



Christo and Jeanne-Claude: An Authorized Biography

Burt Chernow

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For their sheer scale and breathtaking audacity, their works have made them among the most celebrated and controversial artists in the world. Valley Curtain stretched 1,250 feet across a valley in Rifle, Colorado; Wrapped Coast covered a mile and a half of Australian coastline with a million square feet of fabric; The Umbrellas deployed 3,100 umbrellas set in Japan and California, each nearly twenty feet tall; Surrounded Islands encircled eleven islands in Biscayne Bay, Florida with six and a half million square feet of bright pink fabric; and Wrapped Reichstag enveloped the entire German parliament in shimmering silver fabric.

For more than forty years, these and many other works by Christo and Jeanne-Claude have reconceived the art of the possible, turned natural and human monuments-streets, bridges, hills, trees, buildings, parks, and islands-into sculptures and paintings, and created dazzling new landscapes and startling new vistas. Often requiring years, even decades, of preparation and planning, these works-not merely feats of aesthetic daring but engineering and organizational marvels-exist for only a few weeks or less. Yet what makes these transient creations linger forever in the mind is their overwhelming and magisterial beauty. They are, in every sense, transformative, and, for the millions who have experienced them in person, unforgettable.

Christo and Jeanne-Claude have been the frequent subjects of films, videos, catalogues, cartoons, monographs, exhibitions, and editorials. Until this biography by Burt Chernow, however, written with the full cooperation of the artists, nothing has connected the intimate details of their lives and the spectacular dimensions of their projects. Christo, the penniless Bulgarian refugee who made his way to Paris during the 1950s, and Jeanne-Claude, the socialite daughter of a prominent French general, seemed an unlikely couple, yet together they forged one of the most enduring partnerships in contemporary art. When they arrived in New York in 1964, Christo was already becoming well known in avant-garde circles for his wrappings of everyday objects; Jeanne-Claude acted as manager, dealer, and accountant. Over time, as Chernow reveals, the fusion of their prodigious gifts-his drawings and her ability to draw things together-produced the works for which today they are known the world over.

Chernow recounts their rise from relative obscurity to international renown, revealing both the sources of their art and the heights to which it has quite literally aspired. An epilogue by Wolfgang Volz, a longtime and close collaborator of the artists, as well as their exclusive photographer, provides a fascinating insider's view of what it is like to work, and dream, with them. *Christo and Jeanne-Claude* is an indelible portrait of the artists and their work, and a moving account of an extraordinary couple.

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