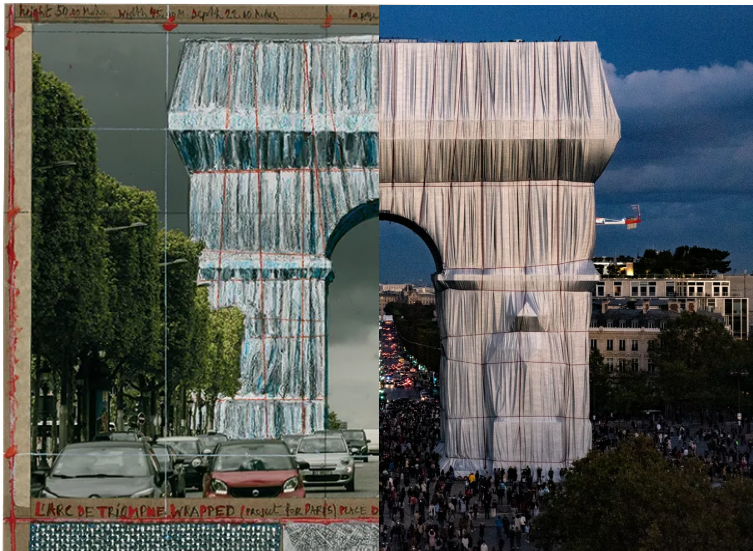


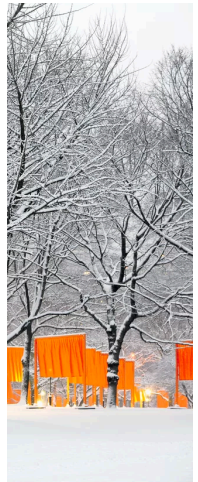
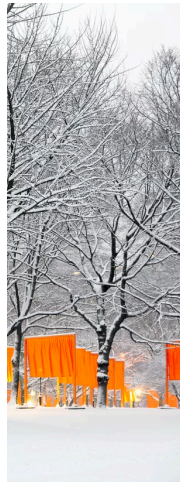
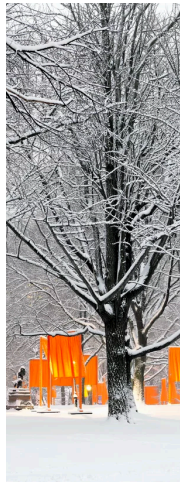
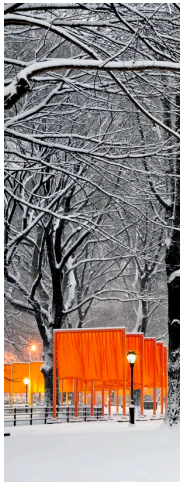
CHRISTO AND JEANNE-CLAUDE

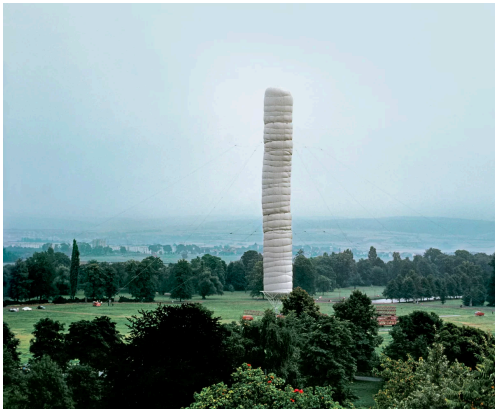
Personal study: inevitable change



“I believe that the prime-time for every work of art exists in the time in which it was done. After that it’s c o n t i n u o u s transformation.”

Christo and Jeanne-Claude were a conceptual artist duo who were at the head of the Art Nouveau movement which primarily concerned itself with advancing past art's boundaries by aiming to detach itself from the pre-conceived notions of 'high art' and the elitism surrounding it which scrutinised technique and form. Beyond the art world, during the late 40s to 50s most modern art was not permitted within the Soviet Bloc countries and for Christo, he made his art in response to his disdain of establishment which restrained not only the artist but the viewer.





His ideology and anti-establishment sentiment is wholly embodied in his repeated use of his artistic technique of wrapping objects and its varying outcomes, from small cans to the Reichstag building. The deliberately open nature of Christo's work always adds a level of interactivity or participation from the audience effectively removing the detachment of art from audience within 'high art'. For example, in 'The Gates' Christo describes it as having a 'nomadic quality' suggesting there is no restriction as to who views it or why one may view it; It invites the viewer to participate rather than alienating them with elitism prevalent in previous 19th century art design and its extensive historicism.



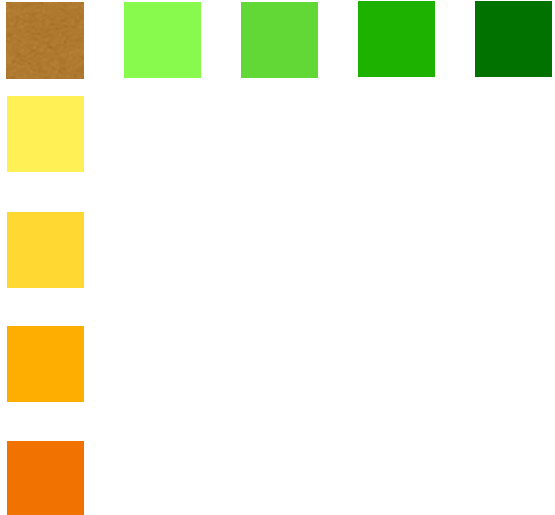
Upon viewing the developmental sketch for Christo's Valley Curtain at Tate Modern, I saw that it actually used fabric on paper to simulate the look of the valley curtain and the pre-determined amber colour scheme shows their deliberate experimentation with art because while the work is simple in concept the logistics and execution arguably require more effort than traditional art of that era. Overall, it puts into perspective the dedication to planning that is a constant throughout all of their work.

Valley Curtain

Rifle, Colorado (1970-1972)

Christo has always insisted upon the 'autonomy' of a work and alongside it being separate from art convention, his work goes against societal convention particularly in establishment. The idea can be seen in his first large installation piece, Valley Curtain. The piece was technically demanding and there were several revisions and two iterations (a failed attempt in 1971 and a second successful attempt in the following year). It utilised 200,000 square feet of nylon fabric and was made with the enlistment of 35 construction workers alongside 64 temporary workers.

The production cost totalled \$400,000 and required that Christo sell a number of his previous pieces to receive sufficient funding. Despite the egregious costs, they never received funding from outside sources saying that "The only way to work in total freedom is to pay for it. When you accept outside money, someone wants to tell you what to do". The installation's incorporation of fabric that will either break or be removed and become recycled expresses the belief in independence which Christo describes is important; which it maintains the integrity of art and I greatly enjoy his work as a show of a true labor of love rather than a business or egregious study as traditional art convention would typically dictate. The piece lasted for 28 hours before being blown away by the wind and apart from some anchors bolted into the cliff face, there is nothing left of the Valley Curtain project.



The piece was installed between Grand Junction and Glenwood Springs within the Grand Hogback Mountain Range of Rifle, Colorado. Due to its scale, the curtain intervenes with the surrounding area and the contrast between the manufactured curtain against the natural scenery can be polarising upon initial viewing. However, its inherent nature as an outdoor installation piece means it is affected by naturalistic elements such as lighting and the weather itself which constantly moulds the form of the piece - the environment adds a passive or incidental beauty to the work. It's evident that Christo knew his work would be temporary and despite the amount of time and effort in planning extending as far as whole decades he has always pursued his vision in art no matter the cost. He acknowledges this himself saying "Because we're impermanent" saying there is a "uniqueness of impermanence." The pieces are made with the idea in mind that they will inevitably be removed almost as if it is a stage in life that will inevitably come to pass. Christo claims that "Humans like to experience something irrational" and his work has always been a portal to that irrationality or emotion. Human experience is a dimension everyone will be able to connect with and his work reflects that by being deliberately placed within open spaces rather than the confines of galleries and tradition he ensures that everyone has the opportunity to experience it. Christo's Valley Curtain integrates itself into nature in the same way that art can be seen as an extension of human emotion.

**'there is no
definition of
aesthetic'**



The Gates

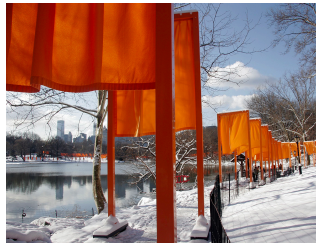
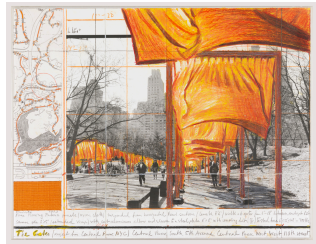
Central Park, New York (2005)

Christo says, 'there is no definition of aesthetic' his art very much aligns with this idea and his work "The Gates" is no different. Done in what was essentially their home, New York, the sculpture appeared in Central Park overnight and only a few days later it had vanished without any residual traces. The work was set up by 600 workers consisting of 7503 fabric panels along 37km of pathway with the width of the gates varying with the width of each walkway; sometimes they are 18 feet wide; sometimes they are six feet wide. Each gate is 16 feet tall. The project was drafted in 1979 and only fully realised by 2005.



“You usually walk on the walkways of the park, looking at trees, looking at people, but you have a space between your feet and the branches hanging over the walkways or just near the walkways. We are trying to energize that space.”

His work is always chosen in a space where people may live or pass by and in “The Gates” what would otherwise be the view of the trees along a path many walk on is deliberately replaced by the amber hue of “The gates” almost acting as a guide for the people along the trail. Christo has always placed an emphasis on doing his work within “total freedom” because he believes in doing what he wants he doesn’t claim to know beauty he simply decides to do something and that freedom is what produces beauty and happiness; it can be enjoyed for its colour; it can be enjoyed for its proportion; it can be enjoyed for its change; that freedom is possibly what is meant when he describes his art as providing energy to a space. Christo says “The essential part of these projects is that they are decided by us. It is something we want to do, we have the urge to do it, we enjoy doing it.” At the heart of “The Gates” is shared experience and Christo wants to share that experience and beauty with as many people as possible while maintaining the temporality that surrounds his work. There is always a level of interactivity with Christo’s work but I personally enjoy how “The Gates” arrangement is in alignment with Central Park’s path which invites all kinds of people meaning audiences always have their own unique experience with the art piece.



“The essential part of these projects is that they are decided by us. It is something we want to do, we have the urge to do it, we enjoy doing it.”

At the heart of “The Gates” is the beauty of shared experience and Christo wants to reflect that common beauty with as many people as possible while maintaining the temporality that surrounds his work. There is always a level of interactivity and this audience participation is pronounced with the gates with Christo’s work but I personally enjoy how “The Gates” arrangement is in alignment with Central Park’s path which invites all kinds of people meaning audiences always have their own unique experience with the art piece.



**‘irrational,
and useless’**

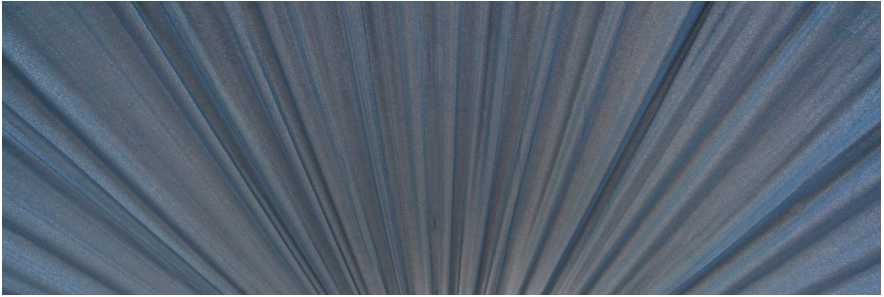


L'arc de Triomphe, Wrapped

Paris, France (2021)

L'arc de Triomphe, Wrapped is a work dreamt up by Christo this since the 1960s and only fully realised posthumously half a century later. "Wrapped Reichstag" bears a similar context in that the chosen subject is a significant piece of history. The Reichstag and its importance are highlighted by its Victorian style and vast ornamentation – it is the centre of commerce and political discussion for the German nation; L'arc de Triomphe was built as a testament to France's everlasting glory and it is fittingly ornamented. Christo's work is known for its utilisation of ready-made materials and this work is no different his intent was to simply bring out the beauty of the structure's form and he does this by employing his signature wrapping technique to remove any previous discernible features.





Beyond the technique of the wrapping itself, the cheap and ready-made nature of the materials presents to the viewer how they can do something like this themselves and demonstrates that art is for everyone because what would otherwise be considered 'useless' material ultimately ended up making something that can be appreciated for its beauty and to him "It was more about cheap materials and variable forms". Christo wraps the structure of L'arc de Triomphe so it may be appreciated for its scale and form by removing the history that binds it.

Critics of his work bring up the fact that Christo's thought process for his pieces follow the same predictable formula: he simply chooses any subject he wishes and then decides to wrap it and while that may be a valid interpretation, it dismisses the work not just logistically but emotionally.





“They were poor things, like me – miserable, transitory and, in a short time, they’d be gone.”



his words are surrounded in a rather nihilistic sentiment and may be interpreted plainly as such but at the same time people who have viewed his work have described it as transient not just in aesthetic but in how it personally affects them - how they feel - this is greatly due in part to what was done to achieve the aesthetics - the lengthy processes required to complete such a project only for it to be gone as soon as it appeared. Again, Christo acknowledges that idea by saying “all the projects are totally irrational and absolutely unnecessary,” but perhaps his work isn’t useless in the sense that it serves no purpose but rather it’s useless in that it has no definable purpose yet because that is up to the interpretation of the audience.



His work isn't appropriated by contexts or history - it is a product formed from a singular idea, formed from many ideas coming together, formed from collectivity – that is as much history and context we are allowed to be given and the rest is up to the viewer. Christo's choice to use a man-made structure (in this case, L'arc de Triomphe) may be dismissed as him just picking another subject at random for his work yet again but the fact it is man-made means it was built with a purpose to serve man but Christo's philosophy in art is to be as far removed from that idea and I believe that is potentially what is meant when his work is described as "transient" by audiences.



A main point of contention for Christo's work and the majority of Art Nouveau work is that anyone could make it. However, I believe in Christo's words that "Each project has its own story" and in my opinion, his work has a uniquely transient nature that nobody can replicate. My enjoyment for that philosophy surrounding their work is due to the basis for their wrapping technique in how it demonstrates the move of art from galleries to open spaces, that art can't be 'owned'. While every piece shares the same visual style, the effect of each is different: Valley Curtain demonstrates art's ability to be free with the installation deliberately placed within a natural open environment whereas L'arc de Triomphe, Wrapped presents the beauty of art in a way that purely focuses on form and proportion and is also a testament to their effect on the art world with one of their dream projects finally being realised even in their passing. All their work shares the common goal of making art that can be appreciated by everyone rather than through everlasting 'notions' like history or merit the simplicity of the work has the immortal effect of permeating in one's memory. Their work was undoubtedly pivotal in spreading the sentiment of liberating art as a form.

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