Chris Burden
Meet in the Middle

Essay by
Thomas Crow
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, alum, and curious students who want to 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? 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 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 a world of increasingly polar communities, the two circles create a center from a void.

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.