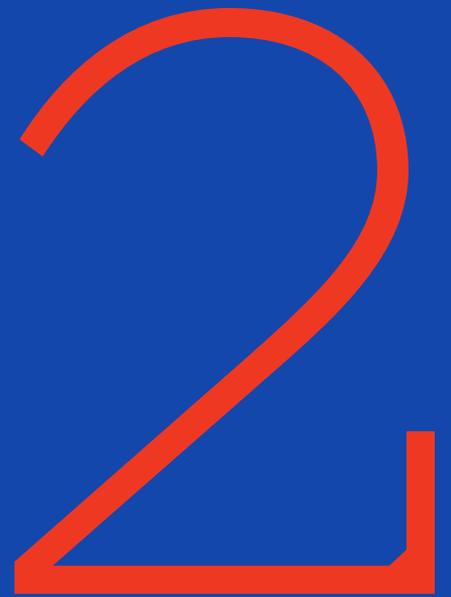


Claremont McKenna College Public Art Project
Gould Center for Humanistic Studies



Chris Burden

Meet in the Middle

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Essay by
Thomas Crow

FOREWORD

To make best use of the comparative advantages, and avoid duplication, of the strongest programs at the Claremont Colleges, the arts have been seen traditionally as the province of superb programs at Scripps and Pomona Colleges and the Graduate University. Claremont McKenna College (CMC) has no art department or curriculum.

Nonetheless, our students, faculty, staff, alumni, and trustees at CMC love the arts, and see the arts as vitally important to our mission and our understanding of and contributions to every aspect of the world we inhabit, from the melodies and rhythms in the language we choose, to the designs in our thinking and institutions, to our appreciation of the natural and built environment.

When I arrived on the CMC campus in 2013, many members of our community spoke to me about CMC's long-term commitment to the arts. A pressing question emerged: how could we "put more arts into the liberal arts" at CMC? With strong student, and faculty support, creating hands-on vehicles for artistic expression at the College took on special urgency. Renovation of a basement dorm, trustee gifts for the purchase of music equipment, spurred by the initiative of several students created what is now The Cave, an underground music studio and performance space. Gifts of more than \$200,000 for student artistic expression funded the Arts Council (a new student organization that provides grants to students who want to do art projects on campus.) Financial support for the musical pursuits of our students grew, including one of our national award-winning acapella groups at the Claremont Colleges, the After School Specials. The Gould Center for Humanistic Studies, directed by Robert Faggen (2008-18),

the Barton Evans and H. Andrea Neves Professor of Literature, continued to sponsor artists in residence to teach screen-writing, documentary film, and painting.

Sumultaneously, under the inspired leadership of trustees and alumni Chris Walker '69 and Ken Novack '67, as well as invaluable support from the and advice from Mary Beebe, who at UCSD has led the Stuart Collection (one of the most successful public art initiatives of any campus in the world), and Philipp Kaiser, a fellow at the Gould Center, we launched CMC's public art initiative in 2014. We took a powerful first step forward when the Gould Center hosted Mary Weatherford for a semester during which she created her mural, "From the mountain to the sea." The mural was then underwritten by the trustees of the Public Art Committee--Abbott Brown P'00, Steve Crown '74; Perry Lerner '65 P'89 GP'19 GP'20; Ken Novack '67, Shaw Wagener '81, and Chris Walker '69. The mural now hangs in our very own Athenaeum. The Gould Center also published the first book about Weatherford's work: *Mary Weatherford: The Neon Paintings* (Prestel/ Gould Center 2016).

In the fall of 2015, CMC announced two spectacular gifts of public art from trustee George '66 P'93 and Linnea Roberts: Ellsworth Kelly's "Totem", and Chris Burden's "Meet in the Middle." We celebrate these two spectacular sculptures, installed in the 2016-17 academic year, to our emerging public art collection.

To mark the occasion, we are producing a special tribute in the form of this publication for each of the two pieces, and I have the honor and special privilege of saying a few words about what the introduction of each of these great works means to me in the context of our College and campus.

First, on behalf of the Board and the entire College community, I am especially grateful: for the leadership of Chris Walker and the other members of the public art committee; for the extraordinary generosity of George and Linnea Roberts; for the advice and counsel of Bob Faggen, Philipp Kaiser, and Mary Beebe; for the enthusiasm of our students and their accomplishment in the arts, as they pursue other primary fields of study; and for the support of Kimberly Petropoulos, Dorothy Buchanan, and Ken Eppinger, who have provided invaluable support.

Second, as the superb essays of Yve-Alain Bois (Kelly) and Thomas Crow (Burden) point out, the impact of a powerful piece of public art is incalculable. It inspires us to see the world in new ways. Intervening forms sharpen our view us to see what is already there, provide a visual expression that moves us emotionally or triggers a more abstract thought or value we cherish.

In the Ellsworth Kelly's Totem, I am struck by the beauty of the sky's many reflections, sparkling off of its shiny white automotive surface. Mostly I see the perfect form of scaled aspiration, a gesture to the steepest ridges of the San Gabriel mountain range to the North, and capturing without confining the pure ambitions of Claremont McKenna College: the search for the piercing, searing, soaring truth, the courage to learn and speak it, lead with and from it. The totem posts and anchors a tether--a virtuous cycle--that spins between the intellectual ambition, open inquiry, and community-building of the Athenaeum and the Roberts Pavilion's heightened venue for the athletic training, teamwork, and competition that helps build and shape the human spirit. Kelly elevates us.

In Chris Burden's Meet in the Middle, I am moved by Chris Burden's 19th Century gesture

to the social network we once knew as the park, to the backlit screen we knew as the street lamp, and the special site we knew as the cast-iron bench. He attended Pomona during a divisive time in our history, and the design of his legacy defies division. His piece is the form of two concentric circles (the inner as interior-facing, the outer with an exterior view). In an age of division, polarization, more time for texts and less for talking and listening in real time, the inner circle is about the strength of our community, how we look at ourselves and one another, break bread together, evaluate ourselves, seek improvements in our imperfections, and engage in dialogue to solve complex problems. The outer circle speaks to the mission we have in public affairs, our purpose, our commitment to make a difference in the world outside our campus on the issues of our time. We draw on the power of our inner circle and sense of connection to one another to inform our outward gaze. This inner sanctum in turn empowers our exterior commitment and public leadership. In a world of increasingly polar communities, the two circles create a center from a void. Now we have a place (both physical and mental) to meet in the middle. Burden brings us together.

George and Linnea Roberts, Chris Walker, Ken Novack, our Board's Public Art Committee, Professor Faggen, and so many others have given us something that sets our minds and hearts on our most cherished values. Now it is our responsibility to make the most of it--to let the inspiration of these forms shape us. Elevate us. Bring us together.

Hiram E. Chodosh
President, Claremont McKenna College
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