

EDUCATION NOTES
INVESTIGATING ARTWORKS IN THE GALLERY
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ART
GALLERY
NSW

40 YEARS
KALDOR PUBLIC
ART PROJECTS

1969/1990 CHRISTO AND JEANNE-CLAUDE



1969/1990 CHRISTO AND JEANNE-CLAUDE

PROJECT 1969

Wrapped Coast

28 October – 14 December 1969
Little Bay, Sydney

Drawings and Collages

22 October – 8 November 1969
Central Street Gallery, Sydney

Wool Works

1–30 November 1969
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

To understand our work one must realize what is inherent to each project. However there is an important difference between our works of art and the usual architecture and urban planning, we are our own sponsors and we pay for our works of art with our own money...

Christo and Jeanne-Claude quoted in *Christo and Jeanne-Claude Gasometer, Oberhausen 1999*, Taschen, New York 1999

PROJECT 1990

Wrapped Vestibule

Christo

12 September – 25 November 1990
Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney

Christo

2 March – 14 April 1991
Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth

CHRISTO AND JEANNE-CLAUDE

**Wrapped Coast – One Million Square Feet,
Little Bay, Sydney, Australia, 1968–69**

90 000 square metres of erosion control
fabric and 56.3 kilometres of rope

Photo: Harry Shunk
Courtesy Kaldor Public Art Projects



CHRISTO AND JEANNE-CLAUDE

Wrapped Vestibule 1990, shrouding the columns, busts, seat and floor of the Art Gallery of NSW entrance vestibule with fabric and rope

Photo: Wolfgang Volz
Courtesy the Art Gallery of New South Wales



1969/1990 CHRISTO AND JEANNE-CLAUDE

INTRODUCTION

Husband-and-wife team Christo and Jeanne-Claude are widely known for their public art projects. Since 1961, they have proposed ambitious alterations of public places. Their temporary large-scale environmental works (in both urban and rural settings) have elements of painting, sculpture, architecture and urban planning. In some of their most famous works, they have wrapped buildings and landscapes in fabric, securing the wrappings with rope. The artists often face some initial public and bureaucratic resistance, but they build a constituency of supporters, including collectors who help finance a project by buying Christo's preparatory drawings and collages.

ARTIST

Christo Javacheff

born 13 June 1935 in Gabrovo, Bulgaria
lives and works in New York, USA

Jeanne-Claude de Guillebon

born 13 June 1935 in Casablanca, Morocco
lives and works in New York, USA

Christo and Jeanne-Claude are a married couple who create environmental installation art. They were born on the same date – 13 June 1935. Christo was born Christo Vladimirov Javacheff in Gabrovo, Bulgaria to an industrial family. His father, Vladimir Yavachev, was a scientist, and his mother, Tsveta Dimitrova, born in Macedonia, was the secretary at the Academy of Fine Arts in Sofia. Jeanne-Claude was born Jeanne-Claude Denat de Guillebon in Casablanca, Morocco, where her French military father was stationed.

Christo and Jeanne-Claude met in Paris in October 1958, when he was commissioned to paint a portrait of her mother, Précilda de Guillebon. Jeanne-Claude's parents were displeased with the relationship, particularly because of Christo's refugee status, and temporarily estranged themselves from their daughter. The couple have a son, Cyril, born in 1960. In 1964, they moved to New York, where they continue to live and work.

How did it all start? Christo exhibited his first series of packaged objects in 1958. In 1962, the couple tackled their first project created in a public space, *Iron Curtain – Wall of Oil Barrels, Rue Visconti, Paris 1961–62*. As a statement against the Berlin Wall, they blocked off a small street near the River Seine with oil barrels. This was done without consent of authorities, with Jeanne-Claude stalling approaching police, convincing them to allow the piece to stand for a few hours. Although he was simultaneously holding his first exhibition at a gallery, it was the Visconti project that made Christo known in Paris.

Wrapped Coast – One Million Square Feet, Little Bay, Sydney, Australia, 1968–69 was their first landscape work and, at that time, the largest single artwork that had ever been made. Since then, their works have included wrapping the Reichstag in Berlin (1971–95) and the Pont Neuf in Paris (1975–85); creating a

'curtain' that ran more than 39 kilometres (24 miles) across two California counties (1972–76); installing 1340 blue umbrellas in Japan and 1760 yellow ones in the USA (1984–91); and, most recently, realising *The Gates, Central Park, New York City, 1979–2005*.

PROJECT: 1969

In 1968, John Kaldor, then a young textile designer, met Christo and Jeanne-Claude in New York, and bought a small *Package* (he had seen their work in a *documenta 4* catalogue). While working for Universal Textiles in Australia, Kaldor had initiated the Alcorso-Sekers Travelling Scholarship, supporting travel and professional development for Australian artists. He requested permission for the scholarship to be used to bring an international artist to Australia and, subsequently, Christo and Jeanne-Claude were invited to visit to give a lecture. Instead, they proposed the concept for *Wrapped Coast*.

Little Bay, property of Prince Henry Hospital, is located 14.5 kilometres (9 miles), southeast of the centre of Sydney. The cliff-lined shore area that was wrapped is approximately 2.4 kilometres (1.5 miles) long, 46 to 244 metres (150 to 800 feet) wide, 26 metres (85 feet) high at the northern cliffs, and is at sea level at the southern sandy beach. One million square feet (90 000 square metres) of erosion-control fabric (a synthetic, woven fibre usually manufactured for agricultural purposes) was used for the wrapping, along with 56.3 kilometres (35 miles) of polypropylene rope, 3.8 centimetres (1.5 inches) in diameter. Ramset guns fired 25 000 charges of fasteners, threaded studs and clips to secure the rope to the rocks. Ninian Melville, a retired major in the Army Corps of Engineers, was in charge of the workers at the site. Over four weeks, it took more than 100 workers (including 15 professional mountain climbers) and 11 volunteers (architecture and art students from the University of Sydney and East Sydney Technical College) in excess of 17 000 hours to complete the work. Opened on 28 October 1969, many thousands of visitors travelled to the coastline to see the project during the weeks the coast was wrapped.

To raise funds for the project, an exhibition was held at Sydney's Central Street Gallery, which included Christo's preparatory drawings, photographs by Harry Shunk of *Wrapped Coast* in progress, and a work entitled *Wrapped Hay*, comprising hay bales packaged in black plastic.

In addition, *Wool Works* was created at the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne in November 1969, with wool bales arranged in the gallery and in its Murdoch Court.

PROJECT: 1990

When the exhibition *Christo* was shown in Australia in 1990, as part of their second Kaldor project, it was the largest retrospective exhibition of Christo and Jeanne-Claude's works to date and the first locally curated survey exhibition of a contemporary international artist in Australia. It opened at

The texture and colour of the sand was strangely intensified, and the wind, by swelling and rippling the fabric, introduced movement and became an important adjunct in informing the wrapped coast with a breath of primeval life.

Alan McCulloch, 'Letter from Australia', *Art International*, January 1970, p 71

the Art Gallery of NSW in Sydney and travelled to the Art Gallery of Western Australia in Perth.

A new work, *Wrapped Vestibule*, was also created for the exhibition in Sydney, with the columns, busts, floor and seat in the Art Gallery of NSW's entrance vestibule shrouded in cloth.

WORLD EVENTS: 1969

- _ Woodstock three-day music festival held in the US
- _ Neil Armstrong becomes first man to walk on the moon
- _ Millions march in Vietnam moratorium protests in the US
- _ Monty Python's *Flying Circus* series debuts on UK TV
- _ *Sesame Street* series debuts on US TV
- _ Gilbert & George first present *The Singing Sculpture* in London
- _ First issue of *Art-Language: The Journal of Conceptual Art* published
- _ Sol LeWitt publishes the essay 'Sentences on conceptual art'
- _ Joseph Kosuth publishes the essay 'Art after philosophy'
- _ Harald Szeemann's first exhibition of conceptual art in Europe, *Live in your head: when attitudes become form*, opens at the Kunsthalle, Bern
- _ **1st Kaldor project:** Christo and Jeanne-Claude create *Wrapped Coast* at Little Bay in Sydney and *Wool Works* at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, while an exhibition of Christo's drawings and collages is held at Central Street Gallery

WORLD EVENTS: 1990

- _ Hubble Space Telescope launched
- _ Gulf War begins following Iraqi invasion of Kuwait
- _ East and West Germany reunify
- _ Nelson Mandela freed after 27 years as a political prisoner in South Africa
- _ Michael Crichton publishes the novel *Jurassic Park*
- _ Tim Berners-Lee submits his proposal for the World Wide Web
- _ Smoking on US domestic flights banned
- _ The Three Tenors perform during World Cup soccer finals
- _ Andreas Gursky starts taking his stockmarket-themed photographs
- _ *High and low: modern art and popular culture* exhibition held at the Museum of Modern Art, New York
- _ *Art et publicité 1890-1990* exhibition at Centre Pompidou, Paris
- _ Biennale of Sydney, *The readymade boomerang*, artistic director René Block
- _ **9th Kaldor project:** Christo and Jeanne-Claude create *Wrapped Vestibule* at the Art Gallery of NSW, which is presented with a survey exhibition *Christo* at the Gallery and at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

THEME

Photo-documentation

One interesting aspect of Christo's work is that he pays for these commercially valueless projects by making very beautiful drawings and prints to be sold via galleries as handmade objects, thus using the dealer system against itself

Adrian Henri, *Total Art*, Praeger, New York 1974, p 163

The problem with making work outside the gallery system – like Christo and Jeanne-Claude's *Wrapped Coast* – is that it is, in many instances, ephemeral and/or inaccessible. Thus most land and environmental artists of the late 1960s and '70s used photography to document their work. Earthwork artists such as Robert Smithson, Dennis Oppenheim and Michael Heizer installed their works in despoiled industrial sites or uninhabited corners of the world, creating pieces that were largely dependent on photography as witness to their existence. Smithson's famous *Spiral Jetty* 1970 is one example – a sculpture, some 500 metres or 1500 feet in length, made of mud, salt crystals and basalt rock that coiled counter-clockwise over the Great Salt Lake in Utah, USA.

Photo-documentation in 'post-object' art movements such as happenings, performance and land art arose before, or at the same time as, conceptual art. This explosion of out-of-gallery modes of expression was fundamentally political. It grew out of dissatisfaction with the mainstream idea of art as a commodity. Ironically, photo-documentation provided a means by which these radical forms could find their way back into museums.

The documentation of performances – mostly through photography and film – also raised questions about whether this process betrays the original 'unmediated' encounter between the performer and audience, turning the unique time-space of the event and its tangible, physical 'presence' into another commodity. Can the documentation of Christo's *Wrapped Coast* – or any such one-time-only artwork – be seen as an equal to the 'real thing'? Where today does the work exist if not in the photographic and filmic representation? Does it only exist in the historical memory of the participants and viewers at the time?

The effect of seeing their work, in the society of the spectacle, is to create a sense of collective intimacy, like being in a theatre audience but outside, or like experiencing a blackout in your suburb without the inconvenience.

Peter Schjeldahl, 'Gated', *New Yorker*, 28 February 2005

COLLECTION CONNECTIONS

Relevant works in the Art Gallery of NSW collection

www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection

- **Christo** (Bulgaria; USA, b1935)

Packed Coast, project for Australia, near Sydney
from the project *Wrapped Coast – One Million Square Feet, Little Bay, Sydney, Australia* 1968–69

collage: gelatin silver photograph, colour offset print, tape, cloth, cotton thread, staples, charcoal, pencil, Perspex box; 72 x 56.7 x 4.5 cm (box)
Purchased 1970 WO1.1970

- **Ana Mendieta** (Cuba; USA, b1948, d1985)

Colour photograph documenting earth / body work with carved earth, carved clay bed, Iowa City 1976–78

type C photograph; 50.7 x 33.6 cm image
Mervyn Horton Bequest Fund 1997 349.1997.12

This work is from the series *Siluetta works in Iowa and Oaxaca Mexico*, in which Mendieta made templates from her body and used these to create impressions in the landscape. Sometimes they took on a ritual cast, as for example when she used fire or flowers to mark out her absent form.

- **Perejaume** (Spain, b1957)

Marc a l'encesa 1990

installation: two type C colour photographs, one burnt frame; dimensions variable
Mervyn Horton Bequest Fund 1993 315.1993.a-c

Catalan artist Perejaume's interdisciplinary art includes painting, sculpture, photography and installation. Landscape is located both from within and outside the gallery space; between what is inside and what is outside the frame. In this work, two gilt-framed photographs show a smouldering segment of gold frame. Between each photograph is a burnt section of the same gold frame shown in each photograph: a frame within a frame within a frame.

- **Callum Morton** (Canada; Australia, b1965)

Motormouth 2002

installation: polystyrene, wood, synthetic polymer paint, impact resistant polyurethane, acrylic, sound; dimensions variable
Contemporary Collection Benefactors 2002 305.2002

This installation-sculpture of two freeways, scaled 1:10, is perfect in detail down to the dirty realism of the distressed, water-stained concrete marked with graffiti. The work is part of Morton's ongoing consideration of the intersections between public and private space.

- **Imants Tillers** (Australia, b1950)

52 displacements (nos 25, 31, 37, 43, 50, 52) 1979–80

installation: gouache on canvas (six paintings), text (six framed panels); dimensions variable
Purchased 1980 16.1980.a-l

Tillers' use of a system – one painting each week for a year – recalls the system-based art of some conceptual artists. The gridded display of this work refers to the gridding used by conceptual artists in displaying photo-documentation work and the gridding of some minimal artists such as Carl Andre.

- **Dennis Oppenheim** (USA, b1938)

Rocked circle – fear 1971

gelatin silver and type C photographs
67.5 x 101.6 cm; 76 x 102 cm; 41.2 x 101.5 cm (sheet)
Gift of the Dennis Oppenheim Foundation 1996 239.1996.a-c

American artist Dennis Oppenheim uses the photograph as a tool to document a specific action carried out away from the confines of a studio or gallery space. As two-dimensional objects, his photographs represent four-dimensional artworks, with time as the fourth dimension. They act like mental 'hotlinks': understanding the concept is dependent on an extended description of the specific action.

SELECTED REFERENCES

- _ Jacob Baal-Teshuva, *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, Taschen Basic Art, Cologne 2001
- _ Burt Chernow, *Christo and Jeanne-Claude: a biography, epilogue* Wolfgang Volz, St Martin's Press, New York 2002
- _ Sophie Forbat (ed), *40 years: Kaldor Public Art Projects*, Kaldor Public Art Projects, Sydney 2009
- _ Jeffrey Kastner and Brian Wallis, *Land and environmental art*, Phaidon, London 1998
- _ Dieter Ronte, *Christo and Jeanne-Claude: international projects*, Philip Wilson Publishers, London 2005

Websites

- _ Christo and Jeanne-Claude
www.christojeanneclaude.net
- _ Kaldor Public Art Projects
www.kaldorartprojects.org.au
- _ Kaldor Public Art Projects Explorer, Art Gallery of NSW
www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/kaldor_projects

ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

Christo and Jeanne-Claude have worked as a team since the beginning of their art practice. Discuss the potential benefits and difficulties of a team approach to art-making. Collaboration is a consistent aspect of their work, not just together but also with others to realise their artworks. Outline and list the collaborations with other people, many of them not from the art world, that were necessary to realise *Wrapped Coast*. Examine the role of John Kaldor in initiating and facilitating the project. What personal and professional qualities enabled him to achieve this first in Australian art?

Consider the role and participation of the audience in this and other Christo and Jeanne-Claude artworks. Do you think the artists considered this during the material and conceptual development of their work? Citing one example from their body of work, debate the value of a Christo and Jeanne-Claude work from a formal (structural)/aesthetic perspective or an interactive/experiential one.

Compare *Wrapped Coast* to *Wrapped Vestibule*. Develop an inventory of the materials required for each project. While the means and materials to realise both projects may have been similar, the outcomes were very different. Look closely at images of both and propose the differing experiences for audiences. Consider the context and location in which each project was presented.

Examine the wrapping process Christo and Jeanne-Claude use for their work. While it seems simple, it is indeed a very complex one. Observe how, in some ways, the fabric suggests a canvas and the ropes suggest drawing or markmaking. Discuss how, even though the things the artists' wrap are no longer visible, their form and presence seem amplified. Propose why you think this phenomenon occurs. Consider the way artists, through their actions and processes, can make the ordinary seem extraordinary. Describe how this is the case with the work of Christo and Jeanne-Claude.

Evaluate *Wrapped Coast*. Propose how you would categorise it. In your opinion, is it landscape architecture, urban planning, an event or an artwork? Discuss what defines an artwork. Is there an accepted definition? Research critical and popular opinions of *Wrapped Coast* at the time it was presented in 1969. Outline the impact the work had at the time. How was it received and how did it stimulate and re-define in Australia what art might be?

Search the web for maps, satellite views and photographs of Little Bay, Sydney, New South Wales, which was the location for *Wrapped Coast*. Discuss why the location, scale, ambition and spectacle of this project worked so well in a city like Sydney.

Consider other Sydney locations that you might select for a project like Christo and Jeanne-Claude's today and present a brief on your selection and your rationale. View Christo and Jeanne-Claude's website and examine the development drawings and photographs they use for each project. Produce your own for your proposed project and present it to your class.

Discuss the role of photography in the work of Christo and Jeanne-Claude. Investigate their relationship with photographers Harry Shunk, who took the *Wrapped Coast* photographs, and Wolfgang Volz, who took the *Wrapped Vestibule* photographs. Would you classify the photographs as part of the artwork, part of the process or a record? Outline how Christo and Jeanne-Claude's art practice deliberately circumvents the traditional gallery system.

Today the artwork *Wrapped Coast* does not exist and yet it is as well known, if not more so, than when it was physically on site at Little Bay. As well as photographs, in what other ways does *Wrapped Coast* continue to be present for people? Consider the ephemeral nature of Christo and Jeanne-Claude's body of work. Discuss time as an element in the development, production and experience of their works.

Research the art movements of the 1970s known as post-object art, including performance, happenings, land art and conceptual art. Discuss why these art movements were labelled in this way and how they were a reaction and challenge to the commoditisation of the art world. Look at the work of key artists practising in these genres. Investigate how they examined this issue in different forms. Create a timeline of key works, including Christo's *Wrapped Coast* and *Wrapped Vestibule*. Discuss the evolution of each work and the possible influences of one on the other. Locate contemporary artists working today who have similar political interests and outline how they express these concerns through the production of their work.

Investigate how Christo and Jeanne-Claude fund their art projects. Discuss the contradiction of creating a major artwork deliberately outside the gallery system but funding it through sales in that system. In what way are Christo and Jeanne-Claude using the commercial gallery system against itself? Do you think they are being true to their principles or not by adopting this strategy?

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Cover: Christo (pictured) and Jeanne-Claude created the first Kaldor project *Wrapped Coast – One Million Square Feet, Little Bay, Sydney, Australia, 1968–69*. Photo: Harry Shunk
Courtesy Kaldor Public Art Projects

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