

May 6, 2025

## Christo and Jeanne-Claude, Legendary Artists, Are Back in Spirit

Known for their outsized and revolutionary art projects, the couple's work is seen again in Florida, New York and Germany.



Jeanne-Claude and Christo on Miami's Biscayne Bay while working on the "Surrounded Islands" project in 1983. 2024 Christo and Jeanne-Claude Foundation, via the Collection NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale. Photo by Wolfgang Volz

# The New York Times

By Joseph B. Treaster

Reporting from Miami

May 6, 2025

It was 42 years ago. Miami awoke to a strange, crooked line of hot pink images floating in the waters of panoramic Biscayne Bay.

Eleven small islands had been wrapped in wide, rippling swaths of pink plastic. They were almost glowing as the morning sun swept over the beaches and skyscrapers of the city. Crowds came out in helicopters and speedboats and the family car. Some people perched on condo balconies.

It was the work of Christo and his wife, Jeanne-Claude, the European artists who had wrapped the [Reichstag](#) building in Berlin, the [Pont Neuf](#) bridge in Paris and run a billowing, tall white nylon fence 24.5 miles over the cattle ranges just north of San Francisco and into the Pacific Ocean.

People flew in from Europe and around the world to see the show, and collectors and museum directors and many others say it lifted the curtain on Miami as a city of natural beauty that would eventually become a dazzling global art center.

“It was a world happening,” said Norman Braman, a former owner of the Philadelphia Eagles, a collector and a Miami car dealer with about a dozen brands, from Hyundai to Rolls-Royce.

But it was a tough time for Miami. Cocaine seemed to be everywhere. Gunmen were in the streets. Time magazine had put the city on its cover as [“Paradise Lost.”](#) In 1984 — a year after the extravaganza on the bay — the “Miami Vice” TV show took the city’s crime and fashion into American living rooms.

It would be years before the Art Basel fair arrived and Miami really blossomed. But Christo and Jeanne-Claude got Miami moving in the right direction.

“Christo was really a central figure in getting people to see Miami for what it could be,” said Beth Dunlop, the architecture critic for The Miami Herald during the “Surrounded Islands” installation. “We lived in Fort Lauderdale at the time. Neighbors would say, ‘Is it safe to drive to Miami?’”

# The New York Times



The "Surrounded Islands" project, now in the spotlight again at the NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale. "Christo was really a central figure in getting people to see Miami for what it could be," said the architecture critic for The Miami Herald at that time. 2024 Christo and Jeanne-Claude Foundation, via the Collection NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale. Photo by Wolfgang Volz

Now, in an incredible flashback that will linger over the coming year, the lush scene of Miami's hot pink islands is back. An exhibition of the highlights of "Surrounded Islands" opened in February at the [NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale](#) and will run through February 2026.

Christo and Jeanne-Claude — both of whom [have died](#) — are having something of a revival.

In February and March, the Shed arts center in Manhattan's Hudson Yards showed a scale model, drawings, photos and some of the arches and dark orange panels of fabric from the couple's stunning 2005 show in Central Park, "The Gates." The exhibition was 23 miles of 16-foot-high, thick plastic (polyvinyl chloride) arches — some as wide as 18 feet — with dark orange, fabric panels flapping and billowing against the February snow.

In the new version of "The Gates," the Christo and Jeanne-Claude Foundation paid for a video phone app that enabled people to walk through Central Park and see the orange fabric swirling around them as if they were back at the exhibition 20 years ago.

Earlier this month, the Yale University Press republished an expanded version of a book it put out in 2004 as Christo and Jeanne-Claude were working toward the opening of "The Gates." It is called "Christo

# The New York Times

and Jeanne-Claude, On the Way to The Gates, Central Park, New York City, 20th Anniversary Edition.” The author is John Fineberg, an art historian who worked with the two artists.

In June, the foundation and a German partner expect to open a two-week show at the Reichstag, the seat of Germany’s parliament, in Berlin that they had wrapped in silvery fabric and blue ropes in 1995. This time about 30 video projectors will make the front of the Reichstag look similar to the wrapped Reichstag of 1995.

The show at the NSU museum in Fort Lauderdale is almost overwhelming. It opens with huge floor-to-ceiling videos and an enormous photograph of one of the islands in pink with the Venetian Causeway streaming toward Miami Beach and Miami’s then spindly skyline rising near the horizon.

The museum walls on a big part of the second floor are covered with photographs, Christo’s drawings and letters from government and environmental leaders and others who debated, protested and praised the project. There’s a shot of Christo in a speedboat with Jeanne-Claude and photographs of the more than 400 workers — some in bikinis — hauling garbage off the islands, lining up and tying down the pink wrapping material.

“It’s a big wow,” said Bonnie Clearwater, the director and chief curator of the museum. “You can really feel it.”



The “Surrounded Islands” exhibition at the NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale will run through February 2026. NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale

# The New York Times

Christo had a long, warm relationship with the Pérez Art Museum Miami, the city's largest art museum. It rises on the edge of the bay near where the southernmost of the islands were wrapped. The foundation says the Pérez has the fourth largest collection of works by Christo and Jeanne-Claude in the country. In 2018 and 2019 it celebrated the 35th anniversary of the "Surrounded Islands" exhibition and showed the same materials now on the walls of the Fort Lauderdale museum.

In 2024, the artists' foundation asked a mutual friend of the Pérez museum to see whether the Pérez wanted the "Surrounded Islands" exhibition permanently, said Jonathan Henery, 53, a board member and a full-time staff member. But, "it just didn't work out," he said.

Last fall the exhibition arrived at the Fort Lauderdale museum in 31 packing crates from the foundation's warehouse in Switzerland. Franklin Sirmans, the director of the Pérez museum, did not say why his museum did not take the gift. But he said he was "so happy the work stays in South Florida."

Christo sold several of the couple's exhibitions to museums — the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C., the Centre Pompidou in Paris, and to Lars Windhorst, a wealthy German businessman who created a long-term display inside the Reichstag. "We don't talk prices," Mr. Henery said, "but these are in the tens of thousands of dollars, and in the millions."

Christo and Jeanne-Claude were compact and energetic. They let their hair grow long. They wore plain, simple clothes. He especially liked jeans and long-sleeved dress shirts. They both liked beige bush jackets.

They had been born on the same day in the same year: June 13, 1935. Their zodiac sign was Gemini, the symbol of lively twins — curious, social, adaptable, quick-witted, great communicators — and they lived it.

Christo Javacheff was born in [Gabrovo, Bulgaria](#); Jeanne-Claude Denat de Guillebon was born thousands of miles to the south in Casablanca, on the Atlantic coast of French Morocco.

They met in Paris in 1958. They married in a civil ceremony there on Nov. 28, 1962, according to the foundation. Their son, Cyril Cristo, was born earlier, on May 11, 1960, in a Paris suburb. Four years later the family sailed to New York on the S.S. France. They lived first at the Chelsea Hotel, then rented two floors in a run-down five-story loft at 48 Howard Street. They eventually bought the loft building and lived there for the rest of their lives. The foundation now operates out of the loft. Jeanne-Claude died in 2009. Christo died in 2020. All their lives they spoke English with a distinct European accent.

# The New York Times



Christo and Jeanne-Claude were based in New York City, where he plotted out the “Surrounded Islands” project in a preparatory collage. 2024 Christo and Jeanne-Claude Foundation, via the Collection NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale. Photo by Wolfgang Volz

Christo was a kind of artist salesman. Environmentalists routinely opposed the couple’s projects. But Christo would not give up. In Miami, it took three years to get the go-ahead. “The Gates” project took 26 years from conception to approval.

Dunlop, the Miami Herald’s architecture critic, had missed the opening of the “Surrounded Islands” exhibition. She was in Mount Sinai Medical Center in Miami Beach, giving birth to her only child, Adam. The hospital had spectacular views of the mid bay.

# The New York Times

"I woke up in the hospital room and there were the islands," she said recently. "They were gorgeous. They looked like Monet's water lilies coming to life. That's what Christo and Jeanne-Claude had promised. They were gorgeous."

*A correction was made on May 7, 2025: An earlier version of this article misstated the name of the museum in Fort Lauderdale where an exhibition of the highlights of "Surrounded Islands" opened in February. It is NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale, not NSU Fort Lauderdale Art Museum.*