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Christo and Jeanne-Claude, Surrounded Islands (Project for Biscayne Bay), 1981

ARTIST

Christo and Jeanne-Claude (1935–2020)
(1935–2009)

TITLE

Surrounded Islands (Project for Biscayne Bay)

MEDIUM

Mixed media, collage on paper on two panels

DATE

1981

SIZE

Lower panel: 43 x 97 in : 109.2 x 246.4 cm
Upper panel: 28 x 97 in : 71.1 x 246.4 cm

INSCRIPTIONS

Signed and dated on the lower right of the upper panel.

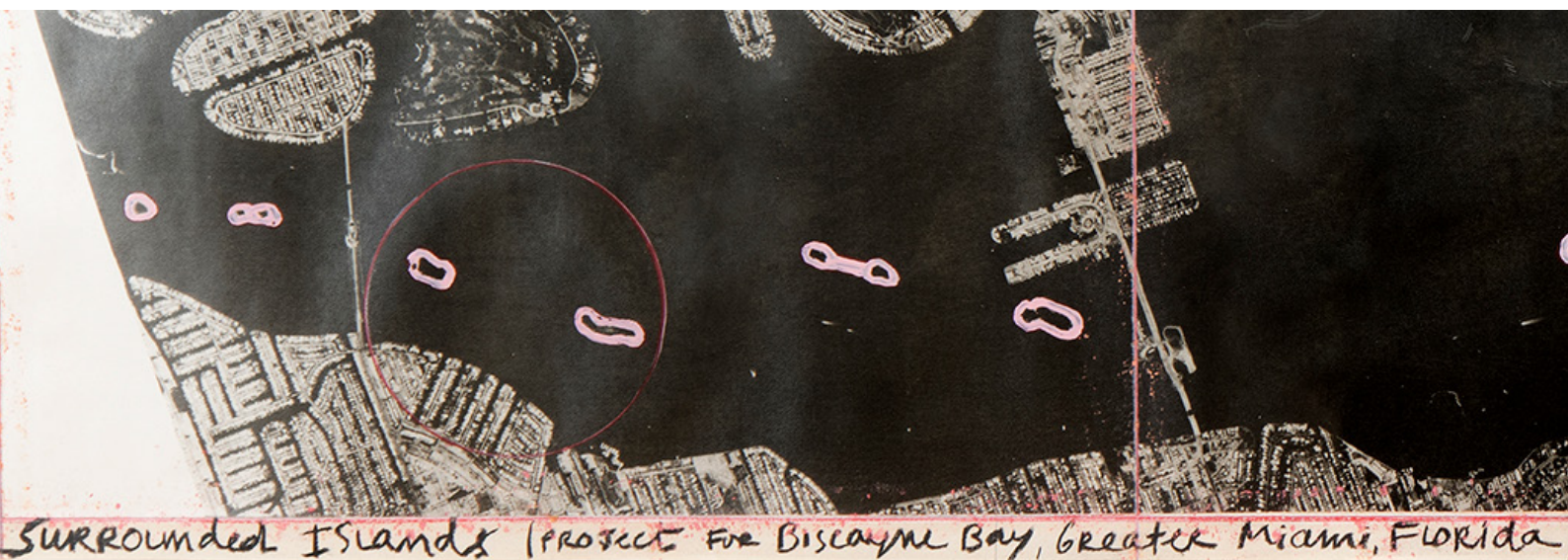
Extensively inscribed on both panels.

PROVENANCE

Acquired directly from the artist
Private collection

REFERENCE

AC22-66





On May 7, 1983, the installation of Surrounded Islands was completed in Biscayne Bay, between the city of Miami, North Miami, the Village of Miami Shores and Miami Beach. Eleven of the islands situated in the area of Bakers Haulover Cut, Broad Causeway, 79th Street Causeway, Julia Tuttle Causeway, and Venetian Causeway were surrounded with 603,870 square meters (6.5 million square feet) of floating pink woven polypropylene fabric covering the surface of the water and extending out 61 meters (200 feet) from each island into the bay. The fabric was sewn into 79 patterns to follow the contours of the eleven islands.

For two weeks, Surrounded Islands, spreading over 11.3 kilometers (7 miles), was seen, approached and enjoyed by the public, from the causeways, the land, the water and the air. The luminous pink colour of the shiny fabric was in harmony with the tropical vegetation of the uninhabited verdant islands, the light of the Miami sky and the colours of the shallow waters of Biscayne Bay.

Since April 1981, attorneys Joseph Z. Fleming, Joseph W. Landers, marine biologist Anitra Thorhaug, ornithologists Oscar Owre and Meri Cummings, mammal expert Daniel Odell, marine engineer John Michel, four consulting engineers, and builder-contractor, Ted Dougherty of A and H Builders, Inc. had been working on the preparation of the Surrounded Islands. The marine and land crews picked up debris from the eleven islands, putting refuse in bags and carting it away after they had removed some forty tons of varied garbage: refrigerator doors, tires, kitchen sinks, mattresses and an abandoned boat.

Permits were obtained from the following governmental agencies: The Governor of Florida and the Cabinet; the Dade County Commission; the Department of Environmental Regulation; the City of Miami Commission; the City of North Miami; the Village of Miami Shores; the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; the Dade County Department of Environmental Resources Management.



The outer edge of the floating fabric was attached to a 30.5 centimetre (12 inch) diameter octagonal boom, in sections, of the same colour as the fabric. The boom was connected to the radial anchor lines which extended from the anchors at the island to the 610 specially made anchors, spaced at 15.2 metres (50 ft) intervals, 76.2 metres (250 ft) beyond the perimeter of each island, driven into the limestone at the bottom of the bay. Earth anchors were driven into the land, near the foot of the trees, to secure the inland edge of the fabric, covering the surface of the beach and disappearing under the vegetation. The floating rafts of fabric and booms, varying from 3.7 to 6.7 metres (12 to 22 ft) in width and from 122 to 183 metres (400 to 600 ft) in length were towed through the bay to each island. There were eleven islands, but on two occasions, two islands were surrounded together as one configuration.

As with Christo and Jeanne-Claude's previous art projects, *Surrounded Islands* was entirely financed by the artists, through the sale of preparatory drawings, collages, and early works. The artists did not accept sponsorship of any kind.

On May 4, 1983, out of a total work force of 430, the unfurling crew began to blossom the pink fabric. *Surrounded Islands* was tended day and night by 120 monitors in inflatable boats. *Surrounded Islands* was a work of art underlining the various elements and ways in which the people of Miami live, between land and water.



Christo and Jeanne-Claude

Christo Javacheff and Jeanne-Claude de Guillebon were both born in 1935, he in Bulgaria, and she in Morocco. Originally working under Christo's name, they later credited their installations to both "Christo and Jeanne-Claude".

Christo studied at the Fine Arts Academy in Sofia (1953–56) before defecting to the West, via Prague, in 1957. That year, he spent one semester at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Vienna. He moved to Paris in 1958 and met Jeanne-Claude, who had earned her baccalaureate in Latin and philosophy from the University of Tunis in 1952. They would later marry and drop their surnames.

Indebted to Vladimir Tatlin's Constructivist edict "real materials in real space," Christo's first artworks, dating from 1958, consist of appropriated everyday objects such as bottles, cans, furniture, and oil drums wrapped in canvas, bundled in twine, and occasionally overlaid with automobile paint. His first solo exhibition, at Galerie Haro Lauhus in Cologne in June 1961, included his inaugural collaboration

with Jeanne-Claude (though she would not publicly acknowledge her role in their creations until 1994), *Dockside Packages*, a collection of draped oil barrels and rolls of industrial paper arranged outside the gallery along a dock. That same year, the couple made their first attempt at exploring their aesthetic vocabulary on a monumental scale with *Project for a Wrapped Public Building*, in which they proposed shrouding an unspecified parliamentary edifice, the quintessential symbol of public architecture, in fabric tied down with metal cables. Never realised, the project exists in the form of a photographic collage with an explanatory text by the artists.

Throughout the 1960s, Christo and Jeanne-Claude outlined proposals for similar projects, often involving iconic buildings, like the *École Militaire* station of the Paris Métro (1961). They saw their dreams come to fruition in the summer of 1968, when they received permission to carry out three of their undertakings: *Wrapped Fountain*, Piazza Mercato, Spoleto, Italy, 1968; *Wrapped Medieval Tower*, Spoleto, Italy, 1968; and *Wrapped Kunsthalle*,

Bern, Switzerland, 1968. The following year, they cloaked both the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago and a mile-long section of the Australian coastline at Little Bay, north of Sydney. Covered with vast quantities of light-coloured fabric, battened down using elaborate systems of cables, ropes, and knots, these architectural and natural forms were defamiliarised, transformed into ghostly presences that momentarily disrupted their surroundings.

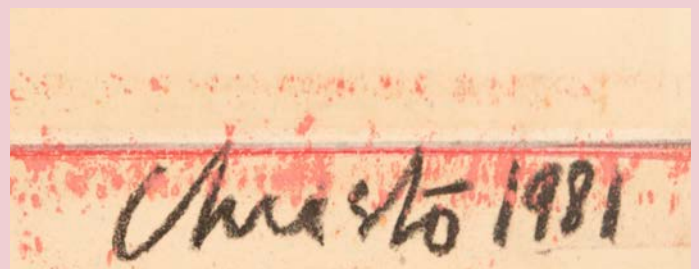
Beginning in 1970, the artists executed numerous other projects, all of which became icons of environmental art: Valley Curtain, Grand Hogback, Rifle, Colorado, 1970–72, a curtain of orange nylon suspended across a valley; Running Fence, Sonoma and Marin Counties, California, 1972–76, more than twenty-four miles of white nylon fabric snaking across the countryside; Surrounded Islands, Biscayne Bay, Greater Miami, Florida, 1980–83, around six and a half million square feet of bright pink fabric floating around eleven islands; The Pont Neuf Wrapped, Paris, 1975–85, honey-hued fabric shrouding the city's oldest bridge; The Umbrellas, Japan–USA, 1984–91, a scattering of 3,100 blue and yellow umbrellas in the valleys around Ibaraki prefecture, Japan, and Tejon Pass, California; Wrapped Reichstag, Berlin, 1971–95, the celebrated German government building swathed in silver fabric; and The Gates, Central Park, New York City, 1979–2005, more than 7,500 metal frames fitted with saffron fabric panels and arranged along some

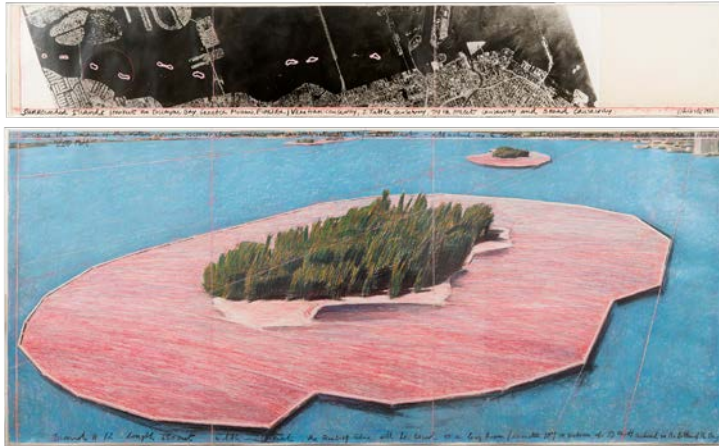
twenty-three miles of walkway in Central Park. Due to the staggering cost and increasing complexity of these ventures, in terms of technical know-how as well as the administrative and environmental hurdles the artists were obligated to surmount, realisation often took years, even decades.

In his solo work, Christo conceived projects, some existing on paper only, in which found objects—from magazines, newspapers, and street signs, to nude female models, telephones, computers, and automobiles—are wrapped in fabric or plastic and then twined. These assemblages embody many of the themes Christo and Jeanne-Claude explored in their artistic partnership, among them the opposition between the familiar and the uncanny, the veiled and the exposed, the built and the natural environments, utility and futility, permanence and ephemerality.

Major exhibitions of the artists' work have been organised by the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston (1979), Museum Ludwig in Cologne (1981), Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art (1990), Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin (2001), and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (2004). Jeanne-Claude died in 2009; Christo in 2020.

L'Arc de Triomphe, Wrapped, a planned work by Christo and Jeanne-Claude, went ahead posthumously in Paris in September 2021.





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