

NEW
235 BOWERY
NEW YORK NY
10002 USA
MUSEUM

Installing “Chris Burden: Extreme Measures”

Joshua Edwards, Director of Exhibitions Management, demystifies the process of installing the most ambitious show in the New Museum’s history.

***Ghost Ship, 2005.* Thirty-foot handmade sixareen sailboat, aluminum mast, computers and software, hydraulics, GPS system, auto rudder, and rigging; 4,000 lbs. Courtesy the artist and Gagosian Gallery**

Ghost Ship weighs about four thousand pounds and it posed some unconventional engineering challenges. The ship was never meant to be hung in the air in this manner, it was meant to be in water. To support it, we had to work with a team of architects and engineers to design the outrigger structures and the connection points that would secure the ship to the side of the building. Additionally, beyond the engineering, Chris wanted the ship to be rigged as if it was ready to sail. In all of my experience at the Museum, I’ve never had to sail a ship so I knew I was out of my depth. Further complicating the matter, due to the size of the crane we were using, we had to shut down the northbound lanes of the Bowery and do all of our work between midnight and 6 a.m. So we not only had to find a maritime rigger, but also one who could come out at 1 a.m. It’s not every day that you have to rig a ship in the middle of the street in the middle of the night.

***Twin Quasi Legal Skyscrapers, 2013.* In collaboration with TK Architecture, Los Angeles, CA. Aluminum Bosch tubing, aluminum tubing, and steel hardware (stainless steel cable, turnbuckles, clips and angles, t-nuts, half-inch bolts); 8,100 lbs each. Courtesy the artist**

Twin Quasi Legal Skyscrapers presented some interesting challenges. Despite it’s appearance, the top box of the New Museum’s building is not a complete structure. So the question was, how do we place something somewhere where there is nothing to actually support it? We worked for months to make sure we had engineered the proper I-beams that could support the load of the structures, not to mention the wind, snow, and rain that would also be placed upon them. The I-beams had to be craned into place

long before the structures could be installed, and the city permitting and planning took quite a long time. We worked for almost a year with engineers, architects, NYC DOT, and NYC DOB to make sure we had everything lined up and properly vetted. Our staff worked with Chris's assistants for two weeks in Long Island to construct the pieces out of parts that were sent to us from the studio in California. The towers themselves were then trucked into the city on their sides and hoisted into place overnight. We only had one shot at making it work, so ultimately the extensive planning paid off.

1 Ton Crane Truck, 2009. Restored 1964 F350 Ford crane truck with one-ton cast-iron weight; 9,000 lbs. Courtesy the artist and Gagosian Gallery

1 Ton Crane Truck looks fairly straightforward, but the challenge for us was that it barely fit in the gallery. While we were confident that it would fit (we wouldn't have shipped it from LA to New York if it hadn't), there's always that moment when the work is literally on the threshold and you start to question yourself. We had to make sure we measured everything precisely because making the turn into the gallery only had a three-inch leeway. Beyond getting it into the gallery, we also had to coordinate installing the crane boom off the back of the truck. There are only two inches between the top of the boom and the ceiling, so when we were setting the one-ton weight, we actually had to remove some of the ceiling panels and reinstall them afterwards to make it fit.

The Big Wheel, 1979. Three-ton, eight-foot diameter, cast-iron flywheel powered by a 1968 Benelli 250cc motorcycle. The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Gift of Lannan Foundation

The Big Wheel deals with power dynamics in a literal and a metaphorical way (it's also really interesting to watch). As a viewer, there's a certain excitement in watching something that large move so quickly. From the installation standpoint, it posed a number of problems—running a motorcycle inside a museum is not the easiest thing to do. We actually removed a window panel in order to install an exhaust system, and met with structural engineers to make sure the vibrations from the wheel and the exhaust would be safe. The piece is activated two to three times a day by Museum staff, and it's not only exciting for the viewers, but also for us. Personally, it's a piece that I've been fascinated with for years (I remember studying it extensively in college), and now, many years later, being able to put it together, maintain it, and actually ride it every day is really thrilling.

Porsche with Meteorite, 2013. Restored 1974 Porsche 914 with 390-pound meteorite, steel frame; 5,025 lbs. Courtesy the artist

The most difficult part on our end was getting the Porsche inside the elevator and up to the Fourth Floor gallery. We worked with Chris's studio in calculating how big the arm of the balance was going to be, so we knew that getting that into our large elevator wouldn't be a problem. But a Porsche is just a Porsche, there's no way to make it smaller and it wasn't going to fit without modification. We had a harebrained idea that the only way it would fit would be to raise it up at a forty-five degree angle. Some of the staff and I came up with a system where the Porsche was partially driven into the elevator and lifted up with a forklift (pivoting it up on its back wheels). We then built a structure underneath that would hold up the front axle and, in turn, hold the Porsche in position. It took a couple hours (and we had to make sure that each step was done properly, safely, and securely), but ultimately it was a success.

Three Arch Dry Stack Bridge, 1/4 Scale, 2013. 974 hand-cast concrete blocks, wood base; 4,000 lbs. Courtesy the artist

One thing that Chris really likes to explore is the engineering of a piece, and small parts becoming large objects. This becomes very obvious with all of the bridges on the Third Floor, and *Three Arch Dry Stack Bridge, 1/4 Scale* is a beautiful example of this. His assistants put the bridge together over the course of six days here at the Museum, but they had put it together six times before they brought it to New York. They would put it together fully and then completely take it apart again to make sure that they had all the parts lined up and that they could build it within the scheduled time frame. As part of the production of the bridge (which is held together by gravity without the use of mortar), it becomes necessary to use a series of wooden forms. Each form has its own leveling feet, and together, they must all be meticulously placed and level before any other work can commence. The concrete forms are then stacked around them until they can eventually be removed.

A Tale of Two Cities, 1981. Two miniature cities with approx. five thousand toys, sand, plants, boulders; approx. 53,000 lbs. Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach

This ambitious work includes twenty-six tons of sand, rock, live plants, toys, and various other materials. It took us three weeks to install, working every day with a group of representatives from the artwork's lender together with our staff. We had to be really strategic and map everything out beforehand, because once something was placed

there wasn't really a chance to fix it. Starting in the back, we worked our way forward, beginning with the mountains and the rough outlines, and then we worked our way from the wall in the direction of where the audience stands. The exhibit includes roughly thirty live plants, so we had to think beyond the opening night to make sure that everything is taken care of during the exhibition's three-month run. We strategically placed a few paths so we could continue to water the plants, and then we came up with the idea of a large grow light that could be extended twenty feet from the edge of the piece so the plants could get the right amount of light.

The final component of the installation is a series of darts that are thrown at the wall from across the room where viewers stand. It's the most harrowing part of the installation, because everything is already done and we couldn't access the darts if they didn't stick into the wall. We just had to practice and hope for the best.

All the Submarines of the United States of America, 1987. 625 miniature cardboard submarines. Dallas Museum of Art purchase with funds donated by the Jolesch Acquisition Fund, The 500 Inc., the National Endowment for the Arts, Bradbury Dyer, III, Mr. and Mrs. Bryant M. Hanley, Jr., Mr. and Mrs. Michael C. Mewhinney, Deedie and Rusty Rose, and Mr. and Mrs. William T. Solomon

This piece from 1987 includes 625 submarines, which represent all the submarines in the US fleet at the time it was made. The piece has been exhibited many times, and although it takes many days to install, it's actually a straightforward installation. Each submarine comes in its own container within a large crate, and needs to be unwrapped and placed in a certain location. A representative from the Dallas Museum came to work with us, and I believe it's the fourth time he's installed the piece. He developed a very clever system of wooden mounts that could be used when installing each submarine to ensure they were at the proper height. It's straightforward but takes a little time per submarine. Multiply that process by 625 units and it's easy to see why this one piece took us six days to install.

Chris Burden (b. 1946 Boston, MA) currently lives and works in Los Angeles. He attended Pomona College and received his MFA from the University of California, Irvine, in 1971. He had a major survey exhibition at the Newport Harbor Art Museum, Newport Beach, CA, in 1988 and at MAK—Austrian Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna, in 1996. His work was presented in the 48th Venice Biennale and at the Tate Gallery in 1999. In 2008, the Public Art Fund presented *WHAT MY DAD GAVE ME*, one of his skyscraper sculptures, at Rockefeller Center in New York City.

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About the New Museum

The New Museum is the only museum in New York City exclusively devoted to contemporary art. Founded in 1977, the New Museum is a center for exhibitions, information, and documentation about living artists from around the world. From its beginnings as a one-room office on Hudson Street to the inauguration of its first freestanding building on the Bowery designed by SANAA in 2007, the New Museum continues to be a place of experimentation and a hub of new art and new ideas.