

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH CHRISTO AND JEANNE-CLAUDE

SUBJECT: CHRISTO AND JEANNE-CLAUDE, WORLD-RENOWNED CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS, WILL ADDRESS A LUNCHEON

MODERATOR: SYLVIA SMITH, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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**SYLVIA SMITH:** (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon. My name is Sylvia Smith. I'm the president of the National Press Club and I'm the Washington editor of *The Ft. Wayne Journal Gazette*.

We're the world's leading professional organization for journalists. And on behalf of our 3,500 members worldwide, I'd like to welcome and our guests in the audience today. I'd especially like to welcome the art students and faculty from St. Paul School for Girls in Brooklynville, Maryland. I'd also like to welcome those of you who are watching on C-Span or listening on XM Satellite Radio.

Here at the Press Club, we're celebrating our 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, and have rededicated ourselves to a commitment to the future of journalism through informative programming, journalism education, and fostering a free press worldwide. For more information about the Press Club, please visit us at [www.press.org](http://www.press.org).

We're looking forward to today's speech, and afterward, I'll ask as many questions from the audience as time permits.

I'd also like to introduce our head table and ask them to stand briefly when their names are called. From your right, I have Skip Kaltenheuser, a freelance writer; Doris Margolis, president of Editorial Associates, Maureen Groppe, Washington correspondent for Gannett News Service; Bob Madigan, WTOP's Man About Town; Melissa Charbonneau, the vice chairwoman of the Press Club Speakers Committee.

And skipping over our speaker for just a moment, Mary Lou Donahue, producer and editor of *Artistically Speaking*, and the Press Club Speakers Committee member who arranged today's luncheon. Thank you very much, Mary Lou. Rick Dunham, Washington bureau chief of *The Houston Chronicle*, and a former president of the Press Club; Barbara Bahny-David, the director of public relations for the Willard InterContinental Hotel in Washington, right across the street; Rod Kuckro, chief editor of Platts McGraw-Hill; and Larry Arnold, an editor at Bloomberg. Welcome everyone. (Applause.)

Few people outside the art world could produce a ready definition of environmental installation art. But if you mention the saffron-colored flags of New York's Central Park or the pink polypropylene wrapped around eleven islands in Miami's Biscayne Bay, you'll have an immediate mental picture. They saw the photos in *Time* magazine, the TV news, or their hometown paper, and they won't quickly have forgotten it.

However, they won't be able to plan a trip to see either of those, or any of the other past creations of Christo and Jeanne-Claude. The large-scale works these two artists produce are designed to be temporary, unlike artists whose legacies live as paintings in museums, films in Netflix, or sculptures in public squares. The artistic output of Christo and Jeanne-Claude melt away or are removed.

Christo once told an interviewer that, "It takes a much greater courage to create things to be gone than to create things that will remain." Christo and Jeanne-Claude were both born on the same day – June 13, 1935. They met in Paris in 1958 when Christo was commissioned to paint a portrait of Jeanne-Claude's mother. It was fate.

Their collaboration on installation artwork is legendary. In an interview with the *Journal of Contemporary Art*, Christo said all he does solo are the drawings. Jeanne-Claude said all she does solo is pay the bills and pay the taxes. When it comes to art, they said, all else is a joint effort.

At times, their art has faced objections from environmentalists. And there are always headaches over cost. They pay for all their own projects, no sponsors. Partly as a result, the results take years, even decades from original idea to

completion. Today, they will tell us about two of their works in progress. The U.S.-based project is called the Over The River Project” nearly six miles of silvery translucent fabric panels will be suspended almost horizontally over the Arkansas River in Colorado. When it is complete, probably in 2012, viewers from above will see a luminous fabric river over the water. Viewers from the riverside or on the water will see the play of light and shadow through the fabric.

The Phillips Collection here in Washington is presenting an exhibit on Over The River which is on view until January 25<sup>th</sup>. Please help me welcome to the National Press Club podium, Christo and Jeanne-Claude. (Applause.)

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** Thank you. We’re very happy to be here, indeed. Madame President has said everything. I think we can leave. But if you want to know more, of course, we have a website, [www.christojeanneclaude.net](http://www.christojeanneclaude.net).

**CHRISTO:** Now, the Over The River project was well described in the exhibition on the Phillips Collection, opened October 11, 2008, and finish on January 25, 2009, is exhibition translating the work in progress since 1992. Finding the right river, we drive about 15,000 miles in the Rocky Mountains, investigating 89 rivers--

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** We didn’t drive. We were driven. Christo doesn’t drive.

**CHRISTO:** And from these 89 rivers, we have six possible choices, 1994. But like all our project, they’re intertwined. We’ll start to work on project in 1971, involving the wrapping of the Reichstag, but finally after three refused in 1992, there was a chance to get permission. We stopped work on Over The River and wrapped Reichstag in 1995.

But to Colorado, our chief engineer, director of construction, Vince Davenport, we start back to this--

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** --who is sitting right there--

**CHRISTO:** We start to work on these six rivers to find who is the most suitable for our project. After several days, actually two weeks of investigations, we come to consensus that best site for our project would be Arkansas River in the distant slope of the Rocky Mountains between-- west from Canon City for 40 miles, and east from Salida.

The biggest difficulty of all our projects, to get permission. Everything in the world is owned by somebody. There are no one square meters, is not owned by somebody. In the case of the Arkansas River Project, entire site, the 40 miles,

is belong to United States Federal government, American taxpayers, and, of course, Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management. In the late '90s, we spend a lot of time proposing the project, introducing the project to community there and start working with the Clinton Administration that time, the late '90s. But early 2000, 2001, friend of ours was elected Mayor of New York City who was very helpful to finish the project we start in 1979. I hope all this give ...(inaudible). That was The Gates project for Central Park, which originated in '79, but was refused by the city of New York in 1981.

When Michael R. Bloomberg was elected Mayor of New York City, we were hoping that very much that we can pull out that project. We concentrated our resources, Vince Davenport and Jonita Davenport, our project director, they moved from Seattle to New York. And actually they build The Gates in 2005.

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** That's where they learned to stop sleeping at night.

**CHRISTO:** After The Gates were finished, we come back to Colorado and we working on permission. Now, why that exhibition is here in the Phillips Collection? Not only is the exhibition of works of art, of preparatory drawings, a study I do for that project, but also the real components of the project, how the project will be built, the real physical material of the project, just about anchor position frame, the fabric panels, the hooks, the anchors, very many photographs of our friend Wolfgang Volz, telling the story of project for all of 15 years, and of course, many original works. Now, how we have money to build--

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** I think you're being boring, darling. (Laughter.)

**CHRISTO:** How we have money to build our project? A secretary, our president of the Press Club was saying that we don't accept sponsors or any donation. The money come from the work of art I make with my own hand in my studio in Manhattan. I am 73 years-old. And all works of art is done by my own hand. I do not have assistant. Ask some artist to tell you that. I do the drawing and sketches, a preparatory study. They're done all before the project. And we sell these original works to collectors and museums around the world. And with that, we can pay for the project.

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** Forgot to tell you that we will gladly answer any questions except no questions about politics, no questions about religion, no vague question about generalities, and of course not about other artists.

**CHRISTO:** In the Phillips Collection, there are a number of original works. These work really affect also evolution of the project, to very simple idea to final location to the site and refine the project precisely. Now, we are saying

that we work on several projects simultaneously. And each of these projects have his own origin.

Another project is The Mastaba of United Arab Emirates. We start to work in 1977. That is a structure of 410,000 oil barrels. When you stack horizontally barrels, you create a shape which is called 'mastaba'. Is not a pyramid. You have two vertical wall, two slanted wall, and truncate top. That particular shape can be created by stacking the barrels. And that project involves height of 500 feet tall, thousand feet on vertical wall, and 750 feet on slanted wall.

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** That shape can be created, not only with oil barrels, anything cylindrical – bottles of red wine, French, pencils, cigarettes, anything cylindrical stuck one upon another will always give you a 60 degree angle.

**CHRISTO:** We start work on that project in 1977 and between that time and '82, we spent seven trips in the United Arab Emirates. I vividly remember when we were saying that we go to Abu Dhabi, to, "Where? Where is that place?" Today, everybody know, where is that place.

But when the Iraq and Iran war start, we stop to go there. But after 2005, we again working on that project. Now, how this project develop? You should understand, this project, the idea, something come from our heart and our head, never the ideas of somebody else. There are two ways to see the project – there on the rural space or urban space. For example, The Gates project was urban project. Like, the Berlin, the Reichstag project was urban.

Over The River or The Umbrellas, or Running Fence, they're rural projects. And the project is initiated and lone creation to that particular area.

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** I was wondering, with Madame, the president here, since she said so much about us before, but we don't have to say. Maybe we can give a little bit more time to the questions. Is that all right with you, Madame?

**MS. SMITH:** Are you ready?

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** Yes, we are ready.

**MS. SMITH:** Thank you very much. Our first question is, how do your projects challenge people's notion of art? Most especially, how does the temporal nature of your art affect its viewers?

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** We of course cannot ask five million visitors who saw the wrapped Reichstag in Berlin in '95 the answer to this question. We

cannot talk to five million people. And we ourselves are not Germans, for instance. We do not know how the Germans saw it. But we--

**CHRISTO:** No, each project, all these projects, they're bigger than our imagination. They're so complex, that is impossible to make provision, how the project--

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** See, he, too doesn't know the answer.

**CHRISTO:** I come to the exact answer. The Umbrellas project was a project in two parts, simultaneously. There was a yellow umbrellas in California and blue umbrellas in Japan. And this project was designed to highlight similarity, difference between the two richest countries in the world. They're giant umbrellas, 20 feet tall, 29 feet diameter, like a roof, like houses without walls. And the bottom umbrellas were built, base, like sitting platform. In California, the people were driving near the yellow umbrella. They were putting the blanket in that base, very large base, and they was picnicking into the yellow umbrellas.

In Japan, they was doing the same things there. Arriving in the blue umbrellas. Instead of that, they were removing their shoes, and they start to walk on the sitting platform, because that was the floor of the house. In Japan, you do not walk with shoes in the house. Basically the project has developed his own interpretation that we never thinking about that.

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** I will now answer about the temporal nature of our works of art. We wish our works to be temporary. It is our decision, because for over 5,000 years, artists of the past have tried to input, to put into their work of art a great variety of different qualities. And they have worked in marble, in bronze, in oil paint, in fresco. They have created different qualities by making creations that were mythological or religious or portraits or landscapes.

However, there is one quality they have never used before, before us. And that is the quality of love and tenderness that we human beings, we have for what does not last. For instance, we have love and tenderness for childhood because we know childhood will not last. We have love and tenderness for our lives because we know it will not last. This quality of love and tenderness, we wish to give it to our work of art as an additional aesthetic quality.

**MS. SMITH:** I was interested in how you described the reaction of the yellow and blue umbrellas in the different countries. Were you surprised at all by that response by the country? And have you ever been absolutely flabbergasted at the reaction one of your installations has brought to its viewers?

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** Well, in the case of the umbrellas, which you know was a work of art in two parts at the same time across the Pacific in the two richest countries in the world, and trying to show the similarities and differences, we had been well prepared through the years while we were trying to get the permit in both countries. And getting the permit is always the most difficult part of all our projects. But we had been prepared for a lot of differences. I'll give you a short anecdote.

We had to recruit young people to come and work at the project, not volunteers. Everybody is paid, except my mother. And so we were going in United States, California, mostly universities, lecturing, and the same in Japan. And one day we lecture in Los Angeles. And after the color slides, the first question from the student comes, "How much will it cost." So we explain and who will pay for it. Of course we will pay for everything, as with all our projects, without sponsors.

And then we fly to Tokyo. And the next day, we lecture at Tokyo University, color slides again, question and answers. First question from a Japanese student: "Mr. Christo, why blue and yellow?" We saw the difference.

**MS. SMITH:** Well, since you brought up permits before color, let me bring up the permit question, too. Do you have all the needed permits and permissions for Over The River.

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** No, we do not. We are working at it.

**MS. SMITH:** What is left to get done.

**CHRISTO:** This is complex project because the Federal government have a special bureau in the Department of Interior called Bureau of Land Management with the care by-- for the Federal land. They lease the land to the county, to state, to different agency, and to private corporation.

In the case of Over The River, we need to get permission from BLM, called Bureau of Land Management, instead of--

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** --BLM in Washington, in Denver, and locally.

**CHRISTO:** --state of Colorado, eleven governmental agency, and two county, Fremont and Chaffee County, and also the two private entity. The north banks of the river is leased from the Federal government to Union Pacific Railroad Company in Omaha, Nebraska.

Now what our project director, Jonita Davenport, do, that they try to put together all these entity that we can-- permitting process can work simultaneously. If not, we're too long. But the most important one is the Federal government. We, myself and Jeanne-Claude, our organization requests to the Federal government that we like to have environmental impact statement instead of environmental impact assessment. Because environmental impact statement, totally, we investigated the impact of the project--

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** It's more complete and costs much more.

**CHRISTO:** And we work very hard in the last one and a half years. And in the exhibition, the Phillips Collection, it received a volume of our planning in the same report, our application to the Federal government with 2,029 pages. You can find it in BLM, in the website. And it costs us one and a half million dollars. That is application. Now, the Federal government--

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** --and it's not a Gutenberg--

**CHRISTO:** And Federal government right now, they hire independent company to prepare and to review and prepare finally draft, environmental impact statement, go to hearings and decision making. And that is the process who can take within 18 months to two years, we hope shorter. And the exhibition is here, very important, because we hope that number of the officers of the Federal government, especially the Department of Interior, consider exhibition. We can articulate the project to them and to enlight (sic) them better what the project is.

When we get the permission, the project have two stages. One stage is that-- This is the long project, is the 40 miles. And this 40 miles-- We install these 5.9 miles of fabric panels in many location---

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** --with interruptions.

**CHRISTO:** And we need to install over 9,000 anchors in very precise place. You know, these fabric panel, they absolutely are-- need to have a parallel cables. These anchors should be very precisely positioned. And we try to-- We work with the local authority that we not disturb the tourist traffic in the summer, that we work in the north bank of the river where the railroad tracks. And our chief engineer, director of construction, Vince Davenport, needs about two years to install these anchor. They will not be not visible. Actually, they are drilling small, three-inches bar in the soil, only two things sticking out.

The final installation, relatively short operation. The first, the special, these anchor position frame, who one of them is exhibit in Phillips Collection, will be installed by professional people. After, the cable will be installed by

professional people who install cables. And finally, the hooking of the fabric will be done by the non-skilled worker who we hire, around 600 non-skilled workers. They go to trainings. The hooking will be happen in the north bank of the river. You can see that in the exhibition very well.

Once that has been done, we unfurl the fabric over the water, because the fabric is only above the water. And the project will be exhibit. We ask permission for exhibition of that project for two weeks, between July 15th and August 15th, a summer. Now, all our projects, their season project. The Gates project in Central Park was a winter project because we live to have leafless tree, because a leafless tree, you can see the Gates. While the Miami project, Surrounded Island, not the wrap island, Surrounded Island project in Florida in 1983 was spring project before the hurricane in Miami coming down, while Over The River is a summer project.

We choose Arkansas River. One of the reason we choose Arkansas River, because is most rafted river in United States. They have 300,000 rafters without us. It's very gentle rafting. Is category two, is familiar, or a few locations, category three. And it will take about one and a half hours to see the project from above, driving on Highway 50, and about five hours to raft inside the project.

**MS. SMITH:** I'm wondering if part of the art is actually the process of bringing it to completion through the permitting process. In other words, you have local hearings or the local hearings are held from various permitting agencies. Is somehow the participation of people in the local communities part of this whole art?

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** Yes, indeed. The process is part of the work of art. But it's not the aim. In human terms, for instance, the nine-month pregnancy of a woman is part of the having a baby. But it's definitely not the aim. And therefore, for us, it's the same. The process is part of the work of art, but it's not the aim.

**CHRISTO:** The project is really revealed through the permitting process. We know very well (again, back to Phillips Collection exhibition) the beginning is very clumsy, very schematic idea what the project will look. But these 2,029 pages do not exist in 1992. The complexity of project, all the richness of the project is revealed. Basically the project build his own identity through the permitting process. And that identity, so incredibly powerful. And this is why this project carries so much energy. This is the reason we never do the same things again. Only once we did Running Fence. There will be no another Running Fence. There's no another Gates. Each project is totally new image, totally new experience.

**MS. SMITH:** Can you please contrast the local opposition to the Over The River project with that of other projects? Is it more? Is it less? Is it more related to the environment? Is it somehow aesthetic?

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** Yes, even though we never do twice the same work, and we present a new image to new people. And it is human that those who do not understand the project are afraid of it. And that has been true for all of our project. But I'll be happy to contrast Over The River with the other projects because in Colorado, on myself personally, not Christo, have received the biggest compliments any human being has ever received.

We were lecturing and after the lecture, from the group for us, big group, great applause, of course all the group is separate, they all stick together to be naysayers. A little old lady got up. She pointed at me and she said, "You are going to cause an earthquake." Boy, was I proud.

**MS. SMITH:** Questioner says, as you create works of beauty out of love, are you affected by the evils in the world while you are working on your projects? And if so, how?

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** We say we will not talk about politics. (Laughter.)

**CHRISTO:** No, no. No.

**MS. SMITH:** Only politics are evil? (Laughter.)

**CHRISTO:** All these projects is something from us, you know? Each project have the origin. Is long story to tell you, why we did the Reichstag, why we did the Pont Neuf there. Not secret, we can tell you. But it's all-- These projects have its own relation. Before everything they're works of art. I hope you understand. They are works of art. And if you enjoy art-- It's, like, you need to learn it to enjoy the art. Like, what is the-- sonatas(?) from Mozart, you cannot-- there are no messages, no anything. But I live in Communist country. I escape--

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** Not today.

**CHRISTO:** No. I escape from Communist country during the Hungarian revolution. And I escape to be free artist, really free artist outside of propaganda. And I will not do anything for propaganda, any propaganda, political, commercial, or religious. It's all propaganda. All these projects is involved with art. Art is something who is absolutely-- not necessarily, totally useless. The world can live without Valley Curtain, without Running Fence. Nobody need these project. We need them because they're(?) artists. This is the first origin of art. Artists, you have this unstoppable urge to this project.

And when they realize this project carry that total freedom-- They're not there because some president of republic like to have them or some minister of the culture or some society or groups, because this is instoppable (sic). And when they realize our project carry that political freedom, even ourselves, we do not own these project. Nobody can buy these projects. Nobody can commercialize these project. Nobody can charge tickets for these project. They(?) go(?) on(?). And that is translate that freedom, because all our-- the freedom is enemy of the possession and possession is equal of permanence. This is why the work of art should go.

**MS. SMITH:** But you say that art is not political. But what you just made--

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** No, we didn't say that. We said we will not talk about politics. We were not talking about other artists.

**MS. SMITH:** But isn't what you just said a strong political statement about freedom? And isn't all art really a statement about the environment that we live in?

**CHRISTO:** What I like to say is basically really the aesthetic-- The visual arts is like-- You need to enjoy it aesthetic. What's aesthetic meaning? Proportion, colors, movement, relation of space, moving. All that is something, you need to enjoy it. Like very much, you cannot enjoy music, contemporary or classical music if you don't-- Your ear enjoying things, for you, probably only noises. Artists do the same things. But of course you should still understand, we are doing work-- What's doing? We are borrowing space. You know? The work involving with space. We're borrowing that space. We inherit everything, what is inherent to that space to become part of the work of art. We do not invent ecology in Biscayne Bay, what's in Biscayne Bay. We don't invent the politics in the Reichstag. What's in the Reichstag is not illustration of the politics, is the real things.

And all these project carry these multi facets, that we, ourselves, even cannot articulate what they meaning. They're so complex. They're rich. But of course we inherit all these meaningful elements to be part of the work of art.

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** --and which we discover ourselves during the time of the process because we did not know all those in advance.

**CHRISTO:** For example, for the Reichstag coming, you know, it's very simple. It's simple logic. All(?) that(?) project(?) went(?) into(?) Haffa (?) to find who is the landlords. In the case of the Berlin parliament, the Reichstag was

owned by 80 million Germans. We cannot talk to 80 million Germans. Fortunately, there was represented by 660 deputy in the parliament of Germany. With our project, like the work on Walls, ourselves, we spent countless hours discussing to this deputy, convincing that they should vote for our project. The chancellor of Germany, that time Prime Minister Kohl, was terribly against the project. And he moved the permitting process of the Reichstag in high level.

In the beginning, the Reichstag, wrapping of the Reichstag can be signed by the president of the parliament. But when the chancellor saw that we get the permission, he moved to be signed by the consortium of the vice president of the parliament. He understand that probably will win there. He ask us to go to the full debate in the parliament and roll call vote. This is the first time in history of art, the work, existence of the work of art was happen and the full debate on the parliament, 70 minutes debate. And we defeated Chancellor Kohl with 69 vote majority. About 70 deputy of his conservative party vote for us.

And during the debate-- Actually, you can see in the film of the Hissen brothers, during the debate, to vote in the parliament of Germany, you vote with little credit cards. White credit card is--

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** --abstention--

**CHRISTO:** --abstention. Blue is yes. Red is no. And Mr. Kohl was marking his red card—

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** For 70 minutes.

**CHRISTO:** For 70 minutes. And of course now, what's happened? That by the enormous power, not an insistent of Kohl to stop the project, he make the project infinitely more important. And often in our meetings in the Over The River when we have opposition, one side, I say, "Actually I'm very happy that you talking so much against that. That make the project more important."

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** That doesn't make them happy.

**MS. SMITH:** I understand that the Over The River project's price tag is about \$50 million dollars. We had quite a number of questions of people who'd like to know how you go about raising that kind of money.

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** First of all, we do not raise money. When General Motors sells a truck, they are not raising money. But we do sell works of art which we own, created by the hand of Christo, and works from the '50s, the '60, et cetera, until today. And they are usually wrapped objects or packages which we have in our storages. Because when we were young, nobody wanted to buy them,

so we kept them. But today, the Smithsonian Museum of American Art has an early package. The National Gallery in Washington has two early packages, amongst many other works, et cetera.

And then there are the preparatory works which you can see at the Phillips Collection, which are drawings that Christo creates to show what we are planning to do. But of course it also shows the evolution of the project. The very early 1992 preparatory works were not even called *Over The River*. We hadn't found the title. They are titled "The River". And then we worked and worked, and you can see in the exhibition the title comes, *Over The River*. And what river, we don't know. There are preparatory works for four different rivers. The Arkansas River is one of them.

Now those preparatory works, Christo does alone in the studio, and the early works, we sell them ourselves to private collectors, museums, galleries, and art dealers, and corporate collections. And with the money, we can spend it at building our work of art. The only one that's not happy is our son. By the way, this name is Cyril. He's 48 years-old. He's a published poet, five books, and one book about Africa, *Lost Africa*.

**MS. SMITH:** Does the subject of the oil barrels, which is the subject of one of your works in progress, have a different meaning today than it did when you conceived it? And has that meaning changed for you over time?

**CHRISTO:** There's a lovely story of that project. You know, I did sculptures who can be inside in room and outside the sculptures in the late '50s, early '60s and they are in some museums around the world. And I did the first temporary Mastaba installation in Studio of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia in 1968.

During that late '60, always the idea to do larger structure of oil barrels. And of course the only area can this possibly be done was ... (inaudible) in state of United States who was deeply involved with the barrels was Texas. And with the late Mr. John Dominil(?), we try to propose that project within Houston, in Galveston, go nowhere.

In early '70, we try to do that Mastaba again. And the country who have the relation to oil production was in Holland ... (inaudible) when Royal Dutch, Shell, and queen of Holland have a lot of interests in oil. Nothing happened.

Now, in the mid-'70s, a friend of ours who was the foreign minister of France, Mr. de Guiringaud during the Jescard (?) administration, was coming often to our home when he was in New York. He was saying the only place in the world that project can have chance is the countries deeply related to oil

production. Now the project was involved with oil production, this is--There was a little federation of ...(inaudible) who was just created in 1972. You know, there was British protectorate. And to go at that time at Abu Dhabi, you need to have a sponsor. And there was no way to go tourist. And I remember vividly the French ambassador, the foreign minister of France was sponsor and we arrive in Abu Dhabi.

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** --for the visa--

**CHRISTO:** --for the visa, to have a visa. We are not accepted to be artists. We need to be professionally described like architects. Myself and Jeanne-Claude, and our engineers, we arrive in Abu Dhabi 1979 and we start negotiating with actually the founder of the Emirate who we never met, but his advisors, Sheikh Zayed Al Nahyan. And we spend a lot of time working with engineers and hoping to move the project, until the thing became very nasty in mid-'80s.

But the project generated(?) no changes. All the same is the project involving-- Basically what we say, we taking that ordinary, dull oil barrels-- But of course they're with multi-colors. And you can see in some of the images outside the vertical wall was 500 feet tall, is like Islamic colorful mosaic of multi-colored barrels. And the slanted wall is more monochromatic, orange and yellow. And is the project to be built outside of Abu Dhabi in the inland direction to the antique quarter, the famous dunes, and is this destination to see(?) the project. The project, basically, there are no change since 1979.

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** While our friend, Monsieur de Guiringaud explained to us why the United Arab Emirates, because the rulers of many other countries in the Gulf, they have oil, but there is-- there was and still is, a big difference with the United Arab Emirate. For instance, when Queen Elizabeth, on her yacht, visited the Gulf country, she stop at the harbor of Saudi Arabia where the ruler greeted her by saying, "We salute you and welcome you, Elizabeth, king of England."

But when she came to Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Zayed was there with Sheikha Fatima, his wife. She drives her own car and they welcomed, "We salute you, Elizabeth, queen of England." There is a difference.

**MS. SMITH:** You bring up that issue and someone had asked me to ask you, Jeanne-Claude, what it's been like over the years of your collaboration as an artistic couple when in fact your husband, in the earlier years, got more attention or the only attention, than you.

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** When we arrived in United States-- Sorry. We never arrived in United States. When we arrived in New York, Manhattan, we

were young and we knew that the art world locally would not be at the harbor to welcome one more European artist emigrating. They had their own. And we knew that it is very hard for one foreign artist or artists to establish oneself. If we had said two, forget it.

So we decided to lie and we said that Christo was the artist and Jeanne-Claude is the administrator, the organizer, the art dealer. And it served us very, very well.

Many years, our friends and collaborators of course always called us Christo and Jeanne-Claude, but not the media. And in 1993, we decided that we were not mature enough, now that Christo's hair had turned gray and mine had turned red that we could finally tell the truth. And that is why my name appeared.

**CHRISTO:** ...(inaudible)

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** Oh, yes. As you can read on our website, there are three things we do not do together. We do everything together as far as the art is concerned. But I do not make drawings because I wasn't brought up as an artist. I do not know how to draw. Christo puts on paper our ideas, sometimes his ideas, sometimes my idea. So that, we do not do together. We never fly in the same aircraft. We go to the same place and we land up in the same hotel room, but two separate aircrafts. And the third thing we do not do together (and you mentioned it) is that all those 50 years together, I never gave to Christo the joy and pleasure of working with our accountant.

**MS. SMITH:** A number of people have questions about the cloth that you use. Where is it made? And what do you do with it when it's over? Is it recycled? In fact, are all the materials recycled?

**CHRISTO:** We use industrial fabric or industrial cloth. We cannot use cloth for the clothing, the fabric. And they're all manmade, artificial fiber. For example, all the sand bags, when you have Mississippi River floods, they don't—In cotton and linen, they don't—An artificial fiber. And we use different fiber for different project — polypropylene, nylon, Dacron. And they're fabricated-- Actually industrial textile is much bigger industry than the clothing textile. They are fabricated for environmental purposes, construction purposes, agricultural purposes.

And each project have his own type of fabric. In the case of Over The River, we're using a polypropylene, who is the fiber especially twisted and is loosely woven. Actually you can see two fabric panels in exhibition, the Phillips Collection. And that fabric is not color silver. It's pulverized with aluminum, like aluminum. You have this incredible quality.

Now all this, what fabric we use, is a slow process. In the beginning, is the cloth, but to choose finally how the project is built, all the time-- Because I say before, we never do the same things again. We cannot make the decision in the studio. We need to build life-sized test in secret place.

And late '90s, before we get the permission, in private ranch near the Colorado/Wyoming border, we did four life-sized tests, meaning we have a five, six fabric panel in one-to-one scale, and with different type of cloth, different type of woving (sic), different type of sewing, different type of hookings, all that different. And we can learn many, many things we should not do or what should do.

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** But for instance, for a project, we want the fabric to be very strong, which was nylon, like Valley Curtain, Running Fence, The Umbrellas and The Gates. But nylon does not float. So that is not what we can use when we want to surround eleven islands in Florida with floating, pink floating fabric. So each time it's different qualification that we need.

**CHRISTO:** The fabric is the less expensive story of that project. The most complex, expensive part is the lever(?). But once the fabric is woven for us, will need to be sewn. The biggest amount of cloth we use was Surrounded Island, was six and a half million square feet of fabric. And I remember vividly, there was no factory in the world to make the sewing, because this huge area-- huge parts of fabric was so enormous that our building contractor rented blimp hangar. We built railroad tracks and our sewing machine was on railroad tracks, sewing the huge fabric panels, because they were long, long part(?).

But all the material is recycled. Through the fabrication of the project, we work with a company. We buy material and go back to recycling. The fabric of the Reichstag, for example, who was the one million square feet of this heavy woven polypropylene, was recycled. It was shredded and became under-layer of carpet. But the much more valuable material, like for The Gates project, we bought 5,000 tons of steel, without meaning to, and actually two-thirds of the steel of Eiffel Tower. And these 5,000 tons of steel, we bought enough that they were recycled to become steel(?). In The Gates, there was a lot of aluminum connection, but you cannot see them under the saffron color poles. That became aluminum(?). All the really-- Our building contractor, our chief director of the project, Jonita Davenport, Vince Davenport, they arrange that the company who buy, they would take it back and they will use it for recycling.

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** But next time you drink a can of soda or hear an airplane, you will think, "Maybe that was melted and it came from one of the projects."

**MS. SMITH:** The fabric for Over The River, is that being built or made in a factory in the U.S. or overseas?

**CHRISTO:** Okay, that is good story, because the Valley Curtain project in Colorado, 1972, was made in United States. I don't mention what company. Probably is not proper. The Running Fence was made in United States. Very funny. This is another—We have time? Our ... (inaudible) was met in the United States. This is in the '70s. And now we are in early '80s with Surrounded Island. And we're using this huge amount of fabric. And we try to make it in United States because this is-- the project should be-- especially for transportation, is easy to make in United States.

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** --and cost(?)--

**CHRISTO:** --and the cost. And the company, American company, three American company to come to our place in New York. We discussing. And they find that six and a half million square feet was not enough sufficient to fabricate our fabric.

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** --too small an order--

**CHRISTO:** --too small. This is why we have a German collector, I remember, who links with textile company. And he find German company can fabricate our polypropylene for Surrounded Island. And since Surrounded Island, in 1983, always German company who fabricate our fabrics. Because the small amount, is only German-- They're willing to go to little research. It's not complicated, little improvement of the fabric for our purposes. And this is why the fabric of the Surrounded Island, of the Pont Neuf, of the Reichstag, of the Wrapped Trees, of The Umbrellas, of The Gates was done in Germany. Fabric for Over The River is done in Germany.

**MS. SMITH:** Quite a number of people have asked some variation of this question. How do you feel when a project is finally completed and is being taken down?

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** First of all, when a project is completed, we are exhausted, truly exhausted. But we are also elated because it's a million times more beautiful than our wildest dreams. But at the moment the work is there, our creativity stops. We are no longer creative artists. We become the two bosses of the pick-up the garbage truck. We become, make sure workers have water and raincoats if it starts raining for instance.

And thank god The Gates, we didn't have much of that to do because Vince Davenport and Jonita Davenport were doing all that for us. But in general, it is very exhausting. And after so many years of the process, and we finally see the baby, we, for us, the two of us, three days would be enough. We want to see our work, enjoy it, and go onto the next project. But we cannot be so egoistic. And that is why we leave it usually two weeks.

**MS. SMITH:** No matter what country you've worked in, your art work has required years of permission gathering and public debate. Which country was the most receptive, and what country was the most interesting experience, and why?

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** Well, it's not a country, it's a town, it's a city. Kansas City, Missouri, 1978. We created an exquisite, exquisite work of art called Wrapped Walkways—

**CHRISTO:** Jacob Louis Park.

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** In Jacob Louis Park in the center of Kansas City. It was very beautiful, but you never heard of it because there was no controversy. True.

**CHRISTO:** Most difficult to identify. The most difficult.

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** The most difficult.

**CHRISTO:** It's not second. Did you say that or what?

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** You say it.

**CHRISTO:** The most difficult permission to get for project is a project in Paris, was the Ponte Neuf Wrapped. We start in 1975, take us ten years to get the permission. We need to get permission. The bridge is the old, historical monument, 400 years old, and we needed to get permission from the Mayor of City of Paris, and also the President of government of France, Minister of Culture. That period, Mayor of City of Paris was conservative and he'd like to become a president of France, and he hate the president of France, who was socialist, who was running the country. Meaning that Mr. Chirac and Mr. Mitterrand never agree on anything together.

And that was the most difficult, most complicated, most poignant. And I never like to go through that permitting projects like the Pont Neuf project.

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** It was not the longest time, but it was the most horrible.

**MS. SMITH:** Questioner says, “Suppose there were no issues with approvals, access or security. Is there a project or concept you’d love to try in Washington,” the nation’s capital?

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** No.

**CHRISTO:** Not for the moment, no. Is anything possible. Our project, then, we’re not—We’re slow thinker. We don’t have a—And for our four years, we realize 19 projects and we failed to get permission for 37 projects.

**MS. SMITH:** Of those 37, which one is saddest for you to realize it might not ever be completed?

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** Oh, none. None, because if it had been sad, we would have persisted. You see, sometimes a project is refused, but it remains in our heart and we continue. The Reichstag was refused three times over ten years.

**CHRISTO:** Or more.

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** But it remained in our heart. Sometimes, the project is refused—

**CHRISTO:** Like the Pont Neuf.

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** The Pont Neuf was refused, but it remained in our heart. In 1981, The Gates was refused, but it still was in our heart. But the projects that were refused and were no longer in our heart, we will never do them and it’s not sad at all.

**MS. SMITH:** If you could have one wish location-wise, what would it be, and why?

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** Well, we have two wishes. One is Colorado, one is the United Arab Emirates.

**MS. SMITH:** No more?

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** No.

**CHRISTO:** For the moment, no.

**MS. SMITH:** What strengths or weaknesses do each of you bring to each project?

**CHRISTO:** What strength or--?

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** I don't know.

**CHRISTO:** What is the question?

**MS. SMITH:** The strengths and weaknesses each of you bring to these collaborative projects?

**CHRISTO:** First is during the Phillips Collection exhibition, there will be a movie showing—Twelve movies showing different projects. You can see that real, they are *cinéma vérité* films. Six of these films, they are done by one of the greatest American movie director—The convention movie director, Albert and David Maysles. You know, they did “Give Me Shelter,” the real “Gray Gardens.” And you can see that these films were criticizing ourself nonstop. We're screaming, arguing all the time.

Basically, what's exciting that we work together is that we have always this critical attitude. Usually, artists are alone in his studio, is himself and he decide what to do, ask friends. But basically, he's decision maker. But working together, this constant, constant critical attitude. And that is probably the most resourceful in the—

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** And that is both our strength and our weakness.

**MS. SMITH:** Questioner says, “What advice would you give to a ten year old child who loves art and aspires to be a fine artist?” Painting is her first love.

**CHRISTO:** No, I was five, six years old, living in Bulgaria when my mother saw that I was drawing all the time and she decided that I should have private lessons of art, meaning that after school, I have a private tutor for oil painting, for sculpture, for architecture. Basically, since age of five or six, I try to be artist. Normal family in the United States, they never think art like that. If the child is gifted, he can play musical instrument.

But visual art is exactly the same things. You need to nourish, you need to excite the young person that is exciting to be artist. And this is something, it should start in the family. The people should live that the child is involved with art.

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** While we do not have many ten year old artists coming to us to asking advice, but we have a lot of young artists coming to our home, asking advice. And we always give them the same advice. If you are ready to work 17 hours a day and devote your life to what it is you want to do, and never take a vacation, then you will be able to do what you want. But the difficult part is to know what you want. And once you know, then go ahead and do it.

**MS. SMITH:** We're almost out of time, but before asking the last question, I have a couple of important things to take care of. First, let me remind our members of upcoming luncheons. On October 10<sup>th</sup>, we have Congressman Chris Van Hollen of Maryland, of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee; and Republican Tom Davis of Virginia, who's of the National Republican Campaign Committee. Obviously, they'll be talking about the election. October 23<sup>rd</sup>, Billy Joel, the musician and songwriter, sold out I'm afraid. And October 24<sup>th</sup>, Dan Hess, the CEO of Sprint.

And I'd like to present our guests with the famous National Press Club Mugs.

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** Oh, great. Wow.

**MS. SMITH:** And our last question. Would you share the secret of your enduring professional and personal relationship and fix my curiosity by telling me if those ten wedding rings on your hands have any relevance?

**JEANNE-CLAUDE:** I have not been married ten times. But gold fights arthritis. So does copper, but copper leaves black marks. But this, not married ten times. The secret is not truly a secret and it's something that is free, doesn't cost, you don't have to buy it, and it's called love. That's all.

**MS. SMITH:** Thank you. Thank you very much. You were lovely, thank you so much. Thank you so much to Christo and Jeanne-Claude, and thank you for coming today. I'd also like to thank National Press Club staff members Melinda Cook, Pat Nelson, Joann Booz, and Howard Rothman for organizing today's lunch. And thanks to the NPC Library for its research. The video archive of today's luncheon is provided by the Broadcast Operation Studio of the Press Club.

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Thank you very much. We're adjourned. (Gavel sounds.)

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