Christo and Jeanne-Claude
Paris!
18 March – 15 June 2020
Gallery 2, Level 6

Christo & Jeanne-Claude, Paris!, a major exhibition from March 18 to June 15, 2020 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 19 to October 4, 2020 (see page 5).

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 Parisian years, 1958-1964

Christo (Christo Vladimirov Javacheff) and Jeanne-Claude (Jeanne-Claude Marie Denat) were both born on June 13, 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’.”


In 1961, Christo and Jeanne-Claude also made their first proposal to wrap a public building (concert hall, conference hall, prison, parliament...). At that time Christo, who was living near the Arc de Triomphe, made several studies of a project there, including the photomontage Édifice public empaqueté (Projet pour l’Arc de Triomphe, Paris) [Wrapped Public Building (Project for The Arc de Triomphe, Paris)] This project will finally be realized this autumn (see page 5).

In late 1962, Christo participated in the New Realists exhibition at the Sidney Janis Gallery in New York, one of the most prestigious American art galleries. Christo’s work was incorrectly classified as “ready-made” in the exhibition introductory text. Ultimately, Christo’s association with the “New Realists” movement, founded by Pierre Restany in October 1960, was never really made official although he cultivated friendships with some of its members.

Before moving with Jeanne-Claude to New York in 1964, Christo began working on new series of works, Vitrines [Show cases] and Store Fronts, which he reconstructed, concealing the inside view with paper or fabric. These series reaffirmed Christo’s interest in architecture and the urban dimension, which later evolved into the large-scale projects he realized with Jeanne-Claude.
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, and 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”, he 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 22 to October 6, 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.”
Press Opening

Tuesday 17 March 2020, 10 am – 1 pm
Guided tour of the exhibition led by curator Sophie Duplaix, starting at 10.30 am (Gallery 2, Level 6).

The Arc de Triomphe Wrapped

19 September – 4 October 2020
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). This work of art will be on view for 16 days from Saturday, September 19 to Sunday, October 4, 2020. 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.

Practical Information

The Exhibition

Christo and Jeanne-Claude
Paris!
18 March – 15 June 2020
Gallery 2, Level 6
Curator Sophie Duplaix
Research Officer Marion Guibert
Production Officer Anne-Claire Gervais
Architect and Designer Corinne Marchand

Catalogue of the Exhibition

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Twitter: @ChristoandJC
Instagram: @ChristoJeanneClaude
#ChristoParis

The Centre Pompidou

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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 concessionary 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.

At the same time

Yuan Jai
5 February – 27 April 2020
Museum, Focus Room

Mutations / Creations #4
Jeremy Shaw, Phase Shifting Index
Neurons, Simulated Intelligence
26 February – 20 April 2020
Galleries 3 et 4

Chine<>Afrique (China<>Africa)
4 March – 25 May 2020
Museum, Gallery 0

Wols
4 March – 25 May 2020
Museum, Graphic Arts Gallery

Matisse
Like a Novel
13 May – 31 August 2020
Gallery 1

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For more information about this project, also visit christoandjeanneclaude.net