The Rose Art Museum presents
Chris Burden: The Master Builder
February 14 – June 8, 2014

Opening Reception: February 13, 5-8 p.m.

(Waltham, MA) - The Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University opens Chris Burden: The Master Builder, a near comprehensive account of Burden’s small-scale Erector set bridges, on February 14, 2014. Modeled from bridges imagined and actual, the sculptures showcase the versatility, simplicity and strength of their unassuming parts, combining technical sophistication and childlike imagination with subtle social commentary. On view through June 8, the exhibition is free and open to the public. An opening reception will be held on Thursday, February 13 from 5-8 p.m.

“In his pioneering performances of the early 1970s, Boston native and internationally acclaimed artist Chris Burden gained a reputation for testing—and forever pushing—the limits: of his own body, and of the institutions and publics implicated in his investigations,” says Christopher Bedford, Henry and Lois Foster Director of the Rose and curator of the exhibition. “First leveled through psychological and physical trial, Chris Burden’s work has continued to pose questions of both its material and audience. Burden’s Erector sculptures extend the artist’s work as a social engineer, demonstrating his dual commitment to empiric and symbolic inquiry.”

Burden’s bridges are constructed from thousands of vintage and reproduced Meccano and Erector parts, popular 20th century children’s building toys. The earliest bridge in the Rose’s exhibition, 1/4 Ton Bridge (1997), is also the first that Burden built, prompted by the artist’s desire to see if he could engineer a structure that might support his own weight. While the resulting sculpture is able to support 500 pounds—a quarter ton—it is slight enough that it can be lifted from below with a single finger. The bridge’s dual delicacy and strength mirror the apparent contradictions of Burden’s preceding works, performances and sculptures defined both by their violence and vulnerability. In the spare, formal beauty of his Erector sets, Burden restores the imaginative fantasy that characterized early industrial ambitions, elevating its optimistic promise over the potentially destructive technology from which the erector components derive.

In April 2014, Burden will construct a two-story Erector set skyscraper that will rise through the atrium of the Rose Art Museum. And, as part of The Master Builder, a video of the making of Burden’s monumental 2008 sculpture What My Dad Gave Me – a 65-foot-tall Erector set skyscraper installed in front of Rockefeller Center in New York City – will be on view.

In addition to his spring exhibition, the Rose has commissioned Chris Burden to create a permanent, outdoor sculpture, entitled Light of Reason. In Burden’s design, antique Victorian lampposts and concrete benches
form three branches that fan out from the museum’s entrance, creating an inviting gateway to the museum and a dynamic outdoor space for the Brandeis community. Inspired by the three torches, three hills, and three Hebrew letters in the Brandeis University seal, the work borrows its title 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.” Light of Reason will be completed in 2014.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Chris Burden was born in Boston, Massachusetts in 1946. He moved to the California in 1965 and obtained a B.F.A. at Pomona College, Claremont, California in 1969 and later a M.F.A. at the University of California in 1971. During the early seventies, Burden’s first mature works were characterized by the idea that the truly important, viable art of the future would not be with objects, things that you could simply sell and hang on your wall. Instead art would be ephemeral and address political, social, environmental and technological change. In his shockingly simple and unforgettable "here and now" performances, Burden shook the conventional art world and took this new art form to its extreme. The images of Burden that continue to resonate in public mind are of a young man who had himself shot (Shoot, 1971), locked up (Five Day Locker Piece, 1971), electrocuted (Doorway to Heaven, 1973), cut (Through the Night Softly, 1973), crucified (Trans-fixed, 1974), and advertised on television (4 TV Ads, 1937–77).

His work has subsequently shifted, focusing now on monumental sculptures and large scale installations, such as B-Car (1975), The Big Wheel (1979), A Tale of Two Cities (1981), Beam Drop (1984), Samson (1985), Medusa’s Head (1990), L.A.P.D. Uniforms (1993), Urban Light (2008) and Metropolis II (2010). These works often reflect their social environments, make observations about cultural institutions, and examine the boundaries of science and technology.

Chris Burden works and lives in California and has been represented by Gagosian Gallery since 1991. He has had major retrospectives at the Newport Harbor Art Museum, Newport Beach, California (1988), the MAK-Austrian Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna (1996), and at the New Museum, New York (2013). In 1999 Burden exhibited at the 48th Venice Biennale and the Tate Gallery in London. In 2008, Burden’s 65-foot tall skyscraper made of one million Erector set parts, titled What My Dad Gave Me, stood in front of Rockefeller Center, New York City. Burden’s installations and sculptures, which have been exhibited all over the world, have continually challenged viewers’ beliefs and attitudes about art and the contemporary world.

ABOUT THE ROSE ART MUSEUM AT BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY

Founded in 1961, the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University is an educational and cultural institution dedicated to collecting, preserving and exhibiting the finest of modern and contemporary art. The programs of the Rose adhere to the overall mission of the university, embracing its values of academic excellence, social justice and freedom of expression. The museum’s permanent collection of postwar and contemporary art is unequalled in New England and is among the best at any university art museum in the United States.

Located on Brandeis University’s campus at 415 South Street, Waltham, MA, the museum is free and open to the public Tuesday through Sunday, noon – 5:00 p.m.

For more information, visit www.brandeis.edu/rose/ or call 781-736-3434.