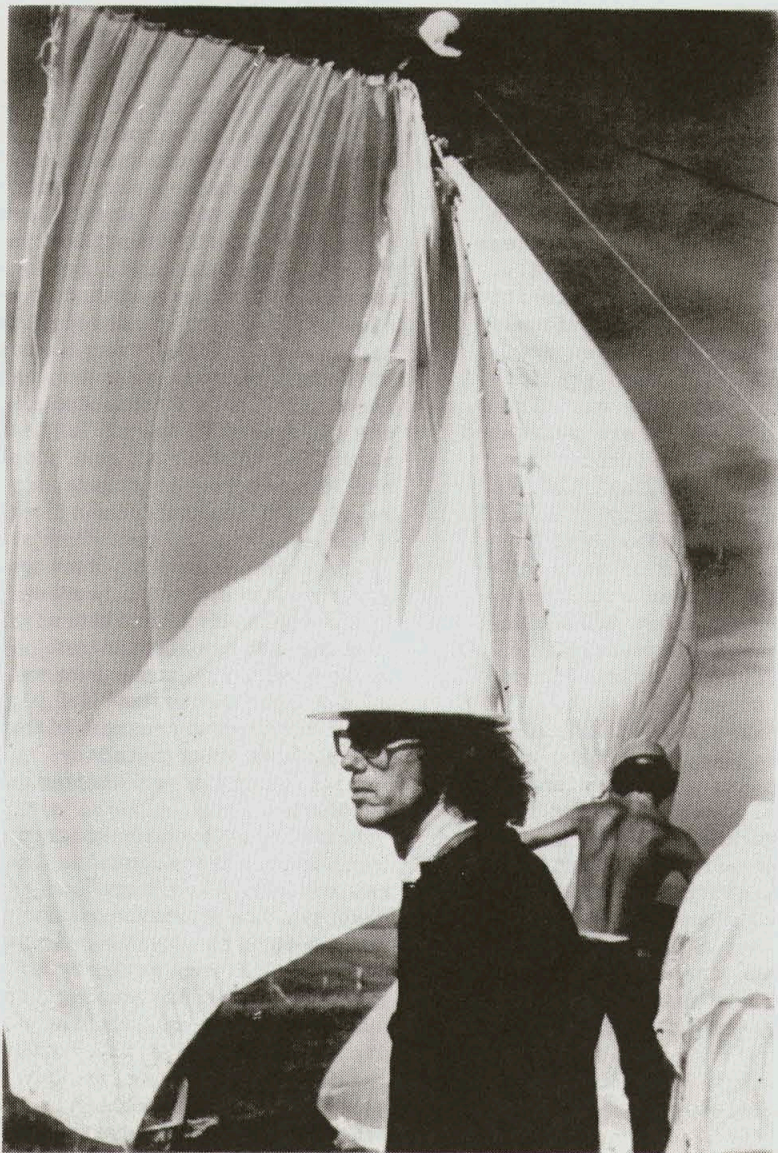


Christo on site at Running Fence, 1976
Photograph: Wolfgang Volz



"See how it describes the wind," Christo said to a friend as they looked at the reality of the Running Fence. Watching its colors change, a young couple who worked on the project, a rancher who slept alongside it and those who walked its 24.5 mile length were moved as we who simply witness the drawings and documentation can never be.

Bulgarian-born Christo's work is among the most innovative, controversial and stimulating for a vanguard of artists concerned with ideas and the arena of public art. "I think that any art that is less political, less social, less economic, is certainly less than contemporary art," Christo said recently. "Everyone is part of this art...the crucial element in the process is people getting involved... even the predictable opposition."

The dynamics of individuals and governmental bodies are among the not always predictable but inevitably exciting ingredients which are activated by the artist. Without this social dimension, all the technical virtuosity of his drawings, his ideas, and the monumental scale of each project might appear contrived. This participatory aesthetic which leaves few neutral is at the core of Christo's concern as an artist. He has called himself a political artist engaged in public art. He casts his net to entangle a general public, taking risks on an immense scale in an uncharted area where art, politics and people intersect.

Christo's work has always been directed at the familiar. He invests the commonplace with mystery and dares to seek the involvement of forces which are either indifferent or antagonistic toward art. With each new project he continues to raise the stakes to demonstrate that art can become an inseparable part of life.

One such recent project was the Running Fence in Northern California. It was constructed with 2,050 panels of white nylon fabric, each measuring 18 feet high by 68 feet wide. There was a total of 165,000 yards of material held by 350,000 hooks, 13,000 steel anchors and 90 miles of steel cable. Completed in the fall of 1976 for a brief two week period, this Herculean undertaking cost the artist over \$3,000,000. Christo is his own patron. He finances all the material and labor costs of each project through the sale of his drawings and collages.

The preparations took forty-seven months, with Christo making seventeen appearances before open hearings to justify his intentions as an artist. The Superior Court of California considered the matter three times. In addition to making separate contracts with fifty-nine ranchers, permission also had to be obtained from boards of supervisors in two counties, the State Lands Commission, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and others. At one point the Running Fence project required a team of nine attorneys.

After the fact both county governments approved resolutions applauding Christo's magnificent completion and environmentally sound removal of the epic project. The place where the fence crossed Highway #1 has been designated by Sonoma County as an historical landmark.

Artist/conjurer/choreographer Christo has moved outside the realm of "official art" to generate monumental experiences that refute the system. He is defining his own category of art - one that is setting its own precedents and finding its own passionate adherents. The Running Fence or the proposed but yet unrealized Reichstag project have been labeled earth art, conceptual, political, environmental,

theatre, realist and public art to name a few. They are none of these as much as they are all of these.

The Reichstag looms as a familiar symbol of German pride, suffering and frustration only a few yards from the Berlin Wall that separates a city and a people. The building was built in 1871 by Bismarck and was the seat of parliament until it was set afire in 1933 signaling the end of German democracy. Hitler rebuilt the Reichstag which was again destroyed in the 1945 battle for Berlin. After World War II the building was once more reconstructed and inaugurated in 1970.

The plan to wrap the Reichstag with 60,000 yards of white nylon has touched off a national debate that has polarized the major political parties. A reminder of Germany's recent history and a symbol of reunification, the structure sits awkwardly in West Berlin's no-man's land with some of its columns jutting into the Eastern sector. Most of the building is in West Berlin but small portions are under the jurisdiction of American, British, French and Russian authorities who must also approve the project.

Every work of art is said to be a measure of those who interact with it, and Christo's highly charged Reichstag undertaking may be seen as a measure of Germany today. Like the Running Fence, the Reichstag project offers a dynamic proving ground designed by the artist to draw together twentieth century art and life.

Christo and his wife, Jeanne-Claude who plays a significant role in the evolution of his work, were both born on June 13, 1935 and live in New York City.

Burt Chernow, Guest Curator
Director, Housatonic Museum of Art
Chairman of the Art Department
Housatonic Community College
Bridgeport, Connecticut

Christo will be at the Atheneum on Thursday, June 15 to install his works in MATRIX and to answer questions from the audience following a screening of Running Fence (color, 55 min.) in the Atheneum Cinema at 8 p.m.

The works related to the Reichstag project are being shown for the first time in the United States. All works in this exhibition have been lent by the artist unless otherwise noted.

Works in MATRIX:

Running Fence, project for Sonoma and Marin Counties, CA., 1973, charcoal, crayon and pencil on paper, 22" x 28".

Property Sketch for Running Fence Corporation, 1974, blue-print surveyor map, 24" x 48".

Running Fence Route, no date, marker pen on automobile road map, 8½" x 11".

Running Fence, project for Sonoma and Marin Counties, CA., 1976, pastel, crayon, charcoal and pencil on paper, in two parts: 15" x 96", 42" x 96".

Running Fence, project for Sonoma and Marin Counties, CA., 1976, collage of fabric, photograph, crayon, charcoal and pencil on paper, 28" x 22".

Running Fence Press Release, 1976, 11" x 8½".

Photographs of Running Fence
by Wolfgang Volz, 1976, seven
color photographs, 28" x 39" each.

Wrapped Reichstag, project for
Berlin, 1977, collage with pastel,
crayons, charcoal and map on
paper, in two parts: 15" x 96",
42" x 96".

Wrapped Reichstag, project for
Berlin, 1978, collage with fabric,
twine, pastel, crayons, charcoal,
and map on paper, in two parts:
22" x 28", 11" x 28". Lent by
Burt Chernow.

January, 1977: Willy Brandt and
Christo in Brandt's office,
Bundeshaus, Bonn, 1977, black
and white photograph by Wolfgang
Volz, 16" x 23½".

The Reichstag, no date, black and
white photograph by Wolfgang Volz,
16" x 23½".

Selected one-man exhibitions:

The Museum of Modern Art, NYC '68;
The Museum of Contemporary Art,
Chicago '69; National Gallery of
Victoria, Melbourne '69; Kunst-
haus, Hamburg '71; Stedelijk
Museum, Amsterdam '73; Kunsthau,
Zurich '73; Krölller-Müller Museum,
Otterlo '73; Louisiana Museum,
Humblebaek, Denmark '74, '78;
Museum of the 20th Century,
Vienna '76; The Israel Museum,
Jerusalem '77; Palais des
Beaux Arts, Bruxelles '78.

Selected films about Christo:

Wrapped Coast, One Million
Square Feet, Little Bay,
Australia, 1969. Michael and
Christian Blackwood, New York.
Valley Curtain, Rifle, Colo-
rado, 1972. David Maysles and
Albert Maysles, New York.

Running Fence, Sonoma and
Marin Counties, California,
1973-76. David Maysles,
Charlotte Sverin, and Albert
Maysles, New York.

Selected bibliography about
Christo:

Alloway, Lawrence. Christo,
Harry N. Abrams, (New York) '69.
Christo-Wrapped Coast, One
Million Square Feet, edited by
Christo, Contemporary Art Litho-
graphers (Minneapolis) '69.

Bourdon, David. Christo,
Harry N. Abrams (New York) '70.
Christo-Valley Curtain, edited
by Christo, Harry N. Abrams
(New York) '73.

Van der Marck, Jan. "Off and
Running Again with Christo's
Latest Project," Arts Magazine,
vol. 48, no. 6 (March '74), p. 44+.

Hunter, Sam and Yard, Sally.
Christo-Ocean Front, Newport,
Princeton University Press '75.

Coffelt, Beth. "Running Fence:
a Drama in Wind and Light," Art
News, vol. 75 no. 9 (November '76),
p. 84+.

Frankenstein, Alfred. "Christo's
Fence, Beauty or Betrayal?," Art
in America, vol. 64, no. 6
(November-December '76), p. 58+.

Davis, Douglas. "The Size of Non-
Size," Artforum, vol. 15, no. 4
(December '76), p. 46+.

Tomkins, Calvin. "Onward and
Upward with the Arts: Running
Fence," The New Yorker, vol. 53,
no. 6 (March 28 '77), p. 43+.

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