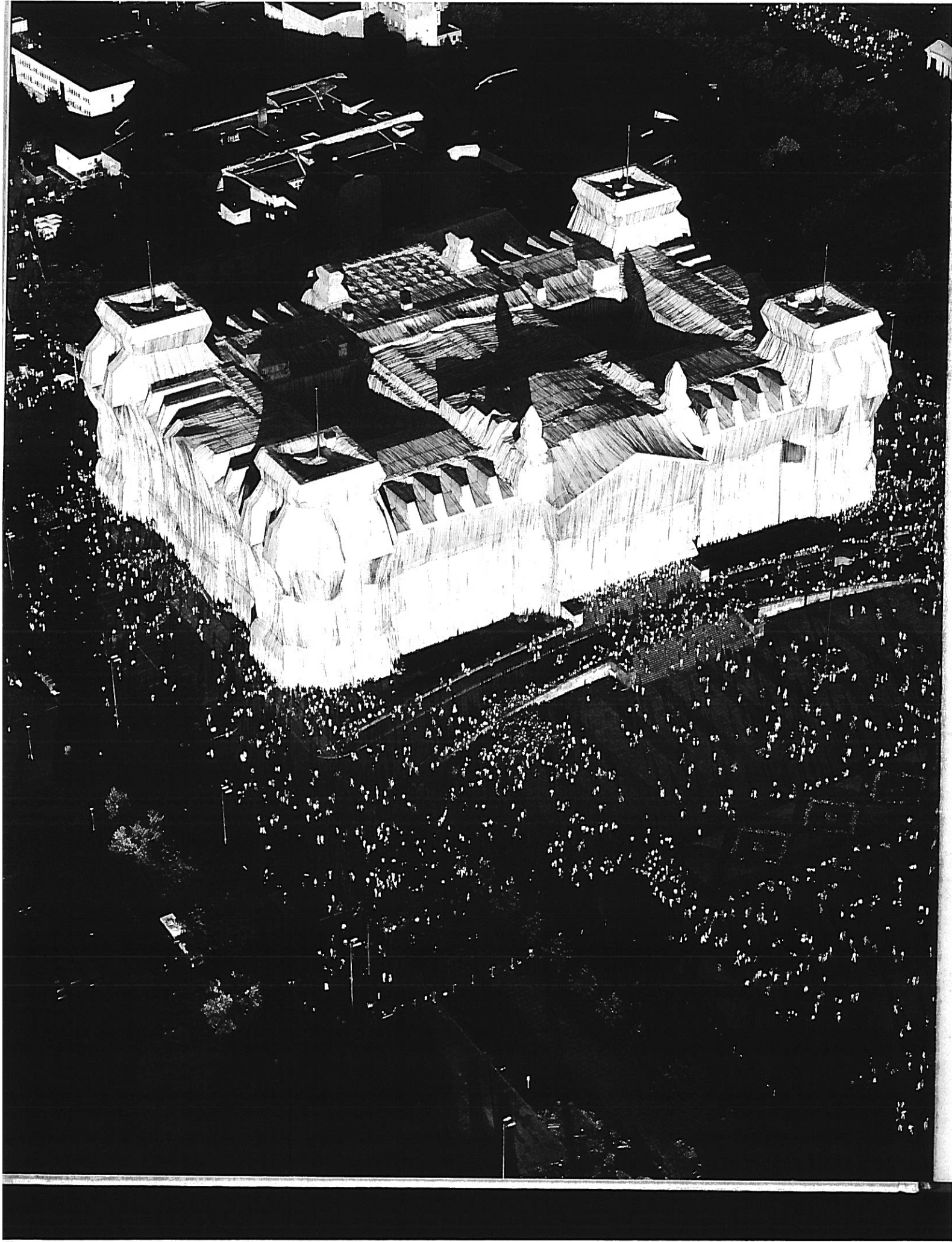


Jacob Baal-Teshuva

Christo and Jeanne-Claude

Photographs by Wolfgang Volz

TASCHEN



Introduction

On February 25, 1994, I was awakened at six in the morning by the fax machine. The message from Jeanne-Claude was one I had long been waiting for: "WE HAVE WON!" Permission had been granted to create the temporary work of art *Wrapped Reichstag, Berlin*. The vote was 292 in favor, 223 against, with 9 abstentions.

The vote had been won against all odds. During the debate, Christo sat in the visitors' gallery with some of his collaborators, following the arguments with the help of an interpreter. It was the first time in history that an unrealized work of art was being discussed and voted on in the German Bundestag – or, for that matter, in any parliament. Furthermore, success had been achieved against the will of Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who had voted against the project. Throughout the discussion, he remained adamant in his opposition, and even refused to meet with Christo and Jeanne-Claude or answer their letters. Now, after 24 years of efforts and lobbying, Christo and Jeanne-Claude had won a great victory: permission to wrap the Reichstag prior to its becoming, once again, the German parliament building. The realization of the project became a spectacular event, drawing five million people to Berlin. Viewing it at all hours of the day or night, visitors were reminded of Claude Monet's series of paintings of the Rouen Cathedral in France, which depict the building at different hours of the day.

The question is frequently asked, "How do you define the work of Christo and Jeanne-Claude? How do you classify it?"

To many people, Christo and Jeanne-Claude are perceived par tout as wrappers of buildings, a bridge, and other objects. But this view is too simplistic. The project *The Umbrellas, Japan – USA*, for example, had nothing to do with wrapping. The same holds true for the *Surrounded Islands* project: in this case, Christo and Jeanne-Claude surrounded eleven islands in pink fabric.

There are several inherent elements in the philosophy behind *Wrapped Reichstag* as well as many of the other projects of Christo and Jeanne-Claude that function as temporary works of art. (Aside from these, the only remaining works consist of films, books, and Christo's drawings, collages, and scale models, which are to be found in museums throughout the world and in private collections. From the sale of these preparatory works and works from the 1950s and 1960s, Christo and Jeanne-Claude finance their projects.) The major elements in the philosophy behind both this work and the many projects of Christo and Jeanne-Claude are:



Jeanne-Claude and Christo in front of the Reichstag in Berlin, 1993



1) Painting and the elements of paintings. A good example is the project *Surrounded Islands, Biscayne Bay, Greater Miami, Florida, 1980–83* (p. 54). Flying over it in a helicopter, I was reminded of the water-lily canvases by Claude Monet: Biscayne Bay functioned as the canvas of Christo and Jeanne-Claude.

2) Sculpture and architecture. The spectacular project *Wrapped Reichstag, Berlin, 1971–95*, can be seen as a huge monumental sculpture and work of architecture. Although it also manifests elements of antique drapery and folds, the building remains intact. The same goes for *The Pont Neuf Wrapped, Paris, 1975–85* (p. 65). Even as a work of architecture, the bridge continued to function: boats continued to sail under its wrapped arches, while cars were driving and pedestrians walking on it.

3) Urbanism and environmental art. The celebrated double project *The Umbrellas, Japan – USA, 1984–91* (p. 8, 70, 71), an installation of 3,100 two-story-high umbrellas – blue in Japan and yellow in California – spread across areas of 48 kilometers (30 miles) and included elements of urban planning. To undertake the project, Christo and Jeanne-Claude needed permission from the Ministry of Construction in Tokyo, as well as other authorities. The project created house-like structures without walls running along highways and roads, or set alongside schools, temples, gas stations, etc. Christo and Jeanne-Claude can also be regarded as environmental artists in their creation of rural and urban environments, such as the *Running Fence, Sonoma and Marin Counties, California, 1972–76* (p. 51). After two weeks all sites are restored to their original condition and the materials recycled.

The Gates, Central Park, New York City, 1979–2005

7,503 vinyl gates, with free-flowing nylon fabric panels, on 37 km (23 miles) of walkways

PAGE 8 TOP

The Umbrellas, Japan – USA, 1984–91
(California site)

1,760 yellow umbrellas – each 6 m (19 ft. 8 in.) high and 8.66 m (28 ft. 5 in.) in diameter

PAGE 8 BOTTOM

The Umbrellas, Japan – USA, 1984–91
(Ibaraki, Japan site)

1,340 blue umbrellas – each 6 m (19 ft. 8 in.) high and 8.66 m (28 ft. 5 in.) in diameter



“Miserable autumn weekends”

Out of Bulgaria

Christo Vladimiroff Javacheff was born on June 13, 1935, in Gabrovo, an industrial town in the central part of Bulgaria – the very same day and year, amazingly, that Jeanne-Claude was born in Casablanca to a French military family. Christo’s father owned a chemical factory which he established in Gabrovo. His mother, Tzveta Dimitrova, who was Secretary General of the Sofia Academy of Fine Arts until her marriage in 1931, had fled Macedonia for Bulgaria following Turkish massacres. “Our mother,” Anani, Christo’s older brother, told *Balkan Magazine* (IX, 1993), “had to flee Macedonia with our grandmother in 1913. Grandmother was a troublemaker in Salonika, where she lived. Our grandfather was a big merchant in Salonika – the Turks killed him in 1913, on an island together with other people. My grandmother was left alone, and had three children on her hands: a two-month-old boy and two girls. The house was surrounded by the Turks. She was inside the house together with the children. The Turks brought artillery and started firing on the house. The family survived somehow, escaped death, and on the next day, or God knows after how many days, managed to get on board a British ship that had just arrived. My grandmother was disguised as a Turkish woman, with her three kids and a sewing machine, which she managed to carry. She finally arrived safely at Dedeagaç, and from there to Sofia. My mother was seven years old then. It was in Sofia that my mother later went to high school.”

Christo’s family, which included an elder brother, Anani (later a well-known actor in Bulgaria) and a younger brother, Stefan (later a chemist), lived through the Second World War in a relatively secure country house that was a haven for artists and other friends fleeing the Allied bombing of the cities. Christo’s childhood memories included the corpses of partisans executed in the streets, and the entrance of the Red Army into Bulgaria in 1944.

Christo’s father, a Western-educated scientist, was harassed and hounded by the new Communist regime. His chemical factory was nationalized under the Communists, and the teenaged Christo visited his father, now branded a “saboteur,” in prison. To *Balkan Magazine*, Christo recalled the early 1950s as a time of “frenzy and upheaval. Everything slowed down and decadence set in.”

By the time he was twelve, Christo had already vaguely heard about the Reichstag, since it played a key role in Bulgarian Communist lore: Georgi Dimitrov, Prime Minister of Bulgaria in the late 1940s, had been a defendant (later acquitted) in the Reichstag fire trial in 1933. Christo himself was a quiet,



Vladimir Javacheff, the Artist's Father Resting, 1952

Pencil on paper, 24.5 x 18.5 cm (9¾ x 7¼ in.)

PAGE 10

Self-Portrait, 1951

Pencil on paper, 51.5 x 41.9 cm (20¼ x 16½ in.)

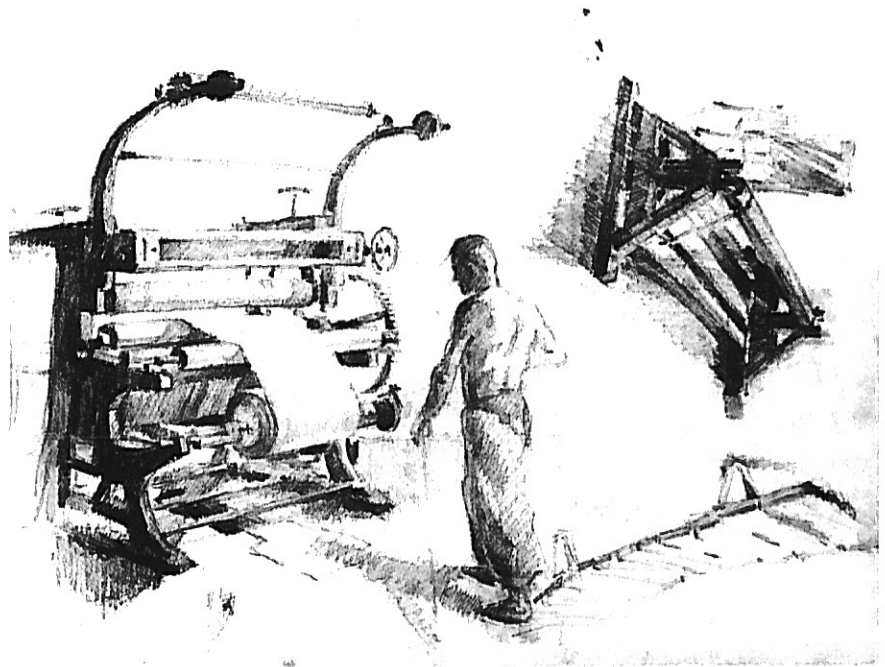


Tzveta, the Artist's Mother, 1948
Pencil on paper, 48.5 x 31.5 cm (19 x 12½ in.)

gentle youngster, shy of girls and vulnerable to ridicule. "I was restless, frantic," remembers Christo's brother Anani, "while he was always at mother's side. He was her favorite one. He always used to tell mother, Tzveta was her name, that they would never part ... she suffered much when developments in Hungary took place, and Christo went over to Prague and later reached Vienna." Christo himself recalls the beautiful house in Gabrovo with fondness, and the village, too, where the family used to spend the summer. "The family got acquainted with a village woman who brought us butter and cheese during the war. We became very good friends, and every summer we went over there. We assisted with the household and farm work. We tended the sheep, harvested fruit, and so spent the whole summer."

Christo's earliest ventures in art dated back to that village, too, where "there was a woman who was born without arms. She used to do so many things, almost everything, with her feet. She taught herself to do so – even knitted with her feet. At the age of six, I made her and others sit for me, so I could paint their portraits." In 1953 he began his formal training at the Academy in the Bulgarian capital, Sofia. There he studied painting, sculpture, architecture, and design until 1956. Socialist realism was the order of the day, and the agitprop approach prevalent throughout the Communist bloc dictated a propagandist, Marxist-Leninist treatment of subject matter and style in art.

The kinds of grotesque lengths Christo's generation had to go to have often been described. The route of the Orient Express, for instance, lay through Bulgaria; and students were therefore sent to agricultural cooperatives (on "miserable autumn weekends") to advise farmers along the track how to show off their tractors or haystacks to the best advantage, to impress travellers from capitalist countries. This propaganda work was mandatory to obtain course credit. Still, something more valuable in his later life may have remained with Christo from those curious exercises: his communicative skill, and his sense of art's physical dimension in landscape, may derive in part from such experience.



Textile Machinery in Plovdiv Factory, 1950
Pencil on paper, 40 x 54 cm (15¾ x 21¼ in.)



Farmers at Rest in a Field
(study for an oil painting), 1954
Charcoal on paper, 35 x 50 cm (13¾ x 19¾ in.)

He fell afoul of socialist realism, and Professor Panayotov's Academy dictates, with a composition that showed peasants in a cornfield (p. 13), resting instead of working. One was drinking; the soil looked unproductive; and even the violet and green shirts of the peasants met with disapproval. Christo was defying the system. How dare he be so provocative?

Bulgaria was the most ardently Stalinist nation in the Communist bloc, the isolated hinterland of Europe, and Christo knew that if he were ever to see work by Matisse or Picasso, Klee or Kandinsky, anywhere outside the covers of a book, he would have to go west. His dream was of Paris, but his first stop was Prague, where, for the first time, he saw originals by the great moderns. Then, on January 10, 1956, with eighteen others, Christo bribed a frontier guard on the Czech border, and made good his passage by train to Vienna. With neither money nor any knowledge of the language, Christo took a taxi to the only address he knew in Vienna, that of a friend of his father. The address was thirty-five years old, but the friend still lived there and took Christo in, and the next morning the young Bulgarian hurried off to enroll at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts. Matriculation as a student bypassed the need to register as a refugee. Fritz Wotruba was head of the Vienna sculpture department, and Robert Anderson was Christo's professor at the academy, but he stayed for only one semester, moving first to Geneva (where he painted portraits of society ladies and children in order to survive) and from there to Paris.



“Revelation through concealment”

Paris

Christo arrived in Paris in March of 1958 and took a tiny room on the Ile Saint-Louis, and, for a studio, a maid's room on Rue de Saint-Senoche. He continued to make a living painting portraits (signed Javacheff), and his work impressed René Bourgeois, a society hairdresser, who recommended him to the wife of General de Guillebon. De Guillebon was a French war hero who had led the troops that liberated Paris and later taken Berchtesgaden, where Hitler had his Berghof and Adlerhorst retreats. His daughter Jeanne-Claude met Christo when he came to the family home to paint her mother (in three versions – plain Realist, Impressionist, and Cubist) and was soon in love with the penniless Bulgarian refugee. Her family considered him gifted but an unsuitable match: “they wanted Christo as a son, not a son-in-law,” Jeanne-Claude told *Avenue Magazine* in 1990. But she and Christo were soon living together and later married, with Christo's friend Pierre Restany, the critic and founder of the *Nouveaux Réalistes* movement, acting as best man at the wedding. “I could tell you it was the art,” Jeanne-Claude told *Avenue*, “but actually he was a hell of a lover.”

Christo's move west had been a serious upheaval in his life, one he had countenanced because conditions in which creative work had to operate behind the Iron Curtain were stifling. In choosing the freedom every artist needs, he was not without personal courage; but finding out what it was he had to do (as he himself puts it), locating his authentic vein and genuine self, mattered above all else. In Paris he now took two further steps that changed his life as an artist.

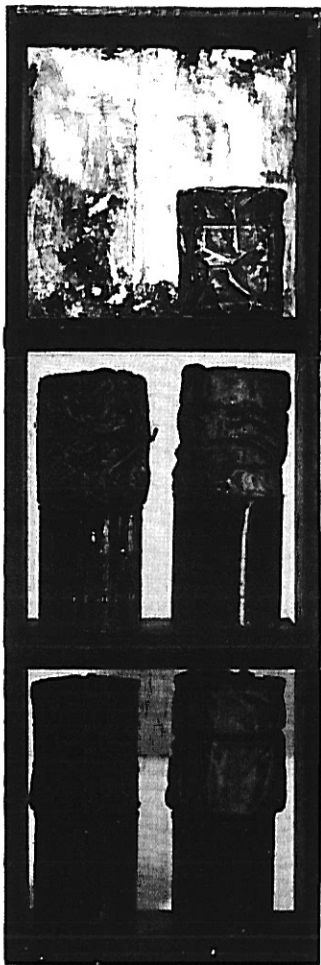
The first was simple: he shed his surname, Javacheff, and henceforth used only his first name, Christo, the name by which he is now known worldwide, for his art.

The second change, dating almost from the beginning of his time in Paris, touched upon the substance of his art. He began to use fabric. Christo wrapped cans, bottles, chairs, a car – anything he could find, everyday objects of no particular beauty or interest. Resembling the Pop artists in this respect (and also, later, in his skillful use of press and the media for his own purposes), he implicitly assumed that any object could be worthy of the attentions of art: there were no hierarchies or distinctions any more. He wrapped his chosen objects in canvas and tied them securely with string, rope, or twine. He even painted some of them.



Invitation card for *Wall of Oil Barrels, Iron Curtain (Le Rideau de Fer)*, 1962
New York, Collection Jacob Baal-Teshuva

PAGE 14
Wall of Oil Barrels, Iron Curtain,
Rue Visconti, Paris, 1961–62
240 oil barrels, 4.3 x 3.8 x 1.7 m
(13.7 x 13.2 x 2.7 ft.)



Shelves, 1958

Five wrapped cans and four cans on three shelves: wood, glass, lacquered canvas, rope and paint, 90 x 30 x 18 cm (35½ x 11¼ in.)

PAGE 17

Wrapped Oil Barrels, 1958–59

Fabric, enamel paint, steel wire and barrels
Barrels range in size from:
49 x 33 cm (19¼ x 13 in.) to 89 x 59 cm
(35 x 23¼ in.)

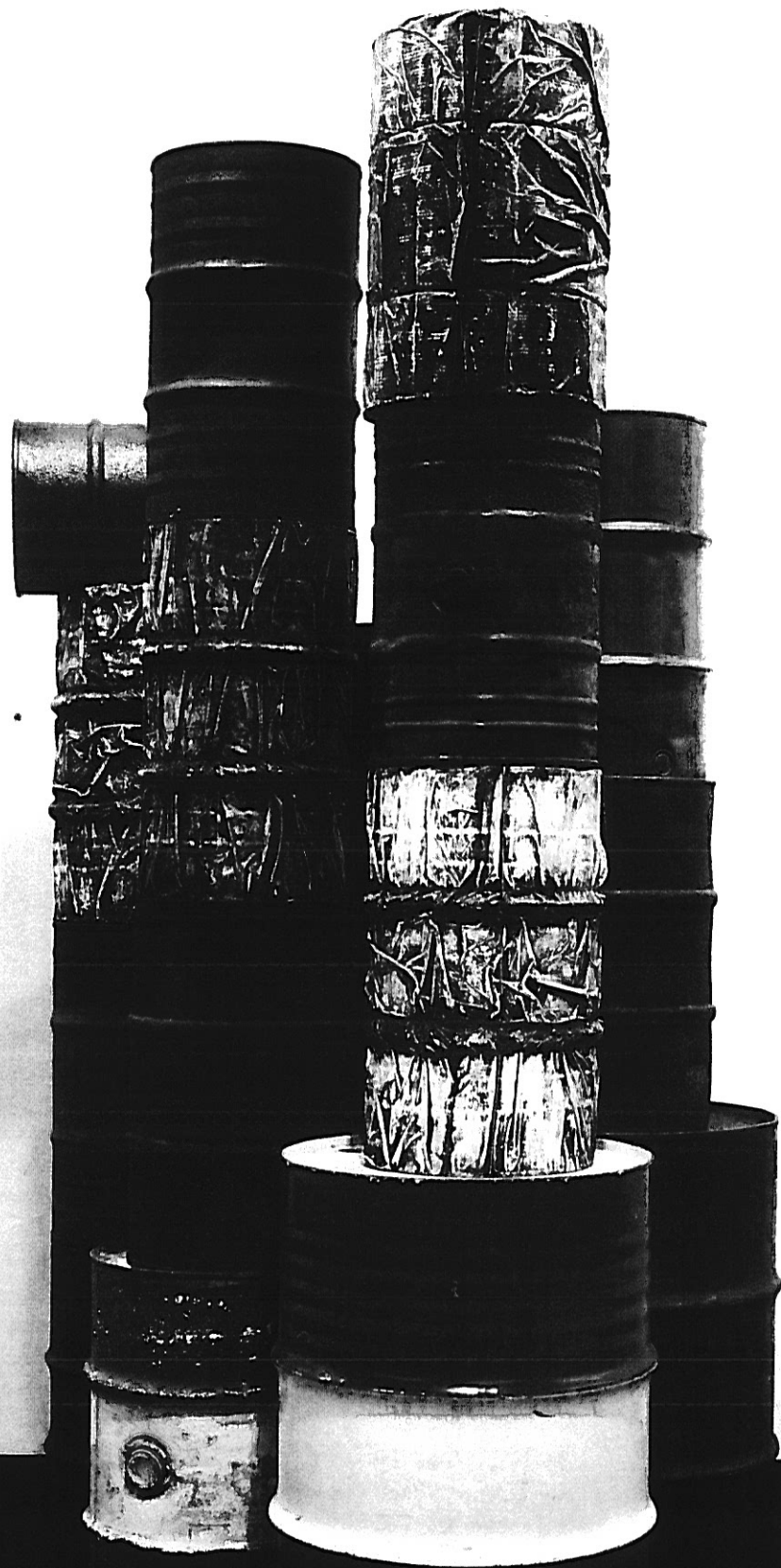
Over the next few years he continued to wrap a bewildering variety of objects – chairs, a wheelbarrow, a motorcycle, naked women, oil barrels (of which we shall have more to say), and a Volkswagen car. On occasion he juxtaposed items: *Wrapped Cans and Bottles, 1958–59*, included several wrapped bottles and cans alongside a few unwrapped paint cans, and bottles containing pigment.

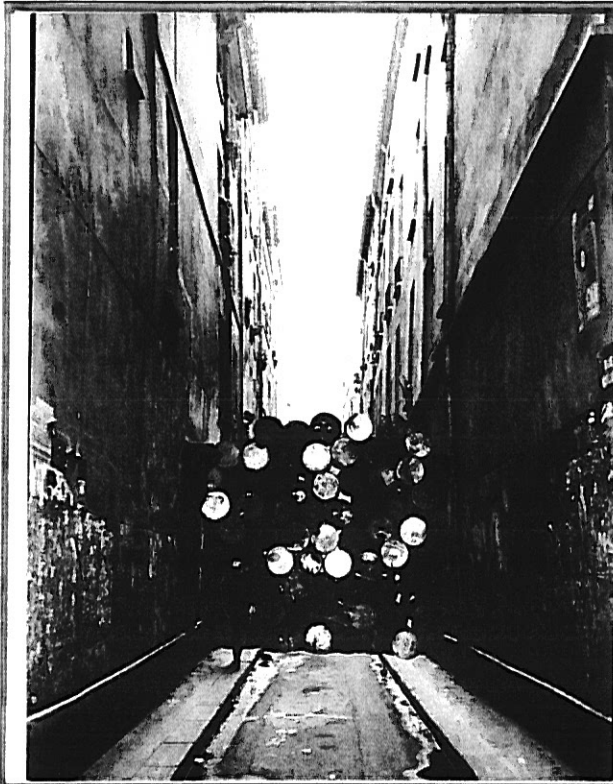
The wrapping of small objects that could be transformed into limited editions for a collectors' market was to be of considerable importance in Christo's future career, since it became an important source of income and thus of the funding needed for projects that became ever larger and costlier. Thus in the 1960s there were editions of wrapped magazines (p. 24); of a *Wrapped Flower* (it was presented to George Maciunas as a gift); of *Wrapped Roses* (in 1968, on the occasion of Christo's exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia, to help cover expenses incurred by his *Mastaba* there – and, in the same year, an edition from Richard Feigen Graphics in New York); a *Wrapped Painting* in 1969; a wrapped model of the Cologne cathedral, done by German artist Klaus Staeck in 1969 and signed by Christo on the sticker; prints of wrapped trees in 1970 (the first life-size *Wrapped Tree* dating from 1966 in Holland); and so forth. Occasionally, these small-scale objects have been given away for purposes of good relations, but more usually they have attracted collectors who want lasting mementoes, and have also played a part, however indirect, in making Christo's larger-scale projects possible.

The principle of wrapping, covering, and concealing (yet not entirely disguising) allowed for surprising versatility. Works such as the *Package on Table, 1961* (p. 23), *Wrapped Chair, 1961*, or *Wrapped Motorcycle, 1962*, might be clad in semi-transparent materials instead of (or in addition to) opaque fabric. Objects might be only partially masked; or, of course, they might be entirely enveloped so that the content was neither visible nor recognizable (*Package, 1961*). For the principle at stake in this process, witless to hostile critics and enchanting in the eyes of Christo's supporters, David Bourdon found the perfect formula, in a biography published in 1970: "revelation through concealment."

That is indeed the key. Christo and Jeanne-Claude touch the world with wonder. From those modest beginnings in Paris they have gone on, over a career of fifty years, to wrap everything – from tin cans to a stretch of Australian coastline – and have created a body of work that, as we shall see, has gone far beyond wrapping, retaining only the use of fabric as a common denominator. Their work has afforded "one of the eeriest visual spectacles of our time" (Bourdon), and has made Christo and Jeanne-Claude celebrities on the international stage. Not that fame in itself is of interest, but theirs is the reward for an unusual steadiness of vision.

During Christo's French years, the Paris art scene was dominated by the *Nouveaux Réalistes*, the group of New Realists founded in 1960 by Pierre Restany. Christo's membership in this group is sometimes disputed, even by the artist himself. The eight founding members of the group, signatories to the original manifesto, were Yves Klein, Martial Raysse, François Dufrêne, Raymond Hains, Jacques de la Villeglé, Jean Tinguely, Arman, and Daniel Spoerri. Others who subsequently became associated with the group – Gérard Deschamps, Mimmo Rotella, Niki de Saint Phalle, César, and Christo himself – never in fact signed the Paris Manifesto. Though he was not formally invited to join, Christo exhibited at the group's 1963 show in Munich, and later in Milan. Pierre Restany has claimed that this signalled his membership. Christo denies that this was so, and Bourdon noted that Christo's "involvement was marginal and brief." He in-





PROJET DU MUR PROVISOIRE DE TONNEAUX METALLIQUES
(Rue Visconti, Paris 6)

Entre la rue Bonaparte et la rue de Seine, la rue Visconti, à sens unique, longue de 140 m., a une largeur moyenne de 3m. Elle se termine au numéro 25 à gauche et au 26 à droite.

Elle compte peu de commerces: une librairie, une galerie d'art moderne, un antiquaire, un magasin d'électricité, une épicerie... "À l'angle de la rue Visconti et de la rue de Seine le cabaret du Petit More (ou Maure) a été ouvert en 1618. Le poète de Saint-Amant qui le fréquentait assidûment y mourut. La galerie de peinture qui remplace la taverne a heureusement conservé la façade, la grille et l'enseigne du XVII^e siècle" (p.134. *Promenades/Clébert* - Promenade dans les rues de Paris, Rive gauche, Éditions Denoël).

Le Mur sera élevé entre les numéros 1 et 2, fermant complètement la rue à circulation, coupera toute communication entre la rue Bonaparte et la rue de Seine.

Exclusivement construit avec les tonneaux métalliques destinés au transport de l'essence et de l'huile pour voitures, (estampillés de marques diverses: ESSO, AGIP, SHELL, EP et d'une contenance de 50 l. ou de 200 l.) le Mur, haut de 4 m., a une largeur de 2,90 m. 8 tonneaux couchés de 50 l., ou 5 tonneaux de 200 l., en constituent la base. 150 tonneaux de 50 l., ou 80 tonneaux de 200 l. sont nécessaires à l'édification du Mur.

Ce "rideau de fer" peut s'utiliser comme barrage durant une période de travaux publics, ou servir à transformer définitivement une rue en impasse. Enfin son principe peut s'étendre à tout un quartier, voir à une cité entière.

CHRISTO
Paris, Octobre 1961

*Project for a Temporary Wall of Oil Barrels,
Rue Visconti, Paris*

Collage, 1961

Two photographs and a typewritten text,
24 x 40.5 cm (9½ x 16 in.)

"Rue Visconti is a one-way street, between Rue Bonaparte and Rue de Seine, 140 meters long and with an average width of 3 meters. The street ends at number 25 on the left side and at 26 on the right. It has few shops: a bookstore, a modern art gallery, an antiques shop, an electrical supplies shop and a grocery store. At the corner of Rue Visconti and Rue de Seine, the Cabaret du Petit More (or Maure) was opened in 1618. The poet Saint-Amant, an assiduous customer, died there. The art gallery that now stands on the site of the tavern has fortunately retained the façade and the seventeenth-century sign, as described on page 134 of *Rocheguide/Clébert: Promenades dans les rues de Paris, Rive Gauche*, Editions Denoël. The Wall will be built between numbers 1 and 2, completely closing the street to traffic, and will cut all communication between Rue Bonaparte and Rue de Seine. [...] This Iron Curtain can be used as a barricade during a period of public work in the street, or to transform the street into a dead end. Finally, its principle can be extended to a whole area or an entire city.

CHRISTO,
Paris, October 1961"

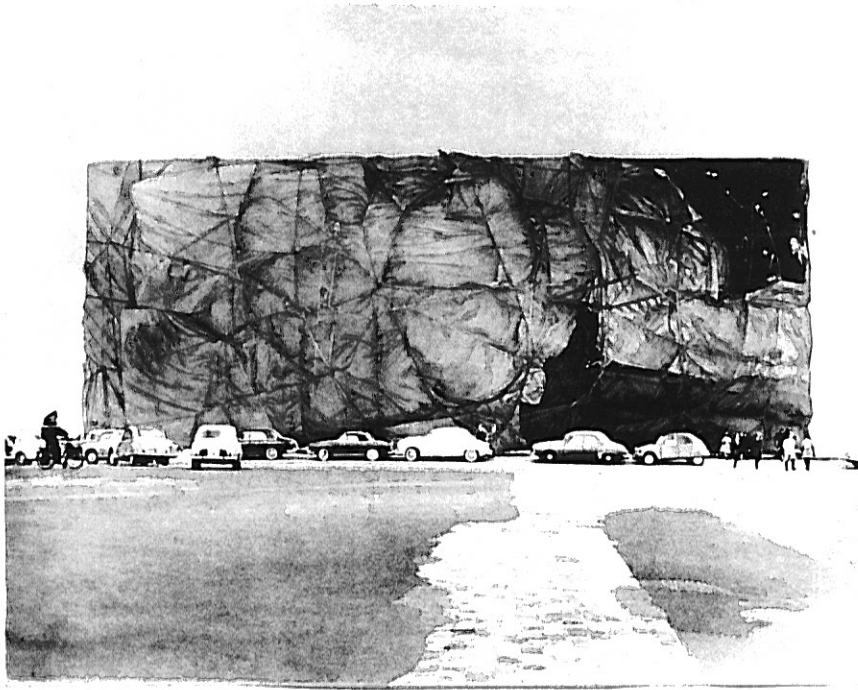
deed exhibited with the group at a much later date, in Nice (July – September 1981) and at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (May – September 1986). Although Christo has also exhibited with a variety of other groups, he is now widely considered to be one of the thirteen members of the *Nouveaux Réalistes* – erroneously, according to Christo and Jeanne-Claude.

In 1961, in Cologne, where Christo and Jeanne-Claude created their first outdoor barrels structure, Christo had his first personal exhibition at the Haro Lauhus Gallery. At that time, Cologne was already developing the lively art scene for which it is now known, and Christo met John Cage, Nam June Paik, and Mary Bauermeister there, as well as his first collector, industrialist Dieter Rosenkranz. The *Dockside Packages, 1961* (p. 20) and *Stacked Oil Barrels* were created in and for Cologne parallel to his exhibition. The former, on the Cologne riverfront, consisted of several heaps of cardboard barrels and industrial paper rolls covered with tarpaulins and secured with rope; the latter was precisely described by its title (the barrels lying on their sides, as he had previously done in Paris). Both works were made by simply rearranging material already available at Cologne's Rhine docks. It was the first collaboration of Christo and Jeanne-Claude.

David Bourdon remarked in his biography of Christo that the large assemblages of oil drums he erected along the Cologne waterfront were hardly distinguishable from the stockpiles that are found in harbors everywhere – but the artists had in fact composed their materials, and had used hoists, cranes, and tractors to arrange them as they required. This touches upon the very heart of what is sometimes seen as a minimalist element in the artistic approach of Christo and Jeanne-Claude. Traditionally, artists declare themselves free both in their selection from given reality and in their skill at handling their chosen

material; Christo and Jeanne-Claude, throughout their careers, have always challenged this conception, by their great readiness to accept what is given and subject it to little alteration.

1961 was also, of course, the year in which, on August 13, the Wall was built by East Berlin's Communist regime. A stateless man with no passport, himself a refugee from a Communist country, Christo was deeply affected and angered by



Project for a Wrapped Public Building, 1961
Collaged photographs by Harry Shunk and text
by Christo, 41.5 x 25 cm (16¼ x 10 in.)

PROJET D'UN EDIFICE PUBLIC EMPAQUETE

I. Notes générales:

Il s'agit d'un immeuble situé dans un emplacement vaste et régulier.
Un bâtiment ayant une base rectangulaire, sans aucune façade. Le bâtiment sera complètement fermé - c'est à dire empaqueté de tous les côtés. Les entrées seront souterraines, placées environ à 15 ou 20 mètres de cet édifice.
L'empaquetage de cet immeuble sera exécuté avec des bâches des toiles gommées et des toiles de matière plastique renforcée d'une largeur moyenne de 10 à 20 mètres, des cordes métalliques et ordinaires. Avec les cordes de métal nous pouvons obtenir les points, qui peuvent servir en suite à l'empaquetage de bâtiment. Les cordes métalliques évitent la construction d'un échafaudage. Pour obtenir le résultat nécessaire il faut environ 10000 mètres de bâches, 20000 mètres de cordes métalliques, 80000 mètres de cordes ordinaires.

Le présent projet pour un édifice public empaqueté est utilisable:

- I. Comme salle sportive - avec des piscines, le stade de football, le stade des disciplines olympiques, ou soit comme patinoire à glace ou à hockey.
- II. Comme salle de concert, planétarium, salle de conférence et essais expérimentaux.
- III. Comme un musée historique, d'art ancienne et d'art moderne.
- IV. Comme salle parlementaire ou un prison.

CHRISTO
octobre 1961, Paris

"I. General Notes:

The building is in a huge symmetrical site. A building with a rectangular base, without a facade. The building will be completely closed - that is, wrapped on all sides. Access will be underground, with entrances placed at 15 or 20 meters from the building. The wrapping of the building will be performed with sheets of tarpaulin and sheets of reinforced plastic of an average width of 10 to 20 meters, and with metal cables and ordinary ropes. With the cables we can obtain the points which can then be used to wrap the building. The cables make scaffolding unnecessary. To obtain the required result, some 10,000 meters of tarpaulin, 20,000 meters of cable and 80,000 meters of rope will be needed. This project for a wrapped public building can be used:

- I. As a sports hall with swimming pools, football stadium and Olympic stadium or as a skating or ice-hockey rink.
- II. As a concert hall, planetarium, conference hall or as an experimental testing site.
- III. As a historical museum, or as a museum of art ancient or modern.
- IV. As a parliamentary hall or as a prison.

CHRISTO,
October 1961, Paris"



Christo standing in front of *Dockside Packages*, Cologne Harbor, 1961

the East German move. On his return to Paris from Cologne, in October 1961, he began preparing his personal response to the building of the wall. This was the *Wall of Oil Barrels, Iron Curtain, 1961–62* (p. 14); Christo and Jeanne-Claude proposed to block Rue Visconti, a narrow one-way street on the Left Bank, with 240 oil barrels, and prepared a detailed description of the project (p. 18).

The preparation of written documentation, accompanied by photocollages and logistical analysis, has become ever more complex over the years as projects of Christo and Jeanne-Claude have become more demanding and ambitious, but the purposes served by these documents have remained essentially constant: to persuade the relevant authorities to give permission for a project to proceed, to publicize and define the nature of a project, and, as commentators have pointed out, to draw the critics' attention towards the examination of technical, social, or environmental data. In the case of the *Wall of Oil Barrels, Iron Curtain* project the document failed in its first purpose: permission was refused. (Years later, in New York, when Christo and Jeanne-Claude proposed to close 53rd Street with 441 barrels to mark the end of the Dada and Surrealism exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art on June 8, 1968, they were again out of luck: various city authorities refused to grant them the necessary permission.)

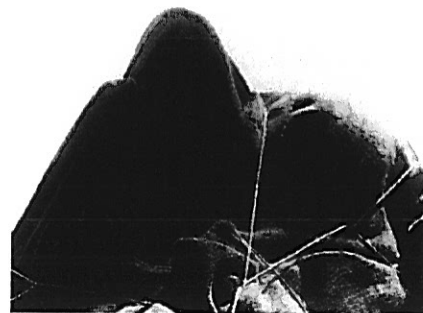
Undeterred, Christo and Jeanne-Claude went ahead with their *Wall of Oil Barrels, Iron Curtain* project without permission. For eight hours on June 27, 1962, they blocked the Rue Visconti – at various times the home of Racine, Delacroix, and Balzac – with 240 oil drums. Christo carried every one himself; the armies of helpers, both professional and unskilled, who were to become so

familiar a feature of the spectacular art projects in later years were conspicuous by their absence on this occasion. The barricade, measuring 4.3 by 3.8 by 1.7 meters (13.7 x 13.2 x 2.7 feet), obstructed the traffic as predicted. The oil barrels were left in their found state, in their industrial colors, complete with brand names and rust.

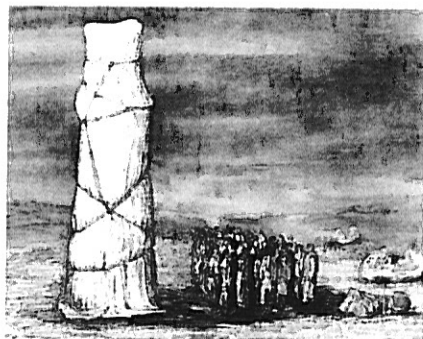
Christo and Jeanne-Claude were inevitably summoned to the police station to answer for the obstruction, but no case was ever pursued. Whether the barricade was understood by casual passers-by to refer to the Berlin Wall is a debatable point; at that time there were frequent demonstrations in Paris in protest against the Algerian war, and permission may even have been refused because officials mistook the project for a protest on that issue. But Christo and Jeanne-Claude had made a breakthrough nonetheless in terms of public art, by using a street, oil barrels, and even the presence of people in the street – given features never previously considered admissible in art – to create a temporary work. Crucial to the post-modern approach of Christo and Jeanne-Claude to art has always been this emphasis on the temporary.

Christo's ambition extended to large-scale projects at a very early date. In 1961 he made his first study for a *Wrapped Public Building* (p. 19), collaging photographs and preparing a written account: "The building is in a huge symmetrical site. A building with a rectangular base, without a façade. The building will be completely closed – that is, wrapped on all sides. Access will be underground, with entrances placed at 15 or 20 meters from the building. The wrapping of the building will be performed with sheets of tarpaulin and sheets of reinforced plastic of an average width of 10 to 20 meters, and with metal cables and ordinary ropes."

Soon Christo was making his first proposals to wrap specific public buildings – the Ecole Militaire in Paris, and the Arc de Triomphe – but none of these projects was ever realized. The wrapping of the Ecole Militaire was to involve covering the building with tarpaulins, using steel cables and strong manila rope. (The steel cables would obviate the need for scaffolding.) The wrapping (Christo explained in his project description) could be used as protection during maintenance work such as repair or cleaning of walls; for a parliament or a jail; or as package scaffolding if the building were ever to be demolished. The wariness of the authorities in the face of such proposals was plainly connected with an inability to decide how seriously to take the artist.

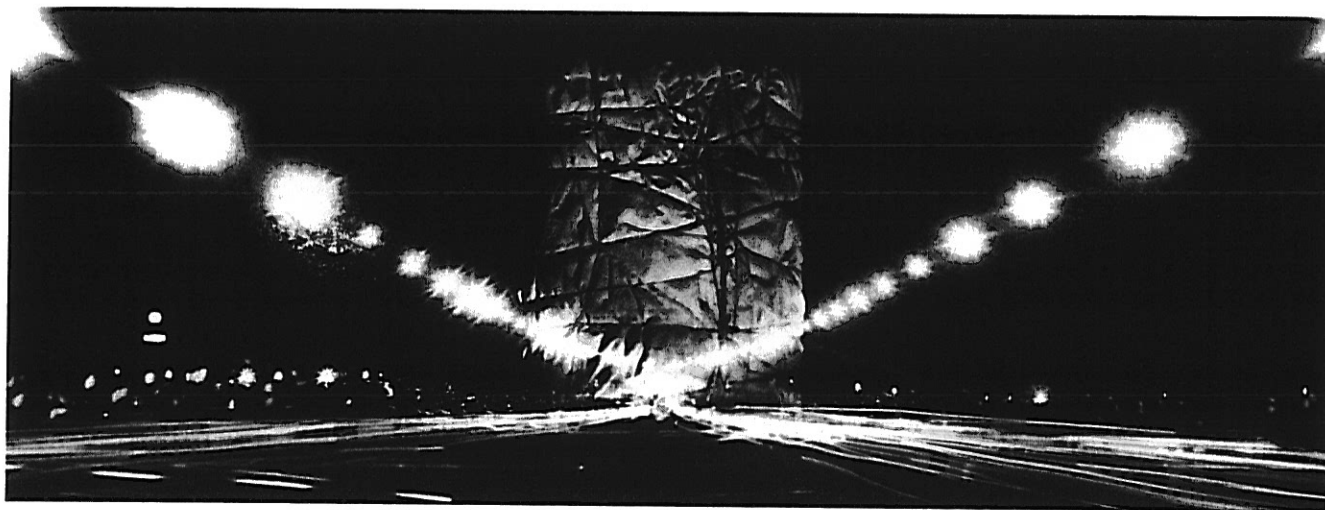


Man Ray
The Enigma of Isidore Ducasse, 1920
Photograph
Paris, Collection Lucien Treillard



Henry Moore
Crowd Looking at a Tied-up Object, 1942
Chalk, wax crayon, watercolor, pen and ink
on paper, 43.2 x 55.9 cm (17 x 22 in.)
Collection The Late Lord Clark of Saltwood.
Courtesy The Henry Moore Foundation

Wrapped Building, Project, 1963
Photomontage (detail)



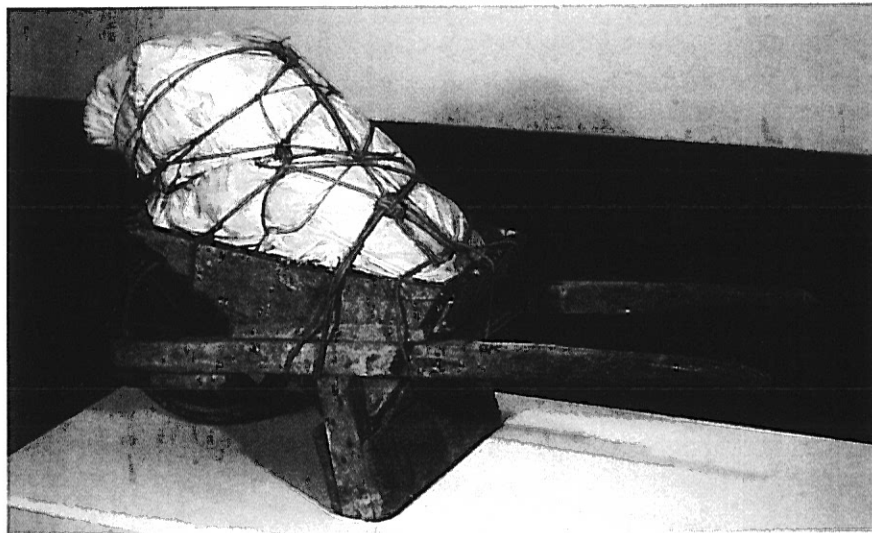
Package on Wheelbarrow, 1963

Cloth, wood, rope, metal and wooden wheelbarrow, 89 x 152.5 x 58.5 cm (35 x 60 x 23 in.)
New York, The Museum of Modern Art

PAGE 23

Package on a Table, 1961

Wood, fabric and ropes, 124 x 61.5 x 30 cm (48¾ x 24¼ x 11¾ in.)
Künzelsau, Museum Würth



There are few precedents for Christo's interest in wrapping. Henry Moore's drawing *Crowd Looking at a Tied-up Object* (1942, p. 21) and Man Ray's photograph *The Enigma of Isidore Ducasse* (1920, p. 21), showing a wrapped sewing machine, have been suggested as influences, but Christo replies that he did not discover these works until later in his career, after he had begun wrapping.

The issue scarcely seems pressing: even if we accept an affinity between aspects of Christo's work and the two earlier pieces, Christo has in any case long since moved beyond his legendary status in the press as "King of the Wrap," and many of the important later projects by Christo and Jeanne-Claude – the *Valley Curtain, Rifle, Colorado, 1970–72* (p. 38) or *Running Fence, 1972–76* (p. 49), the *Surrounded Islands, 1980–83* (p. 54) or *The Umbrellas, Japan – USA, 1984–91* (p. 70, 71) or *The Gates, Central Park, New York City, 1979–2005* (p. 84) – merely retain the interest in using fabric.

In *Over The River* (p. 90, 91), a work in progress, the emphasis is not on wrapping but on enhancement, on the creation of new shapes and images using the natural environment together with effects of fabric, motion, and light.

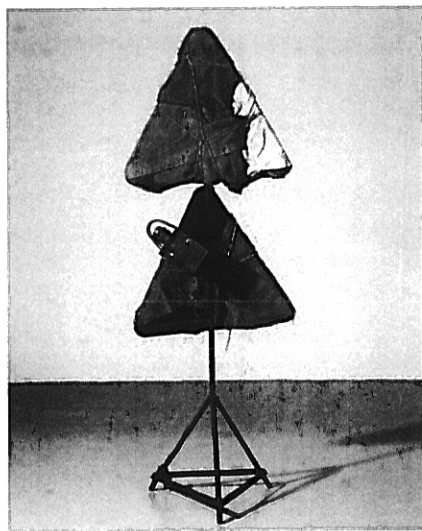
The esthetic of Christo and Jeanne-Claude, as told to the present writer, is a distinctive one: "Traditional sculpture creates its own space. We take a space not belonging to sculpture, and make sculpture out of it. It's similar to what Claude Monet did with the cathedral at Rouen. Claude Monet was not saying that the Gothic cathedral was good or bad, but he could see the cathedral in blue, yellow and purple."

In evolving this esthetic, Christo and Jeanne-Claude have invested immense resources of energy, resources directed (as we have seen) at locating their genuine selves. Much of this energy has to do with their displaced status; it is no accident that they have made their home in the great melting-pot New York. "In 1964," Christo told *Balkan Magazine*, "I already knew I had to go to America because over there things were already evolving. As early as 1962 in Paris, the famous art dealer Leo Castelli told me my place was in New York." As they kept moving, Christo and Jeanne-Claude were forever seeking, and forever finding.

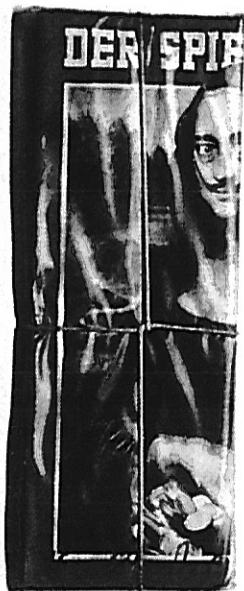
And what they found, above all else, was a means of creation that satisfied the wise dictum of G. K. Chesterton: "Every work of art has one indispensable mark:

Wrapped Road Signs, 1963

Wooden road signs, steel stand, lantern, chain, fabric, rope and jute, 181 x 62.5 x 47 cm (71¼ x 24½ x 18½ in.)
Künzelsau, Museum Würth







Der Spiegel Magazine Wrapped, 1963
Magazine, polyethylene and rope,
30 x 13 x 2.5 cm (11¼ x 5 x 1 in.)

the center of it is simple, however much the fulfillment may be complicated.” Critics well or ill disposed whose concern is with the logistics of the art by Christo and Jeanne-Claude would do well to bear this in mind.

Esthetically speaking, one other issue needs addressing, since Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s reliance on the beauties of a creation with no meanings beyond the thing itself implies an indifference to conceptions that see art as having a role (social, political, moral, or philosophical) beyond itself. Or, to put it differently: if Christo and Jeanne-Claude are content for the artwork to “be” rather than to “mean,” does that not place them in the art-for-art’s-sake camp? The notion of art for art’s sake, originated by the French writer Victor Cousin (1792–1867), has fallen into disrepute in recent decades, since it implies a narcissistic disdain for life as it is lived and experienced by most people.

The doctrine is associated with the priestly caste of artists, writers, and thinkers of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (such as Mallarmé or Nietzsche, Gustave Moreau or Stefan George) who held themselves aloof from common life and tended to have right-wing political ideas that in some cases (Ezra Pound) did not even stop short of fascism. If it is correct to see Christo and Jeanne-Claude as sharing some of the art-for-art’s-sake convictions, it is also important to point out that their brand of populism always insists on the pleasure of ordinary people, rather than excluding them: the implications of art for art’s sake are complex, and we should beware of suggesting that Christo and Jeanne-Claude endorse any of them except the love of beauty in the artwork, regardless of social, moral, or other affiliations.

PAGE 25

Wrapped Portrait of Jeanne-Claude, 1963
Oil painting wrapped in polyethylene and rope,
75 x 55 x 4 cm (29½ x 21¼ x 1½ in.)

