Campus to welcome new Rose installation

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As the culmination of several months of research and negotiations, the Rose Art Museum will acquire a piece that the museum’s organizers hope will change the way that students interact with the museum as a fixture of campus life. The piece, which will soon be under construction and will be completely installed at the entrance of the Rose by late April, is a permanent outdoor installation created by artist Chris Burden.

Born in Boston, Burden has been an active artist since the early 1970s and has worked with the mediums of installation, sculpture and performance art. Burden has created a piece called “Light of Reason” for the Rose to be placed outside of the entrance to the museum. Burden took conceptual inspiration from the seal of the University, and garnered its title from the words of Justice Louis D. Brandeis, who said “if we would guide by the light of reason, we must let our minds be bold.” Analogous to the three torches, hills and Hebrew phrase on the University seal, the architectural composition of the installation is meant to ensure that it remains as an enduring work on campus.

The piece was acquired through the Rose’s restricted acquisitions fund, a resource that is secured only for the acquisition of works of visual art, whose places in the museum’s permanent collection contribute to the museum’s longevity. Although the installation will cost the museum two million dollars, the Rose staff reasons that the investment will pay off because thousands of visitors that the museum sees each year will come to know the Rose as an art destination by its new
characteristic entrance.

The installation will be a fixture of longevity at the Rose, and Bedford is hopeful that it will become integrated into campus. “I imagine the sculpture serving various different functions at Brandeis and for the Rose as an icon for the University and for the museum as part of the University,” Bedford said. “It’s supposed to operate as a thoroughfare or ushering people in and out of the museum, from campus into the museum, out from the museum onto campus. It’s symbolic of the connection.”

Rose Art Museum director Christopher Bedford gave a public statement about his anticipation for the installation in a BrandeisNOW press release yesterday. “Brandeis has a history of radical innovation in the visual arts,” he said. “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.”

Bedford also has a longstanding professional relationship with Burden, as he described in an interview with the Justice. The two met almost seven years ago while involved with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. “I think it was around that time as a curatorial assistant and an assistant curator at LACMA, that I got to know him doing research for a dissertation ... and I began visiting him at his studio,” Bedford explained.

Bedford said that his vision for the installation is one that focuses largely on community. “I imagined it as space for social activity, artistic activity, both scripted and improvised. So when I imagine that, I think musical performances, theater, performance art, a cappella, as well as really just a place for students and faculty and members of the general public to meet,” he said.

Students can look forward to construction beginning soon, during which time Burden will be on campus frequently, checking in on both the installation and the response to his work.

—Phil Gallagher contributed reporting