

In Memory of Jeanne-Claude (1935-2009)



Image courtesy of David Corio/Michael Ochs Archive

The death of visionary artist Jeanne-Claude is a great loss. Collaborating with Christo, she reshaped landscapes and captured the imaginations of millions. We mourn her cherished friendship.

Born in 1935 in Casablanca, Morocco, Jeanne-Claude shared not only her life's work with her husband but also a birthday, a poetic symmetry aligning their inseparable artistic career. For thirty-seven years the artists worked solely under the

name “Christo,” though Jeanne-Claude’s role was never secondary. The architect behind their projects, she was the force that turned their bold artistic dreams into built realities. With her signature red hair and fiery wit, she reminded us in a 1995 Washington Post interview: “Don’t waste your film taking only photographs of the one with glasses. The one with red hair is also an artist.”

Together, Jeanne-Claude and Christo transformed nature and architecture into extraordinary artworks including *The Pont Neuf Wrapped* (1985) in Paris, the encircling of pink fabric around eleven islands in Biscayne Bay for *Surrounded Islands* (1983), and the well-known 7,503 saffron fabric panels fluttering from posts for *The Gates* (2005) in Central Park. Their monumental projects were gifts of beauty, impermanence, and wonder.

Jeanne-Claude and Christo invited people to see the world anew through their art. The New York Times’s Michael Kimmelman, in a 2005 appraisal of *The Gates*, wrote that the installation “is a work of pure joy, a vast populist spectacle of good will and simple eloquence, the first great public art event of the 21st century.” Impressively, their installations were funded entirely by the couple’s sales of their own preparatory sketches and artworks. In the early 1980s Jeanne-Claude entrusted this gallery with a magnificent collage for the *Surrounded Islands*. Taking the work to Miami, we offered it to collectors who seemed indifferent. Yet once the project was completed, we could have sold it a hundred times.

We celebrate Jeanne-Claude’s and Christo’s enduring vision. A true artist and a logistical miracle worker, she believed in beauty for beauty’s sake. In her own words from an interview for *Sculpture Magazine* in 2002 she affirmed: “We wish to create works of art, works of joy and of beauty. As with every true work of art, it has absolutely no purpose whatsoever: it is not a message, it is not a symbol, it is only a work of art.”