Christo and Jeanne-Claude
Paris!
July 1st – October 19th 2020

#ChristoParis
Christo and Jeanne-Claude
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July 1st – October 19th 2020
Gallery 2, Level 6

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“Christo and Jeanne-Claude, Paris!”, a major exhibition presented in Gallery 2 of the Centre Pompidou, retraces artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s years in Paris together, from 1958 to 1964, and the story of The Pont-Neuf Wrapped, Paris, 1975-1985. This exhibition will also be a prelude to L’Arc de triomphe, Wrapped (Project for Paris, Place de l’Etoile – Charles de Gaulle) which will be on view from September 18th to October 3rd, 2021 (cf. page 15).

The seven years Christo lived in Paris were essential to the development of his work as an artist. Christo broke free from the boundaries of the painting, as he began wrapping everyday objects and creating temporary artworks in public spaces. He also began conceiving works of art in monumental dimension, envisioning numerous temporary projects for the city. The first section of the exhibition presents around 80 works from 1958, the year Christo and Jeanne-Claude met, until 1964, when they moved to New York. The second section, The Pont-Neuf Wrapped Documentation Exhibition, retraces the period leading up to the realization of The Pont-Neuf Wrapped, Paris, 1975-1985 with a collection of around 300 items, including original drawings and collages, a scale model, photographs, documents, engineering studies and original components of the realized project. The exhibition also includes the screening of the film Christo in Paris (1990) by the Maysles brothers, which documents the ten years Christo and Jeanne-Claude devoted to The Pont-Neuf Wrapped and recount the biography of this extraordinary couple who has produced some of the most spectacular works of the 20th and 21st centuries.
The exhibition layout

Highlight on a few pieces

The parisian years
1958 – 1964

1 — Mur provisoire de tonneaux métalliques – Le Rideau de fer, rue Visconti, Paris
[Temporary Wall of Oil Barrels – The Iron Curtain, Rue Visconti, Paris]
27 June 1962

2 — Inventaire – Étagères [Inventory – Shelves]
1958 – 1960

3 — Surface d’empaquetage [Packing Surface]
1958

4 — Cratère [Crater]
1960

5 — Édifice public empaqueté
(Projet pour l’Arc de triomphe, Paris)
[Wrapped Public Building
(Project for The Arc de triomphe, Paris)]
1962-1963

6 — Petit cheval empaqueté [Wrapped Toy Horse]
1963

7 — Empaquetage [Package]
1961

8 — Purple Store Front
1964

9 — Christo in Paris
A film by Albert and David Maysles – 1990

The Pont-Neuf Wrapped,
Documentation Exhibition

10 — Photograph by Wolfgang Volz:
Christo and Jeanne-Claude at Paris City Hall
21 February 1982

11 — The Pont-Neuf Wrapped (Project for Paris)
Drawing – 1985

12 — Photograph by Wolfgang Volz:
Climbers attach the veil, hoisted under one of the
Pont-Neuf arches
16 – 22 September 1985

13 — The Pont-Neuf Wrapped (Project for Paris)
Project’s scale model – 1981-1991

14 — Photographs by Wolfgang Volz:
1985
The parisian years 1958 – 1964

Christo (Christo Vladimirov Javacheff) and Jeanne-Claude (Jeanne-Claude Marie Denat) were both born on June 13th, 1935, respectively in Gabrovo (Bulgaria) and Casablanca (Morocco). Christo fled communist Bulgaria to Prague in 1956, and finally escaped the Soviet Block in 1957, moving first to Vienna and then to Geneva. He ultimately settled in Paris in March 1958, where he met Jeanne-Claude at the age of 23. Despite his classical education at the National Academy of Art in Sofia, Christo established his own artistic language during his years in Paris. Working with texture, surface, objects, scale and appropriation of space, Christo created his early works and later he and Jeanne-Claude began developing the monumental temporary projects they became best known for.

When Christo arrived in Paris, he earned his living as a classical portraitist for high society families, signing most of his paintings with his last name: "Javacheff". But in the small maid’s room, where he was living and working, he began creating what he called his Inventory — a collection of small cans, bottles, crates and later barrels, wrapped in fabric, stiffened with lacquer and tied with twine, which he signed with his artist name: "Christo". What was most attractive to Christo was surface. “It was not so much about making an object, but more about the texture of the object itself”, he says. The results of his continuous and restless experimentations include the Surfaces d’Empaquetage [Packing Surfaces], made of folded and wrinkled lacquered cloth or paper, then washed to highlight the reliefs, and the Cratères [Craters]. This little-known series, presented here at the Centre Pompidou for the first time, is characterized by an extremely commanding physical presence: sand and dust mixed with paint and glue create an earthy-looking bas-relief that expands both inside and outside the surface of the work. Like a lunar landscape, the Craters can be seen as Christo’s answer to Jean Dubuffet’s very textural works of the 1950’s.

Most of Christo’s iconic Empaquetages [Packages] were made between 1958 and the early 1960s by wrapping everyday objects. Fabric, first lacquered and washed, and later left uncoated and simply folded and tied with ropes or twine, was gradually altered with the use of polyethylene. The translucid nature and sculptural sturdiness of polyethylene made it an appealing material to wrap statues and living models as well.

Christo’s first works of art in public spaces were temporary structures made of piled or stacked barrels. Most of these artworks were assembled in a studio he had in Gentilly, on the outskirts of Paris. “I found the cylindrical oil barrels already looked like sculptures themselves” says Christo. “The spilled oil, the bleached out color, the rust, the bumps – I found them very enchanting, very beautiful, because they were ‘real’.” As a reaction to the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961, Christo and Jeanne-Claude envisioned a work that would barricade one of the narrowest street in Paris with a wall of oil barrels. In collaboration with Jeanne-Claude, he managed to carry out the project on the night of June 27th, 1962, before being ordered by police to dismantle the temporary sculpture. In keeping with what would be his first Parisian urban project, he presented installations, photographs and drawings on his work with barrels for a few days at the Galerie J, whose advisor was the art critic Pierre Restany. This would also be his first solo exhibition in Paris.


Christo’s artistic vocabulary, in addition to the wrapping of small metal cans, also extended to oil barrels, which the artist stacked either vertically or horizontally. In October 1961, in response to the recent construction of the Berlin Wall, he imagined barricading the rue Visconti – one of the narrowest street in Paris – with oil barrels. In collaboration with Jeanne-Claude, he managed to carry out the project on the night of June 27th, 1962, before being ordered by police to dismantle the temporary sculpture. In keeping with what would be his first Parisian urban project, he presented installations, photographs and drawings on his work with barrels for a few days at the Galerie J, whose advisor was the art critic Pierre Restany. This would also be his first solo exhibition in Paris.
Inventaire – Étagères
[Inventory – Shelves]
1958 – 1960

Christo began wrapping cylindrical metal cans – paint cans or tin cans – and bottles as early as 1958, covering them with fabric stiffened with lacquer and wrapping them with string. He further developed this work by using crates whose sides he treated in the same manner, as well as furniture, often built by the artist himself. These ensembles, which would later incorporate barrels, constitute what Christo referred to as his “Inventory.” He exhibited these works for the first time in late 1960 in Lisbon, then in April-May 1961 in Paris, notably with Lourdes Castro, René Bertholo and Jan Voss, his friends from the KWY group, who published an artisanal art magazine.

Nine metal boxes, fabric, cord, paint, lacquer, sand, wood, steel and glass
90 × 30 × 18 cm
Collection of the artist
© Christo 1958
Photo © Eeva-Inkeri
Deeply affected by the important expressionist paintings in the exhibition “Jackson Pollock et la nouvelle peinture américaine” (Jackson Pollock and the New American Painting) at Paris’ Musée national d’art moderne in early 1959, Christo produced a number of abstract works between 1959 and 1960 in the style of various artists like Jean Dubuffet, shown at the Daniel Cordier gallery in late April 1959 in an exhibition on the theme of the “Célébration du sol” (The Celebration of the Soil). This inspired the series Cratères (Craters), which is however more closely related to Dubuffet’s matterist research from the early 1950s, for which Christo had great admiration.

Enamel paint, glue, paint, sand and metal on board
163 × 123 cm
Centre Pompidou, Musée national d’art moderne
Gift of the artist in 2019
© Christo 1960
Photo © Wolfgang Volz

Surface d’empaquetage (Packing Surface) 1958

Christo became increasingly interested in the treatment of surfaces: he used paper and sometimes fabric, giving them a rugged appearance with creases and wrinkles, which he then stiffened with lacquer and discolored in places with dark paint. He added sand or dust to give them a “miserabilistic” appearance. These works, entitled Surfaces d’Empaquetage (Packing Surfaces), represent one of Christo’s responses to the artistic trend of the time of liberating oneself from the motif and exploring the qualities of matter.

Paint, lacquer and sand, on fabric stretched by ropes on a wooden frame
158.5 × 102 × 7 cm
Private Collection
© Christo 1958
Photo © Wolfgang Volz
Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s first urban projects were initially conceived in the form of collages made from photographs, with or without text. As early as the fall of 1961, Christo imagined wrapping a Parisian public building, more specifically the École militaire (Military school), as shown in two photomontages made with the image of the same empaquetage (package). In 1962, Christo was already visualizing wrapping the Arc de Triomphe on the Place de l’Étoile. The monument is represented in one collage by the image of a small, quadrangular wrapped object, also shown in the exhibition in front of the large photomontage. This project, which is evoked in a documentary film shown later in the exhibition, will finally be realized in the fall of 2020, some sixty years after its conception.
Empaquetages (Packages)

The precise timeline of Christo’s artistic practice in Paris is not always easy to establish. Regarding his Empaquetages (Packages), he mostly developed them from 1960 onwards. However, the premise of this work probably dates back to the artist’s stay in Geneva before his arrival in Paris and one of the first packages shown in the exhibition, made of paper, is dated 1958. Christo later chose to wrap objects with fabric, which would be wrinkled, then coated with lacquer. He then experimented with raw fabric but without abandoning his previous research. The artist focused his attention on the relationship between various textures and on the play of materials – the fabric’s shininess or matte quality –, its silkiness or roughness, and its color, often faded. The rope and string were also very carefully chosen.

The contents of Christo’s Empaquetages (Packages) remain mysterious; the artist refused to name the objects hidden in them. At a later stage, while exploring other methods, he would only partially cover certain objects, in particular pieces of furniture, establishing a somewhat different relationship with the viewer. In 1960, the artist discovered polyethylene, a transparent plastic that would inspire further research, in that the membrane allowed viewers to guess the wrapped object’s identity but without revealing it explicitly. Polyethylene would also be used by Christo for wrapping statues and live models.

Empaquetage (Package) 1961

This Empaquetage (Package) was presented in late 1962 in the group exhibition “New Realists”, which the Sidney Janis Gallery in New York devoted to artists whose practice was linked either to the Readymade (that is, declaring a pre-existing object a “work of art”), to the colorful visual universe of advertising or to parodying mass consumption. Despite the importance of this exhibition for Christo, whose work was shown alongside such renowned American artists as Andy Warhol or Claes Oldenburg, he was wrongly classified in the catalogue’s introductory text as an artist whose approach was based on the Readymade. Indeed, Christo’s gesture can be assimilated neither to an appropriation of the Readymade nor to a questioning of packaging in industrial society. His gesture has bewildered art critics, who have often struggled to find a way to qualify it.

Fabric, string, cord and various objects on panel
47.5 × 42.5 × 22.8 cm
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection, 1999.4.1
© Christo 1961
Photo © National Gallery of Art, Washington, NGA Images

Petit cheval empaqueté (Wrapped Toy Horse) 1963

Among these wrapped objects is a small toy horse, which evokes a project carried out with a member of the Nouveaux Réalistes movement, founded by art critic Pierre Restany in October 1960 and to which Christo would not be invited to participate until 1963. This wrapped toy was used in one of the photomontages created for the “Salon Comparaisons” exhibition in March 1963, a section of which was organized by artist Jacques Villeglé. The idea was to express, through this “wrapped Neo-Dada” – a term coined by Raymond Hains – disagreement with Pierre Restany’s theoretical approach regarding the affiliation of the Nouveaux Réalistes with the Dada movement. The realization of this large-scale project, which dissatisfied Christo, nonetheless reassured him about the idea of not identifying himself with the group, despite the fact that he maintained friendships with some of its members.

Fabric, twine, rope, toy horse on wheels
40.6 × 50.8 × 12.7 cm
The Private collection of the late Jan van der Marck, USA
© Christo 1963
Photo © Dirk Bakker
This series, the next to the last undertaken the year before Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s definitive departure for the United States in September 1964, consists of “Vitrines” [Show Cases], many of them made from medicine cabinets. The idea here is no longer to use wrapping to hide an object from view while still allowing the viewer to understand its contours. Rather, Christo’s concept was to place the spectator in a situation of obstruction by concealing the inside of a display case, whereas vitrines are intended to show something. Christo thus lined the furniture’s inside walls with paper or fabric, sometimes providing a light source, to emphasize the fact that in principle there is something to see. The Vitrines [Show Cases] led to the series of “Store Fronts”, which Christo principally developed in the United States, with the exception of two Store Fronts shown in the exhibition, built to scale in France, as well as a few smaller-scale projects. The first storefronts were realized with recycled material. Subsequently, their elaboration became more sophisticated, with Christo giving them a minimalist appearance that reflected the work of American artists of the time, while simultaneously contrasting this with a critical, offbeat approach. These monumental realizations function according to the same principle as the first Vitrines [Show Cases]: transparent walls are covered with paper or fabric, then enhanced by an internal light source.
Christo in Paris
A film by Albert and David Maysles – 1990

Brothers Albert and David Maysles (1926-2015 and 1931-1987) accompanied Christo and Jeanne-Claude from the 1970s onwards to film without concession all the stages in the development of many of their projects. Their “forthright cinema”, which earned them a major place in the history of the filmed document, made it possible to immortalize either the most spectacular and trivial moments of the in-progress projects. One of their major works, Christo in Paris, is presented at the heart of the exhibition.

Completed in 1990, the film tells the adventure of the packaging process of the Pont-Neuf from its beginnings, by mixing in the biographical story of Christo and Jeanne-Claude, which allows the viewer to enter the life of the duo at which we owe extraordinary achievements. Taking a back-and-forth format between a relentless battle for the accomplishment of the project and the resurgence of the artists’ memories of youth, the film can be viewed at any time during its projection.
Documentation Exhibition

The second section of the show is dedicated to the story of Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s major urban project for Paris. The Pont-Neuf Wrapped Documentation Exhibition is a collection of 337 items, including 36 original drawings and collages, one large scale model, original archival documents, engineering components and about two hundred photographs by Wolfgang Volz, who has been documenting Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s work for over 40 years, and original components from the completed project. The purpose of a Documentation Exhibition, which has been done for every realized project of Christo and Jeanne-Claude, is to preserve the memory of their temporary works of art and convey their magnitude and complexity, retracing their stories from the original concept through the permitting process, and finally to the realization.

As early as 1975, Christo and Jeanne-Claude developed the idea of wrapping the Pont-Neuf using golden sandstone polyamide to cover the sides, the 12 arches, parapets, borders and pavements (visitors would walk on the fabric), the 44 lamp-posts, the vertical sides of the central island, at the tip of the Île de la Cité and the Esplanade du Vert-Galant. “For more than 400 years the Pont-Neuf has been the subject of hundreds of works of art”, Christo says. “When it was wrapped, for two weeks, it became a work of art itself.”

Following Jacques Callot, Turner, Renoir, Brassai, Pissarro, Picasso and Marquet, Christo and Jeanne-Claude added a new chapter to the history of the Parisian bridge. The temporary work of art was deeply connected to the urban fabric and real life of the city. It emphasized the architectural structure of the bridge, and provided a new approach to its dimension, its relationship to the surroundings, its function, and the way we interact with it. Like all of Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s temporary works, The Pont-Neuf Wrapped, Paris, 1975-1985, was on view for a very short time (from September 22nd to October 6th, 1985), and required substantial technical and human resources, following ten years of negotiations with both local politicians and residents. Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s large-scale temporary projects are funded exclusively through the sale of Christo’s original preparatory studies, drawings and collages, scale models, and works from the 1950s and 1960s. The artists have never received any public funding or private sponsorship.

“All our temporary projects are very nomadic, in transition and always moving”, explains Christo. “They are once-in-a-lifetime and only remain in our memories. This quality is an essential part of our work. It’s very human: nothing lasts forever, this is the beauty of being alive.”

Christo and Jeanne-Claude, with Johannes Schaub, are received by Jacques Chirac and Françoise de Panafieu, respectively Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Paris, at the City Hall, February 21st, 1982. During this meeting, which was filmed by the Maysles brothers, Jacques Chirac, in favor of the project, specifies that he will not formally give his permission until after the next elections, scheduled in spring 1983.

© Christo 1982 / Photo © Wolfgang Volz
12 Climbers attach the fabric hoisted under one of the arches and adjust the tension of the straps sewn onto the fabric, making it hug the lines of the vault (September 16-22, 1985).

© Christo 1985 / Photo © Wolfgang Volz

The Pont-Neuf Wrapped (Project for Paris)
Drawing, 1985
Pencil, pastel, charcoal, wax crayon, ink prints and glue on paper mounted on cardboard
Diptych: 38 × 244 cm and 106.6 × 244 cm / Collection of the artist / © Christo 1985 / Photo © Philippe Migeat
The Pont-Neuf Wrapped (Project for Paris)

Scale model of the project, 1981-1991

View of the model of The Pont-Neuf Wrapped and its presentation in La Samaritaine’s shop window, Paris, October 1981.

Wood, fabric, wire, synthetic foam, Plexiglas, staples and glue / 82 × 611 × 478 cm / © Christo 1981 / Photo © All rights reserved
The Arc de triomphe, Wrapped
September 18th – October 3rd 2021

Christo, in close collaboration with the Centre des Monuments Nationaux and the Centre Pompidou, will create a temporary artwork in Paris entitled The Arc de triomphe, Wrapped (Project for Paris, Place de l’Étoile-Charles de Gaulle). Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Christo, the Centre des Monuments Nationaux and the Centre Pompidou have jointly decided to postpone, by one year, L’Arc de triomphe, Wrapped, initially planned for the fall 2020. The project will then be on view for 16 days from September 18th up until October 3rd, 2021. The Arc de triomphe will be wrapped in 25,000 square meters of recyclable polypropylene fabric in silvery blue, and 7,000 meters of red rope.

In 1961, three years after they met in Paris, Christo and Jeanne-Claude began creating works of art in public spaces. One of their projects was to wrap a public building. At the time, Christo, who was renting a small room near the Arc de triomphe, made several studies of a project there, including, in 1962, a photomontage of the Arc de triomphe wrapped, seen from the Avenue Foch.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Christo created a few additional studies. Almost 60 years later, the project will finally be concretized. L’Arc de triomphe, Wrapped will be entirely funded by Christo through the sale of his preparatory studies, drawings and collages of the project as well as scale models, works from the 1950s and 1960s and original lithographs on other subjects. It will receive no public funds.

The Eternal Flame, in front of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at the Arc de triomphe, will continue to burn throughout the preparation and display of the artwork. As always, veterans associations and volunteers committed to the values of the French Republic will ensure the continuity of remembrance and the daily ceremony of rekindling the flame that pays homage to the Unknown Soldier and those who lost their lives fighting for France. The Arc de triomphe, including its terrace, will remain accessible for the duration of the project. The Centre des Monuments Nationaux will soon specify the modalities of this access.

“Thirty-five years after Jeanne-Claude and I wrapped the Pont-Neuf, I am eager to work in Paris again to realize our project for the Arc de triomphe,” says Christo.

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For more information, please visit: paris-arc-de-triomphe.fr

© Christo 2018 © Christo 2019
Photos © André Grossmann

The Arc de Triomphe, Wrapped
Project for Paris, Place de l’Étoile – Charles de Gaulle
2018 - 2019

Up: 2019, pencil, wax crayon, enamel paint, photograph by Wolfgang Volz, tape and glue, 28 x 21,5 cm
Diptych: 77,5 x 66,7 cm et 77,5 x 30,5 cm
© Christo 2018 © Christo 2019
Photos © André Grossmann
Publications

Catalogue of the exhibition
A catalogue presenting unpublished documents and revealing the creative process at the origin of the artist’s career. Edited by Sophie Duplaix.

Éditions du Centre Pompidou
Release: 18 March 2020
ISBN: 9782844268693
256 pages
20 x 26 cm
Launch price €27.93
Public price € 39.90
Starting March 18th, 2020

Catalogue in a limited edition
This original box contains the catalogue of the exhibition and a numbered print signed by the artist. Limited edition of 500 copies.

Éditions du Centre Pompidou
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Practical information

The Exhibition

Christo and Jeanne-Claude
Paris !
July 1st – October 19th 2020
Gallery 2, Level 6

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Opening times and Admissions
Every day from 11am to 9pm (Thursdays until 11pm), except Tuesdays and May 1st.
€15, reduced fare €12 / Free for those under 18. Young people under 26*, teachers and students at schools of art, drama, dance and music and members of the Maison des artistes may visit the Museum for free and buy tickets for exhibitions at the concessory rate.
Free admission for Centre Pompidou members.

Online bookings and print-at-home tickets on:
www.billetterie.centrepompidou.fr
The reservation of a time slot applies to all visitors, except for those benefiting of a free admission.

* Nationals of Member States of the EU or the European Economic Area aged 18-25. Valid the same day for the Musée National d’Art Moderne and all exhibitions.

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#ChristoParis