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Note: Landscape architect’s renderings are available for download below.

Sculpture by acclaimed artist Chris Burden to illuminate Rose Art Museum

Work by Boston native to highlight museum entry, Brandeis University

Waltham, Mass. — Brandeis University’s Rose Art Museum has commissioned a major installation by Boston native and critically acclaimed artist Chris Burden. Heralded as a creator of “epoch-defining work” and “one of the most important American artists to emerge since 1970” by New York City’s New Museum, Burden has designed a work inspired by the three torches, three hills and three Hebrew letters in the Brandeis University seal.

The installation’s title, “Light of Reason,” borrows from a well-known quote by the university’s namesake, Supreme Court Justice Louis Dembitz Brandeis: “If we would guide by the light of reason, we must let our minds be bold.”

In Burden’s design, antique Victorian lampposts and concrete benches form three branches that fan out from the Rose Art Museum’s entrance. The sculpture will create an inviting gateway to the museum and a dynamic outdoor space for the Brandeis community. The work will become an integral part of the image of the Rose Art Museum and the university, and is already being discussed as a potential setting for a broad range of student and community activities.

In explaining the decision to use the museum’s special acquisition funds, which can be used only to purchase art, to commission the piece, museum director Christopher Bedford said, “Brandeis has a history of radical innovation in the visual arts. When the Rose Museum was established in 1961, the decision was made not to develop an encyclopedic account of art history comparable to those museums of peer universities, but rather to collect the art of the present. The decision to add to that collection a landmark sculpture by Chris Burden, one of our most important living artists, is conceived in accordance with Brandeis’ history of prescience and greatness in collecting and presenting the art of our time.”

He added, “I want to find a way to turn the museum inside out so that our deepest artistic commitments extend beyond the museum walls, becoming integrated psychically into the social lives of students, faculty and staff.”
Waltham Mayor Jeannette McCarthy supports this objective. “Commissioning Chris Burden to create a major outdoor art sculpture in front of the nationally known Rose Art Museum is exciting news for Brandeis, the Rose and the city of Waltham,” she noted. “The kind of light installation for which Mr. Burden is famous is in keeping with the legacy of Justice Brandeis, who always wanted to bring in the ‘sunshine.’ This will advance Brandeis and Waltham as art destinations.”

“Under Christopher Bedford’s guidance, the Rose Art Museum is a truly vibrant part of the Brandeis community, our educational and scholarly enterprise, and our commitment to sustaining the legacy of contemporary art for which the museum was founded,” said President Frederick M. Lawrence.

Provost Steven A.N. Goldstein added, “We welcome about 35,000 people each year to arts events on the Brandeis campus. An artwork such as this can help us expand the reach of the Rose Art Museum and the arts at Brandeis to new audiences both inside and outside the boundaries of the university.”

Bedford noted that Burden is repurposing the Victorian lampposts, formerly discarded objects: “He has ensured that this distinctive public art will be designed and installed with the principles of sustainability in mind, a value consistent with our university’s values. My hope is that this sculpture will be an icon for Brandeis and for the Rose Art Museum, a portal into the museum for visitors ranging from our campus community to international patrons, and a nexus of student activity and ritual from the time of its unveiling into the foreseeable future.”

The installation will be completed in 2014.

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