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## Artistic Process of Christo and Jeanne-Claude Explored Through Installation of Documentary Photographs in National Gallery of Art Library Installation



Christo and Jeanne-Claude with the finished project *Valley Curtain, Rifle, Colorado, 1970-72*, August 10, 1972, gelatin silver print, Shunk-Kender Photography Collection, Department of Image Collections, National Gallery of Art Library, Gift of the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation in memory of Harry Shunk and János Kender. © Christo. Photograph: Shunk-Kender © J. Paul Getty Trust. All Rights Reserved.

Washington, DC—From 1958 to 1973, Harry Shunk (German, 1924–2006) and János Kender (Hungarian, 1938–2009)—known collectively as Shunk-Kender, a partnership based initially in Paris and later in New York City—photographed the major European and American artists, studios, performances, and exhibitions of the era. A new installation from the National Gallery of Art Library presents selections from these photographs depicting artists Christo (b. 1935) and Jeanne-Claude (1935–2009), project staff, visitors, works of art, and related locations during the 1960s to early 1970s, including extensive documentation of two major site-specific installations, *Wrapped Coast, One Million Square Feet, Little Bay, Sydney, Australia, 1968–69* (1968–1969) and *Valley Curtain, Rifle, Colorado, 1970–72* (1970–1972). ***In the Library: Process and Participation in the Work of Christo and Jeanne-Claude*** will be on view from February 6 to April 14, 2017, in the East Building Study Center.

### About the Installation

Through documentary photographs created at the artists' behest, Shunk-Kender captured the groundbreaking work done by artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude in the 1960s and 1970s. Installation images depict the myriad details of preparation, construction, and final installation as well as the teams of workers that executed the landmark installations.

Shunk-Kender documented all phases of *Wrapped Coast, One Million Square Feet, Little Bay, Sydney, Australia, 1968–69*. Christo and Jeanne-Claude's monumental work of art created for the coast and cliffs of Little Bay near Sydney, Australia. The artists, working with project coordinator John Kaldor (*Wrapped Coast* was the first in a series by Kaldor Public Art Projects) and Major Ninian Melville (retired Army Corps of Engineers), assembled and directed a team of 15 professional rock climbers and 110 local art and architecture student workers, in addition to Australian artists and teachers. Over a period of a month, they wrapped about one and a half miles of coast and cliffs up to 85 feet high with one million square feet of light beige erosion-control fabric and 35 miles of rope. Three-quarters of the way through the project, a storm severely damaged sections of fabric on the wrapped coastline, which required them to be redraped. The artists and their team completed *Wrapped Coast* on October 28, 1969, and the work remained on view for 10 weeks.

As with *Wrapped Coast*, Shunk-Kender played an integral part in the *Valley Curtain, Rifle, Colorado, 1970–72* project team, which included engineers, site supervisors, 35 construction workers, and 64 temporary staff (college students and itinerant art workers). Over a period of two years, they photographed the initial preparation and meetings associated with planning the project. After the construction of the first curtain was destroyed by winds on October 9, 1971, the final curtain was successfully unfurled on August 10, 1972. The completed project existed for only 28 hours before a gale required that it be dismantled.

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Together, Harry Shunk and János Kender were employed by Christo to photograph his earlier works in Paris in the 1960s as well as the beginning of Christo and Jeanne-Claude's work in the United States wrapping public buildings. These monumental projects were installed for a limited time and the artists considered the Shunk-Kender photographs to be an integral part of the record. The documentary images were used in subsequent exhibition announcements and publications. A selection of these earlier works will also be on view.

### **Shunk-Kender Photography Collection**

Harry Shunk and János Kender began working as a photographic team in 1958 and became highly sought-after in the artistic circles of Paris, particularly among artists associated with *nouveau réalisme*, the movement founded by art critic Pierre Restany in 1960. As Shunk-Kender, they photographed the work, events, and exhibitions of Yves Klein, Arman, Jean Tinguely, Niki de Saint Phalle, Raymond Hains, and others. *Valley Curtain* was their last collaborative project as they ended their partnership in 1973. Shunk continued briefly to work with Christo and Jeanne-Claude, as well as documenting the work of other artists. He retained Shunk-Kender's negatives and photographs until his death in 2006.

Between 2008 and 2012, the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation acquired the Harry Shunk Archive, which included the photograph and negative collection of Shunk-Kender as well as Shunk's individual work. After organizing, digitizing, and cataloging the archive, the foundation donated the material in 2014 to a consortium of five institutions: the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Tate, London; Museum of Modern Art, New York; and National Gallery of Art, Washington.

The portion of the Shunk-Kender Photography Collection received by the department of image collections in the National Gallery of Art Library encompasses 2,460 photographs with related digital images, and documents exclusively the work of Christo and Jeanne-Claude, with whom the photographers worked closely throughout their partnership. Some images are credited to Harry Shunk alone, but the majority of the works in the collection are credited to Shunk-Kender. The collection includes materials relating to a range of projects, and is particularly rich in documentation of *Wrapped Coast* and *Valley Curtain*.

Organized by the National Gallery of Art Library and curated by Meg L. Melvin, image specialist for modern art, department of image collections, this exhibition is open from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

### **Library and Rare Books Collection**

The National Gallery of Art Library contains more than 400,000 books and periodicals, including more than 15,000 volumes in the rare books collection, with an emphasis on Western art from the Middle Ages to the present. The National Gallery of Art Library was founded in 1941, the year the Gallery opened to the public. In 1979, with the move to a seven-story facility in the Gallery's new East Building and the establishment of the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts (CASVA), the library broadened its purpose and the scope of its collection. Its goal has been to establish a major national art research center, serving the Gallery's curatorial, educational, and conservation staff, CASVA members, interns, visiting scholars, and researchers in the Washington art community. Call (202) 842-6511 or email [refdesk@nga.gov](mailto:refdesk@nga.gov) for more information.

The library's department of image collections is a study and research center for images of Western art and architecture and is one of the largest of its kind, numbering over 15 million photographs, slides, negatives, microforms, and digital images. The department serves the Gallery's staff, CASVA members, visiting scholars, and qualified researchers. Initial access to the library is by appointment, Monday through Friday. Call (202) 842-6026 or email [image-collections@nga.gov](mailto:image-collections@nga.gov) for more information.

### **Press Contact:**

Laurie Tylec, (202) 842-6355 or [ltylec@nga.gov](mailto:ltylec@nga.gov)

### **General Information**

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For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

Department of Communications  
National Gallery of Art  
2000B South Club Drive

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Landover, MD 20785  
phone: (202) 842-6353  
e-mail: [pressinfo@nga.gov](mailto:pressinfo@nga.gov)

Anabeth Guthrie  
Chief of Communications  
(202) 842-6804  
[a-guthrie@nga.gov](mailto:a-guthrie@nga.gov)

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[\*Christo and Jeanne-Claude in the Vogel Collection\*](#)

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#### PRESS CONTACT

Laurie Tylec  
(202) 842-6355  
[l-tylec@nga.gov](mailto:l-tylec@nga.gov)

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Questions from members of the media may be directed to the Department of Communications at (202) 842-6353 or [pressinfo@nga.gov](mailto:pressinfo@nga.gov)

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