

## GAGOSIAN GALLERY

# Art in America

### Going to Extremes: Chris Burden at the New Museum

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*"Chris Burden: Extreme Measures" at New Museum, New York, 2013. Courtesy New Museum, New York. Photo Benoit Pailley.*

Those passing by New York's New Museum these days will notice a pair of skeletal towers extending from the roof and a 30-foot sailboat precariously suspended from the facade. Both are part of "Chris Burden: Extreme Measures," the exhibition currently occupying the entire museum (through Jan. 12, 2014). Burden, the Los Angeles-based artist best known for performance pieces like *Shoot* (1971), in which he was shot through the arm with a rifle, and *Trans-fixed* (1974), where he was crucified to the hood of a Volkswagen Beetle, abandoned performance for sculptural installations in 1979. The latter, most of which have never been seen in New York, are the focus of the New Museum exhibition, which also includes several new pieces.

Although Burden is well known in his native California and in Europe, this is his first museum retrospective since a 1988 show at the Newport Harbor Art Museum (now the Orange County Museum of Art). It follows in the wake of numerous other recent exhibitions devoted to Los Angeles artists in New York, among them James Turrell at the Guggenheim, Ken Price at the Metropolitan Museum and Llyn Foulkes at the New Museum.

"Extreme Measures" is an apt title for Burden's show. As he once went to extreme measures to explore the limits of his own body, Burden has gone on to test the physical and psychological potentials of materials in his sculptural installations, as seen in *The Big Wheel* (1979), in which a 1968 Benelli motorcycle (activated by a seemingly death-defying member of the museum staff at intervals) powers the rotation of a 3-ton cast-iron fly wheel; or *Porsche with Meteorite* (2013), in which a restored Porsche counterbalances a 365-pound meteorite by means of a steel frame that the artist describes as "a giant teeter-totter." Throughout the exhibition, wall labels authored by the artist provide insights into his thinking process. The label for *Porsche with Meteorite* concludes, "To me, it makes sense to combine the long and noted history of German metallurgy with a chunk of extraterrestrial iron."

Extremes of another sort are found in works that involve massive accumulations of materials, such as *Tyne Bridge Kit* (2004), a do-it-yourself bridge-building set in a huge wooden cabinet. It includes over 100,000 Meccano metal toy construction parts. The toy parts hark back to both childhood pursuits and the artist's father's occupation as an engineer. (A 6-storey tower made of 1 million Erector Set parts constructed by Burden at Rockefeller Center in 2008 was titled *What My Dad Gave Me*.) Massive accumulation of a different sort is seen in *A Tale of Two Cities* (1983), in which over 6,000 toy pieces of varying types and scales enact a multitude of war scenes and scenarios. For optimal viewing, binoculars are provided.

War, weaponry and political uprisings and crises have been recurrent themes in Burden's art. *Shoot*, after all, took place in the Vietnam era, post-Kent State, and *L.A.P.D. Uniforms* (1993), consisting of oversized replicas of police uniforms complete with Berretta handguns, came after the Rodney King beating and the ensuing L.A. riots. As for more recent events, the roof structure certainly references the Twin Towers, and the boat on the facade is, according to Burden, intended to evoke a rescue ship in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy. Burden has responded with extreme measures to our extreme times.