

*Uristo and Jeanne-Claude*  
EPHEMERAL NATURE





# CHRISTO AND JEANNE-CLAUDE

EPHEMERAL NATURE

ASPEN, CO

## Introduction

Synthesizing the grandeur of Christo and Jeanne-Claude's vision is a daunting task at best. Therefore, when contemplating this exhibition our team set out to identify the narrative that best linked to the ethos of our gallery. What emerged was a story about bold visionaries, public personas, and a behind-the-scenes look at two artists whose intimacy and trust fueled a body of work that forever changed the way we perceive the world around us.

My personal connection to this narrative began roughly twenty years ago when I first met Scott Hodes, Christo and Jeanne-Claude's legal collaborator. *The Gates* was gaining international attention at the time and was finally coming to fruition after more than two decades of development and negotiation. At that first meeting, Scott slipped me a small swatch of *The Gates* fabric and I was hooked.

I had long been a fan of Christo and Jeanne-Claude and, as a young art dealer, looked forward to the day I would be able to place their work into important collections and own pieces myself.

Knowing Scott and learning more about the mechanics of their process, I had become fascinated with the intersection of art, politics and the myriad legal wranglings around bringing these works to life. The idea that three disparate disciplines, many times diametrically opposed in force, could come together as a single artistic expression stands as one of the great visions of the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

As I looked deeper, the ephemeral nature of their work emerged as yet another fascinating layer to the process. Many projects would incubate for decades, and upon final execution, last only a brief moment. These projects would alter the way we see the world around us and do so in a more purposeful way thanks to their fleeting time frame.



Christo and project director Jan van der Marck (both right of desk) announce the Valley Curtain project from the State Capitol  
Denver, February 1971

Photo: Shunk-Kender © 1971 Christo and Jeanne-Claude Foundation and J. Paul Getty Trust



Christo and Jeanne-Claude  
Valley Curtain, Rifle, Colorado, 1970-72

Photo: Harry Shunk  
© 1972 Christo and Jeanne-Claude Foundation and J. Paul Getty Trust

The ephemeral nature of their practice meant that these projects would only live on in the minds of those who saw them, and that they would gain momentum and reverence as time passed. “I was there” became a proud badge of honor for those who would go on to tell the stories of visiting these installations or, in many cases, volunteering with the hundreds of others needed to pull them off.

The resulting body of work became legendary in its scope and in its pioneering vision. It is one of the few artistic legacies that captivated not only the insider, die-hard fans of conceptual art, but the general public at large. Christo and Jeanne-Claude had become pop-stars at the broadest level while remaining true to their highly conceptual roots. Very few artists have ever successfully navigated that terrain.

Furthermore, very few had ever realized a vision at this level. Many times I imagined Christo alone at his drawing table, creating the beautifully executed drawing collages that would begin to iterate a project. Like a young boy captivated by a dream, I imagined him furiously, yet methodically, rendering his ideas. These works were the first impulse of the artist, the moment when the dream was transitioning to reality. As they progressed for each project, he would tirelessly refine them and begin to merge the mechanical necessities with the creative vision. These works became a unique study in left-brain, right-brain harmony, all the while standing as an inspiring reminder that dreams can in fact become actualized.

However, bringing a dream to fruition is a tricky mix of clear vision and hard-hitting execution. Without the right talent at hand, many dreams languish in the eternal world of the unrealized. The magic of Christo and Jeanne-Claude rests in their partnership, both romantic and professional. With Christo as dreamer and Jeanne-Claude as the driving force

behind the execution, they were able to cover the spectrum of talent needed to realize such grand ideas. As romantic partners, their support of each other's roles and reverence for each other's talents allowed for a five-decade long marriage.

As such, this exhibition highlights some of the most intimate aspects of their work, both in drawings and collages from their own personal collection as well as wrapped objects. Most of the works in this show have never seen the light of day outside of the couple's collection and this presentation marks the first time a selection of their most intimate objects have been made available for acquisition.



### The Wrapped Objects

Perhaps the work that allows us the most unfettered, behind-the-scenes access to their personal relationship is *Wrapped Roses for J-C*. This rare object not only captures the romantic gesture of a man gifting flowers to his wife, it also appears as a thank you to Jeanne-Claude for her tireless efforts in making Christo's vision a reality. Christo made this work in 1993 and it remained in their private residence from the moment he gifted it to Jeanne-Claude that same year. Our exhibition marks the first time it has ever been exhibited. In the arc of their career, no object may be more indicative of their partnership both personally and professionally and, as such, *Wrapped Roses for Jeanne-Claude* takes its place as one of the most historic items in their entire canon of work.

The other objects curated for the exhibition speak further to the world in which the artists operated. Having relocated to New York from Europe in 1964, the couple eventually set up their home and studio in a Soho walk-up that remains to this day.

New York had firmly established itself as the art world's international center by the 1960s when Christo made 1964's *Wrapped Magazines*, the genesis of which allows us a view into that robust moment. At that time, New York's famed Chelsea Hotel hosted The Artists' Key Club, an event organized by the artist Arman whereby participants would pay a \$10 entry fee and receive a locker key in return. These keys opened lockers in nearby Penn Station, some of which contained artwork by the day's most renowned artists including Christo, William Copley, Arman, Niki de Saint-Phalle, Alberto Greco, Allan Kaprow, Roy Lichtenstein, and Andy Warhol. Odds to win an artwork were 1 in 2.

A friend of the conceptual artist Allan Kaprow received a key, and upon opening his locker found Christo's *Wrapped Magazines* inside. Kaprow's friend couldn't quite understand the meaning behind the piece so it ended up in Kaprow's possession. Christo eventually learned that Kaprow had the work and repeatedly attempted to buy it back. Kaprow finally relented, but before relinquishing the piece he signed it, appropriating the object into his own conceptual art practice. The work now bears signatures from two of the most innovative conceptual artists at work during that time.

(Note, Kaprow would later go on to stage one of his famous "happenings" at the top of Aspen Highlands in 1971, one year before Christo's *Valley Curtain* in Colorado).

Further examination reveals another hallmark trait of Christo's wrapped magazine works. Like others in the series, Christo would often change the cover to a more provocative image that would help transform the object from the everyday to something more alluring. However, this object stands apart from other wrapped magazine works he made at the time. Here he draped the magazine over a mysteriously wrapped package, adding significant volume and dimensional weight to the object. The sculpture became more powerful and mysterious as a result and stands as one of the most important examples of his domestic work at that time, pulling together the idea of a wrapped package and a wrapped magazine into one artwork.

Fifty years later another encounter with a prominent New York artist would lead to a wrapped object reminiscent of his earlier work but charged with a new sense of energy. Christo and Maya Lin (the contemporary architect, designer and sculptor) had been close friends for years. Over dinner one night,







Maya's eldest daughter told Christo about her school's fundraising exhibition featuring artworks made from pairs of Charlotte Olympia shoes. She asked if Christo would be interested in contributing a work for the event. Christies was conducting the event and as such, Christo assumed the fundraiser would be filled with other important artists' work. He agreed and created *Wrapped Women Shoes*.

The designer Charlotte Olympia Dellal had become known for her irreverent designs and the pair Christo wrapped were large, white leather pumps emblazoned with gold. Unlike his earlier objects that were entirely wrapped in opaque fabric, Christo left portions of the shoes exposed, almost as if to highlight the charged nature of the object. The taming of these shoes, wrapped tightly in Christo's signature style, offered an unexpected juxtaposition as they were at once contained, while at the same time poised to break free from their wrapping.



Upon arrival to the fundraiser it became clear to Christo that the event was not as he had imagined. The room was filled mostly with artwork created by students rather than work from Christo's peers. He politely placed his work into the exhibition and, upon conclusion, asked for its return. The object remained in his personal collection until this exhibition.

Top Image: Christo in his Paris studio, circa 1960.  
Photo: Scott Hyde © Christo and Jeanne-Claude Foundation









Below: Christo and Jeanne-Claude with preparatory works for Valley Curtain and an early Mastaba model, New York City, 1972



## The Drawings and Collages

In addition to the wrapped objects, this exhibition covers a range of Christo and Jeanne-Claude's most important land-art installations. Hexton Gallery has a particular interest in environmentally oriented work and, as such, we identified projects that dramatically altered the way in which we see the landscape around us.

Our exhibition opens with 1972's *Valley Curtain (Project for Colorado)* which celebrates its 50th Anniversary this year and may be the best example of the ephemeral nature we endeavored to highlight in this show. *Valley Curtain* was the shortest project in Christo and Jeanne-Claude's history, lasting just 28 hours. Wind speeds at the project site reached a critical level within the first two days of the curtain's unveiling, triggering the break-away seam that had been engineered to safely release the curtain so it wouldn't dangerously pull away from the valley walls.

What many don't realize is that this project had been originally considered in a number of locations around Colorado prior to settling on Rifle Gap. Our hometown of Aspen was one of the original locations identified and this exhibition features two drawing collages depicting the Aspen site. These rare works have been pulled directly from Christo and Jeanne-Claude's private collection, which reveals another critical aspect of this show: most works on display have never been exhibited and remained in their personal collection since the day they were created. Having access to such historic work, in pristine condition and with such clear provenance, is a rare and exciting privilege for me as an art dealer and you as collector.

We have also curated works from such seminal projects as *Running Fence*, *The Umbrellas*, *Surrounded Islands*, *The Gates*, *Over The River* (also conceived for Colorado), and *Floating Piers*.



Our exhibition concludes with a look toward the future and the largest land-art project ever conceived by Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *The Mastaba (Project for Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates)*. In this large-scale drawing we see the true grandeur of their vision. 410,000 oil barrels stacked upon each other will form a Mastaba in the middle of the desert 100 miles south of Abu Dhabi. It will be the largest contemporary sculpture (in volume) in the world - this from the artists who dared to dream big and were brave enough to devote their entire lives to making such dreams a reality.

And therein lies the essence of my relationship to these works and these ground-breaking artists. In the end, their work stands as a powerful reminder of the romantic desire to dream, the importance of supporting each other in such pursuits, and ultimately how shedding new light on the world can transform our relationship to the environment around us.

My hope is that this exhibition inspires you in the same way Christo and Jeanne-Claude have inspired me, and thousands of others across the world, for so many years.

All the best,

Bob Chase  
Founder, Hexton Gallery  
July 29, 2022

Christo and Jeanne-Claude during the life-size test for *Over The River* Colorado, 1999

Photo: Wolfgang Volz © 1999 Christo and Jeanne-Claude Foundation



Installation of Valley Curtain, Rifle, 1972

Photo: Shunk-Kender

© 1972 Christo and Jeanne-Claude Foundation and J. Paul Getty Trust







Christo  
*Valley Curtain (Project for Aspen, Colorado)*, 1970  
Pencil, fabric, photostat and charcoal  
28 x 22 inches

Private Collection of the Artist

Provenance:  
Beyeler Gallery, Basel 1970-1985

Exhibitions:  
1985 James Goodman Gallery, New York.

Publications:  
Jacobson, Karen and Sobel, Dean. *One Hour Ahead: The Avant-Garde in Aspen, 1945-2004*. Aspen Art Museum 2004 (p. 72).

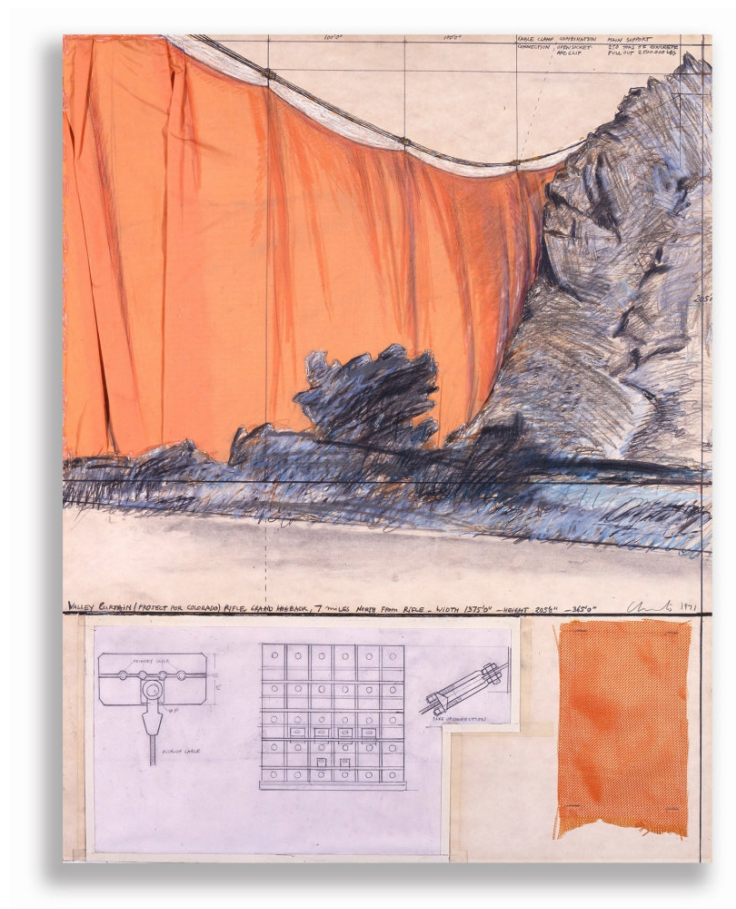


Christo  
*Valley Curtain (Project for Aspen, Colorado)*, 1970  
Pencil, fabric, colored pencil, staples and charcoal  
28 x 22 inches

Private Collection of the Artist

Publications:  
*Christo: Valley Curtain*, 1973. Harry N. Abrams Publications, New York, USA.





Christo  
*Valley Curtain (Project for Colorado)*, 1971  
 Pencil, fabric, wax crayon, hand-drawn technical data,  
 fabric sample, tape and staples  
 28 x 22 inches

Private Collection of the Artist

Exhibitions:

1 Oct 2015 - 31 March 2016. 40th Anniversary Exhibition, Hal Bromm Gallery, New York.

Publications:

*Christo and Jeanne-Claude*: 75, 2010. Köln, Germany: TASCHEN (p. 402).  
*Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, Updated Edition, 2019. Germany: TASCHEN (p. 344).



Christo  
*Valley Curtain (Project for Colorado)*, 1972  
 Fabric, staples, paint, wax crayon, pencil and ball point pen  
 28 x 22 inches

Private Collection of the Artist

Publications:  
*Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, 2006, Skira, Milan, Italy for the Museo d'Arte Moderna,  
 Lugano, Switzerland (p. 126).



Christo and Jeanne-Claude looking for a possible site for The Mastaba  
United Arab Emirates, February 1982

Photo: Wolfgang Volz  
© 1982 Christo and Jeanne-Claude Foundation



**HEXTON**  
modern | contemporary

[aspen@hextongallery.com](mailto:aspen@hextongallery.com) 970.925.1616