

Chris Burden

L.A.P.D. Uniform

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MASSIMODECARLO Pièce Unique is very pleased to present *L.A.P.D. Uniform* by the late Chris Burden (1946 – 2015).

The artist explains the process behind the creation of this work:

They were done in conjunction with the Fabric Workshop in Philadelphia. Kippy Stroud had asked me to come up with an idea to do something... And they do all kinds of projects with artists. So she approached me and said, you know, "I'd like you to do something with fabric. Can you think of a project you could do with fabric?" An edition piece or something."

I thought, fabric, that's kind of tough. And it was really close to the riots, the Rodney King riots. And the idea of the police uniform became a big symbol and, you know, a sort of passing fantasy. But if you wanted to be disruptive, what you do is you just have hundreds of police uniforms, or thousands, and really just airdrop them all over South Central LA. Now we've got a real problem. Now we have a bunch of disenfranchised people that are pissed as hell wearing police uniforms. It was just a subversive thought.

And then I thought, that's it, that's what the Fabric Workshop should do. Because I've always sort of been intimidated by policemen, and I wanted to have them be 10 percent bigger, so that when they were displayed on the wall like paper cutout dolls, that you would look at them and not realize they were bigger than they should be, that you would just see them as, 'Holy cow, cops are huge,' kind of thing. And so we worked with the Fabric Workshop, I don't know, for a year, year-and-a-half, two years, and we actually hired the companies that make official police uniforms to make our police uniforms. And the label says 'Conqueror.' That's the label, 'Conqueror.'

But it was very tricky because we wanted them to hang flat on the wall and look good and look impressive. Well, it meant they had no butts. And... we had the badge made 10 percent bigger. We didn't have the gun or any of that equipment made bigger. It was just too — it was too prohibitive.

That was an experience. I went to a gun shop, bought 30 Berettas and no questions asked... You had to pass a handgun law and you had to wait your 10 days or whatever it is, but there's no limit on how many you can buy.

And then, the best part was when I went to take them back to the same gun store and I said, 'And I want them all to be rendered inoperable.' And they said, 'Permanently?' I said, 'Yes.' And they said, 'We could do it so we could reverse it. You don't want to ruin these beautiful guns, do you?' And I said, 'Yes, I do.' So that was a really weird thing, to take the same guns back and have 30 of them totally disabled so they can't shoot. They were welded, and when you weld them the metal gets crystallized. I mean, you just can't turn the process around.

- CHRIS BURDEN

Chris Burden

Chris Burden, born in Boston in 1946, spent most of his childhood between France and Italy. A near-fatal motorcycle accident at age 12, after which he underwent surgery without anesthesia, deeply influenced his later work, which often explored physical endurance and self-inflicted pain. After returning to the US and finishing high school in Massachusetts, he moved to California in 1965, initially studying physics and architecture before earning a B.F.A. from Pomona College (1969) and an M.F.A. from the University of California, Irvine (1971). While still a student, Burden began experimenting with performance art, famously locking himself inside a school locker for five days as his Master's project. His early performances, which were characterized by extreme physical trials and not publicly advertised by the artist, were often witnessed only by small, in-the-know audiences. Burden gained a reputation for provocative works, such as *Shoot* (1971), where he had himself shot in the arm, and *Trans-Fixed* (1974), in which he was nailed to a Volkswagen Beetle. The masochistic tendencies of his oeuvre earned him the title of the "Evel Knieval of Contemporary Art".

By the late 1970s, Burden transitioned from performance art to large-scale sculptures and dynamic installations, often inspired by engineering, politics, and technology. His later works maintained the boldness of his early career, exploring mechanical movement and grand physical structures, such as *Metropolis II* (2011), a kinetic cityscape. He received multiple awards, including a National Endowment for the Arts grant and a Guggenheim Fellowship, and taught at UCLA until resigning in 2005 after a controversial classroom stunt pulled by a student. In 2013, the New Museum in New York held a retrospective, *Extreme Measures*, cementing his legacy as a radical innovator. Burden, who lived and worked in Los Angeles with his wife, artist Nancy Rubins, passed away in 2015. Though he stated that he was against the re-enactment of his early works, most of them are well-documented through photography and videos. His groundbreaking performances challenged the definition of art and inspired future generations of conceptual and performance artists, including Marina Abramović and Carolee Schneemann.