not like a Joan Jonas dance piece where you have a lot of intricate parts that make a whole. With my pieces there is one thing and that's it."



*Shoot*

Medium: Performance at F Space, Los Angeles

Date: Nov. 19, 1971

In Burden's own words, "At 7:45 P.M. I was shot in the left arm by a friend. The bullet was a copper jacket .22 long rifle. My friend was standing about fifteen feet from me." Bringing together life and art in a violent way, Burden allowed his body to be sculpted by a bullet. At the time, this quasi-masochistic act was taken as a critique of the Vietnam War, but it also speaks to the role of the artist in society and boundaries between real and fictive experience.



*TV Hi-Jack*

Medium: Performance

Date: Jan. 14, 1972

On January 14th, 1972, Chris Burden was interviewed by Phyllis Lutjeans on Channel 3's station in Irvine, California. He brought his own video crew that created documentation on the station's own crew as well. During the interview, Burden asked that the station begin broadcasting live. When asked about pieces that he was thinking of performing, Burden held a knife to Phyllis' throat and threatened to kill her if the station stopped live transmission—demonstrating T.V. Hijack. After verbally threatening the host and finishing the performance, Burden destroyed the show's copy of the tape and offered them his own recording. In curator Irene Hofmann's words, "T.V. Hijack was ultimately about who is in control over what's presented through the media."



*Bed Piece*

Medium: Performance

Date: Feb. 18, 1972 - March 3, 1972

Bed Piece, another early work, consisted of Burden moving a single bed into the gallery space, then living in it for 22 days. He did not speak to anyone during the performance, but the curator Josh Young provided Burden with water, food, and toilet facilities without being asked. Bed

Piece reorients assumptions about what a performance entails, making the usually-private bed into a very-public stage. As Burden approached the end of his 22-day performance, he became more and more relaxed and comfortable in the bed, while the people around him became more worried, "Bob Irwin came in and asked me not to do anything crazy, not to let the whole thing come down on my head."



*Deadman*

Medium: Performance in front of Mizuno Gallery, Los Angeles  
Date: Nov. 12, 1972

In this piece, Burden positioned himself behind the rear wheels of a parked car in front of Mizuno Gallery on La Cienega Boulevard, a busy street in L.A. "At 8 p.m. I lay down on La Cienega Boulevard and was covered completely with a canvas tarpaulin," Burden said after the event. "Two fifteen-minute 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 to be reported." Burden's trial was held in Beverly Hills and his case was eventually dismissed when the jury failed to reach a decision.



*747*

Medium: Performance near LAX, Los Angeles  
Date: Jan. 5, 1973

"At about 8:00 a.m. at a beach near the Los Angeles International Airport, I fired several shots with a pistol at a Boeing 747," Burden said of the performance. In what some critics called

"terrorism," Burden opened fire on a passenger airliner—a futile act of aggression. The documentation of this performance embodies the cultural tension and antagonism between ideas of artist and the world, individuality and the state, chance and control.



*"TV Commercials"*

Medium: Video and performance

Date: 1973-77

"During the early seventies I conceived a way to break the omnipotent stranglehold of the airwaves that broadcast television had. The solution was to simply purchase commercial advertising time and have the stations play my tapes along with their other commercials." Burden's "TV Commercials" are four television interventions, including *Through the Night Softly*, *Poem for L.A.*, *Chris Burden Promo*, and *Full Financial Disclosure*. *Through the Night Softly* was a performance where Burden held his hands behind his back and crawled through fifty feet of broken glass on Main Street in Los Angeles.



*Doorway to Heaven*

Medium: Performance, Venice, Calif.

Date: 1973

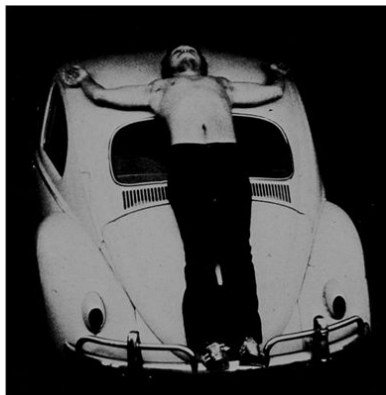
As Burden describes this performance piece, “At 6 p.m. I stood in the doorway of my studio facing the Venice boardwalk. A few spectators watched as I pushed two live electric wires into my chest. The wires crossed and exploded, burning me but saving me from electrocution.” Similar to Burden's other physical tests, this performance once again tests the artist's endurance, bringing him to the precipice of death. By using electricity, what we rely on to keep our bodies comfortable (with heating, air conditioning, light, etc.), Burden turns this essentially modern element into a dangerous force.



*Back to You*

Medium: Performance, New York  
Date: 1974

In *Back to You*, Burden had a volunteer push pins into his body. Spectators were able to watch Burden and his volunteer on a monitor. By willfully assigning the act of mutilation to a volunteer, Burden renegotiates social codes governing the morality of self-mutilation. Burden also emphasizes this reversal by titling the piece *Back to You*.



*Trans-fixed*

Medium: Performance, Venice, Calif.  
Date: April 23, 1974

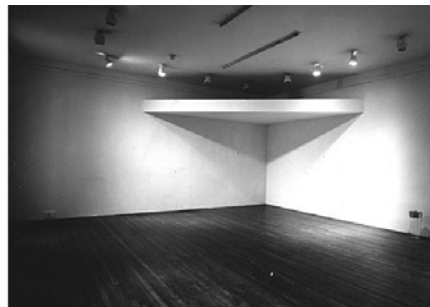
Burden said of this performance, "Inside a small garage on Speedway Avenue, I stood on the rear bumper of a Volkswagen. I lay on my back over the rear section of the car, stretching my arms onto the roof. Nails are driven through my palms onto the roof of the car. The garage door was opened and the car was pushed half way out into the speedway. Screaming for me the engine was run at full speed for two minutes. After two minutes, the engine was turned off and the car pushed back into the garage. The door was closed." Trans-fixed is one of Burden's most cited pieces. The documentation of Burden's performance recalls images of a crucified Jesus, but instead of a cross, Burden is nailed to a Volkswagen—"the car of the people," in Burden's terms. Somewhat humorously using a commercial car to evoke religious imagery of martyrdom, Burden demystifies the sacrificial act.



*Dreamy Nights*

Medium: Performance, Corked bottle, spiritus, Graz, Austria  
Date: Oct. 15, 1974

In another violent and quasi-masochistic performance in Graz, Austria, Burden lit a sink full of spiritus on fire and blew a police whistle as he thrashed underneath the sink. The spiritus, an alcohol, is said to represent the destructiveness of Medieval weaponry. He had an assistant throw water into the sink, subsequently causing the enflamed alcohol to overflow and splash onto Burden's body. The performance ended when his assistant had thrown enough water into the sink to put out the fire.

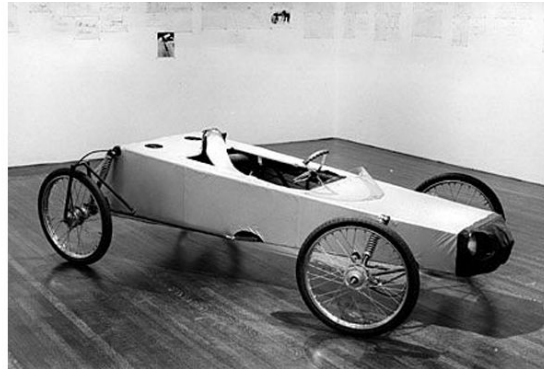


*White Light/White Heat*

Medium: Performance at Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York  
Date: Feb. 8, 1975 - March 1, 1975



For an exhibit at Ronald Feldman, Burden constructed a large platform in the southeast corner of the gallery. The artist laid himself on the platform for 22 days, the entire duration of his show. The platform, being only two feet below the ceiling, blocked any possible view of Burden from the gallery below. In Burden's own words, "During the entire piece, I did not eat, talk, or come down, I did not see anyone, and no one saw me." Again, Burden's performance questions the relationship between performer and spectator, artist and audience, by suspending his performance in an empirically unverifiable faith—faith that Burden is really there throughout the unseen act.



*B-Car*

Medium: Fully operational car installed at Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York

Date: April 1, 1977

Chris Burden's work often explores engineering and with B-Car Burden designed a fully operational car and wrote in a statement, "...my fantasy as an artist of what a car should be." B-Car is a one-passenger automobile with four wheels that can travel 100 m.p.h. and achieve 100 m.p.g. Rather than follow strict calculations, Burden hand-made many of the parts and made decisions "based on hunches."



*Coals to Newcastle*

Medium: Performance in Calexico, Calif.

Date: Dec. 17, 1978

Coals to Newcastle is titled after an English idiom that describes a pointless act. In this performance, Burden flew two joints of marijuana, grown in the U.S., from California to Mexico



with toy rubber-band model airplanes. Burden inscribed the phrases, "Hecho in U.S.A.," "Fumenlos Muchachos," and "Topanga Typica" on the planes, highlighting the border dividing Mexicali and Calexico into two cities.



*Big Wrench*

Medium: Film

Date: 1980

In 1978, Burden owned an antique 16,000 pound freight-truck named "Big Job." Burden wanted to turn the truck into an art project before running into legal and financial troubles which he narrates in *Big Wrench*, a movie about his relationship with the doomed truck. At once frightening and hilarious, *Big Wrench* consists of Burden facing the viewer frontally, frankly relaying his story, holding a giant wrench, while images of Big Job flicker behind him. Quickly, it becomes clear that Big Job also acts as a metaphor for the weight of insanity.



*SAMSON*

Medium: Installation consisting of a turnstile, winch, worm gear, leather strap, jack, timbers, steel, and steel plates

Date: 1985

*SAMSON* is an installation with a 100-ton jack connected to a gear box and a turnstile. As each visitor passes through the turnstile to see Burden's work, the 100-ton jack pushes two large blocks against the load-bearing walls of the building. Each visitor knowingly expands the jack,

creating an invisible change with a sense of danger, since enough visitors could, in theory, cause SAMSON to destroy the structure.



*Exposing the Foundations of the Museum*

Medium: Installation at MOCA, Los Angeles  
Date: 1986 - 2008

In 1986, Burden dug through the floor of MOCA's Temporary Contemporary and exposed the foundation piers of the structure. In a concrete form of institutional critique, Burden's exposing of the foundations acts as a literal revealing of the physical boundaries and limits of the museum. Burden and MOCA re-did the piece in 2008 at the Geffen Contemporary, the now-official name of the Temporary Contemporary.



*The Other Vietnam Memorial*

Medium: Installation of steel and copper plates  
Date: 1991

The Other Vietnam Memorial stands 13 feet tall and is fitted with multiple, revolving, copper plates. Etched on each sheet—a form that recalls printing plates and, furthermore, the writing of history—are three million names compiled from Vietnamese phone books and mixed and matched through a computer. Without exact records, Burden had to compile three million names to match the total number of war dead, including Vietnamese losses, during America's involvement in the Vietnam War, many more than the 57,939 dead from American losses listed

in Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The Other Vietnam Memorial is a key example of Burden's investment in sociopolitical concerns and historiographic issues.



*L.A.P.D. Uniforms*

Medium: Installation at the New Museum, New York

Date: Oct. 2, 2013 - Jan. 12, 2014

After the Los Angeles riots of 1992, Burden proposed the project L.A.P.D. Uniforms, an edition of thirty Los Angeles Police Department uniforms. Each uniform is equipped with a regulation belt, holster, baton, handcuff, handgun, and copy of an official badge. Burden's uniforms are enlarged, designed to fit an officer that stands over seven feet tall. When installed, the uniforms' arms are outstretched, nearly touching each other, so that the physical presence of these powerful symbols are overwhelming and engulfing, causing the viewer to question what the nature of authority really is.



*Ghost Ship (Thirty-foot handmade sixern sailboat, computers and software, hydraulics, Global Positioning System, auto rudder, rigging; Mast: 360 in (914.4 cm); Overall: 72 x 102 x 360 in (182.9 x 259 x 914.4 cm).*

Medium: Crewless self-navigating yacht

Date: 2005

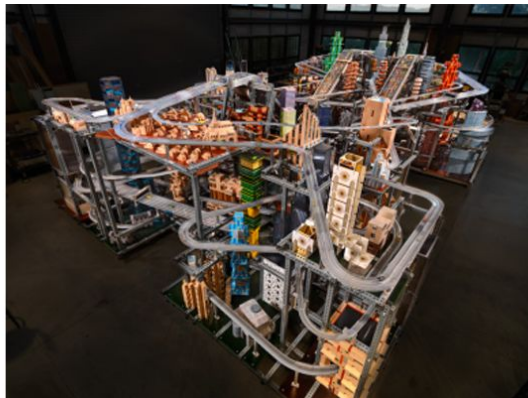
Ghost Ship is a crewless, self-navigating sailboat that mixes the picturesque pleasure of sailing with the sinister connotations of an unmanned ship. Ghost Ship is fully functional and took its maiden voyage between Fiar Isle, Scotland and Newcastle upon Tyne in 2005. Now, the 30-foot Ghost Ship is installed on the New Museum's facade in preparation for the Oct. 2nd opening of "Extreme Measures."



*Urban Light*

Medium: Outdoor installation of 202 restored cast iron antique street lamps outside LACMA, Los Angeles  
Date: 2008

Since its installation in 2008, Urban Light has become a visual icon of Los Angeles. Standing in front of LACMA, Urban Light consists of 202 restored cast-iron street lamps, most of which used to light the streets of Southern California. Burden began collecting street lamps in 2000 without a specific work in mind. Ranging from 20 to 30 feet tall, there are a total of 17 different lamp styles represented in Burden's sampling. Michael Govan reportedly acquired the piece for LACMA with funds from Andrew M. Gordon's family foundation after a visit to Burden's Topanga Canyon studio not long after he arrived in Los Angeles as the new director of LACMA in 2006.



*Metropolis II*

Medium: Kinetic sculpture  
Date: 2010

Metropolis II is an intensely engineered kinetic sculpture with 1,100 miniature cars speeding through an elaborate system of roads, freeways, train tracks, and buildings at a speed of 240 scale m.p.h. Every hour, approximately 100,000 cars circulate through the toy-city's network. It took Burden over four years to build the sculpture. Unlike the piece's predecessor Metropolis I, Metropolis II's cars are specially manufactured in China since off-the-shelf Hot Wheels' axles wear out quickly. The frenetic, dynamic piece models the hustle and bustle of a car-dominated metropolis. Burden's Metropolis II acts like a moving model of Le Corbusier's Ville Radieuse, while acknowledging and highlighting this vision of urban life as nearly extinct, an end of an era.