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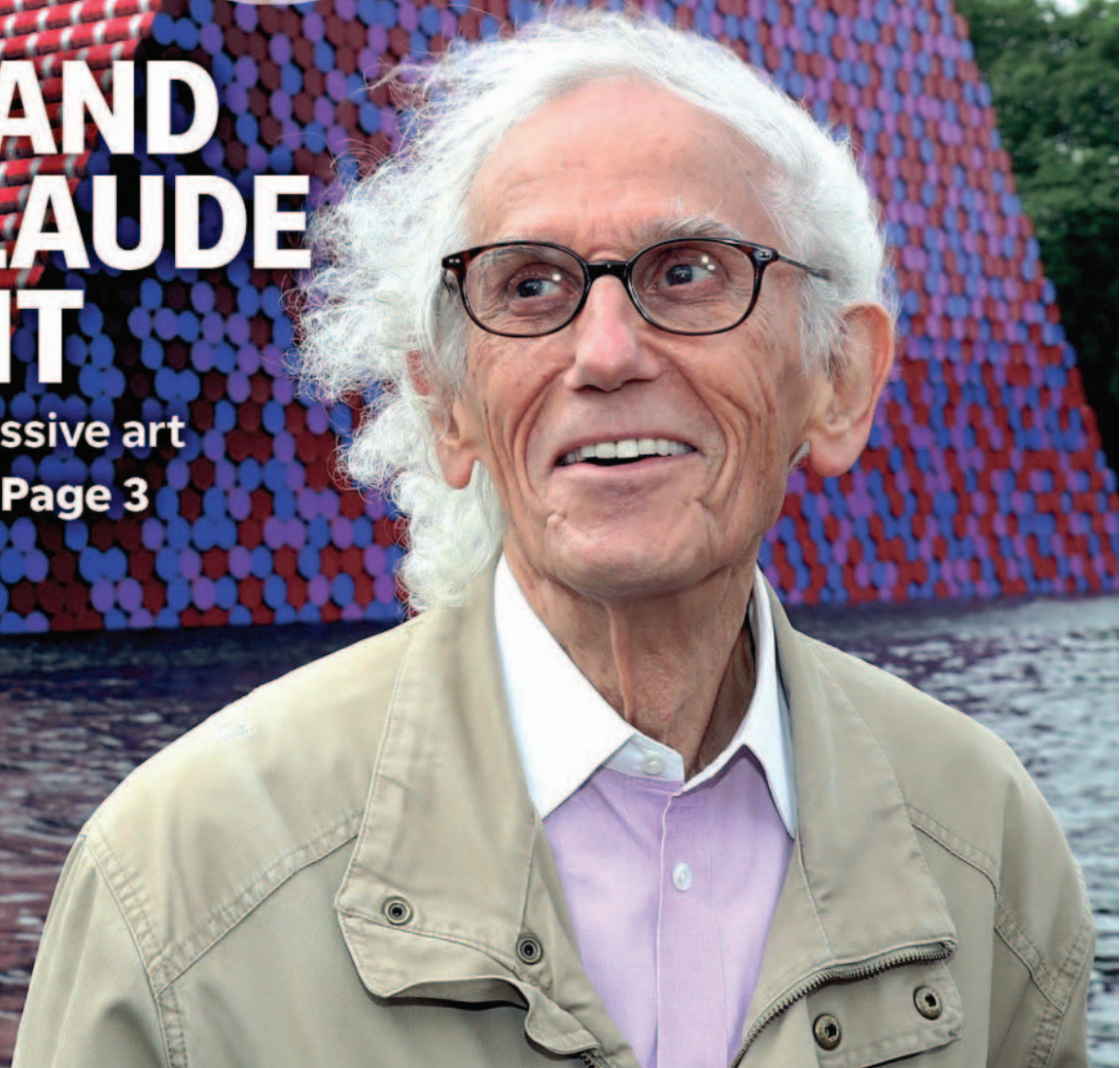
TOP 10
THINGS
TO DO » 10-12

On stage
'Boheme' meets
Vincent van Gogh
at Mann Hall
» 6

CHRISTO AND JEANNE-CLAUDE EXHIBIT

Remnants of their massive art
in Fort Myers show Page 3

Jean
Le Boeuf
Tacos Mexican
Restaurant,
Urban Buzz
Coffee » 19



Remnants of Christo and Jeanne-Claude's massive art in Fort Myers show

Charles Runnells
Fort Myers News-Press
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

You can't see Christo and Jeanne-Claude's most famous artworks in a gallery or a museum.

They don't exist anymore.

Gigantic, sprawling pieces such as California's "Running Fence" and Miami's "Surrounded Island" stood for only a matter of weeks.

Then they were gone forever.

The fabric panels of "Running Fence" traveled across 24 miles of California

ranchland in 1976. The pink-plastic "beaches" of "Surrounded Islands" encircled 11 islands in Miami Beach's Biscayne Bay in 1983. And the billowing white drapery of "Wrapped Reichstag" cocooned one of Germany's most famous buildings in 1995.

All three pieces attracted art lovers and critics from across the world.

And then those art installations disappeared — dismantled and put away — only to exist in photos, preparatory drawings, maps and other documentation.

See ART, Page 4W



In 1983, Christo and Jeanne-Claude surrounded 11 Biscayne Bay islands with 6.5 million square feet of pink plastic. SUBMITTED BY THE BIGGS MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART





Pedestrians walk along the edge of Harlem Meer under “The Gates” project, by artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude, in New York’s Central Park in February 2005.

JULIE JACOBSON/AP

Art

Continued from Page 3W

That was the beauty of Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s art, says Jade Dellinger, director of Bob Rauschenberg Gallery at Florida SouthWestern State College.

“Most of the major projects, the large-scale projects, were purposefully ephemeral,” Dellinger says. “It’s not about making a work for an art gallery or for a museum.

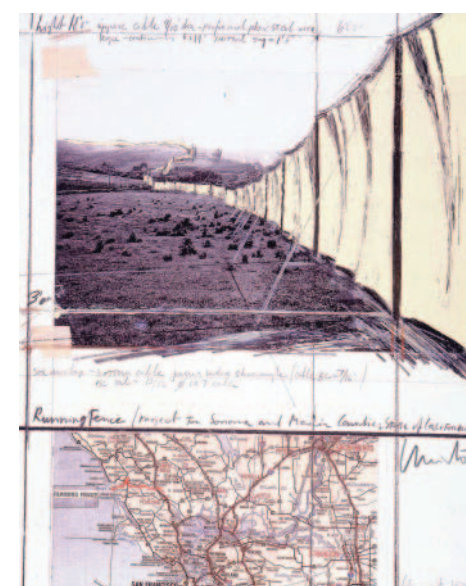
“No one can ultimately own these things. They live in the memory and in the documentation.”

That documentation is the focus of a new exhibit at Rauschenberg Gallery. “Christo & Jeanne-Claude: The Tom Golden Collection” combines a touring show with other items curated by the Fort Myers gallery, including an 18-by-60-foot section of plastic sheeting from “Running Fence.”

The traveling exhibit features more than 130 photographs, drawings, preparatory collages and other objects from the renowned husband-and-wife artistic team of Christo Vladimirov Javacheff and Jeanne-Claude Denat de Guillebon — better known as simply Christo and Jeanne-Claude.

Together, they were massive figures in the field of land art and conceptual art, Dellinger says.

The idea was to change peoples’ perception of things they see every day. The



A planning collage for Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s “Running Fence,” including a map of California.

SPECIAL TO THE NEWS-PRESS

large-scale, public-art projects temporarily transformed the landscapes wherever they appeared, whether it was Miami’s Biscayne Bay or the hills of California’s Sonoma and Marin counties.

“Christo would always say that everything he did was somehow irrational,” Dellinger says. “It was about creating these sort of dreamlike things.”

The retrospective tour was organized

See ART, Page 5W

Art

Continued from Page 4W

by the Sonoma County Museum with art donated by the late Tom Golden, an art collector and a longtime friend of the artists. The museum holds the most extensive private collection of the artists' work in the world.

The show spans 37 years of the late artists' large-scale environmental installations, including famous pieces "Running Fence," "Surrounded Islands," "Wrapped Reichstag" and "The Gates" (where the duo installed 23 miles of vinyl "gates" in New York City's Central Park).

Dellinger supplemented the touring exhibit with an actual segment of the 24-mile "Running Fence" installation, which is on loan from Kent State University Art Galleries.

The synthetic-fiber panel is so big that it couldn't be fully displayed inside Rauschenberg Gallery. Only 14½ feet of its 18-foot height could be shown, and 45 feet of its 60-foot length.

Still, Dellinger says it was important to include the massive panel, which hangs

like a huge white shower curtain in one corner of the room.

"I wanted to give you a sense of the scale," Dellinger says. "My thinking was: You're going to walk into this place and you're going to see these small pictures, and you're never really going to understand that this was 24.5 miles long. It went into the ocean, and it was always 18 feet in height."

Another project, closer to Southwest Florida, was the artists' 1983 installation "Surrounded Islands," where they surrounded 11 uninhabited islands in Miami's Biscayne Bay with 6.5 million square feet of bright pink, floating polypropylene fabric.

At the time, artist and art consultant Barbara Hill of Fort Myers was an art student at FSW. She was one of about 400 people, including other Southwest Florida residents, who helped Christo and Jeanne-Claude put the installation together in 1983.

Hill helped sew the plastic panels around one of those 11 islands. But she didn't fully appreciate the beauty of "Surrounded Islands" until she saw the installation at just the right moment.

"The sun was going down, and the sun

If you go

What: "Christo & Jeanne-Claude: The Tom Golden Collection"

When: Now through April 17

Where: Bob Rauschenberg Gallery at Florida SouthWestern State College, 8099 College Parkway S.W., Building L, south Fort Myers.

Admission: Free

Info: 489-9313 or rauschenberggallery.com

hit this beautiful turquoise water," Hill recalls. "And that color bounced off of the pink, and it was incredibly surreal. It almost felt like you were transported to a foreign country.

"It was unlike anything I had ever seen before: The vividness of the pink and the turquoise water and the sunset and the city was phenomenal. That was a very powerful experience."

The new art exhibit reunites Rauschenberg Gallery with the late Christo and Jeanne-Claude, who visited there in 2003 to raise money for their project "The

Gates." All of Christo and Jeanne-Claude's work was self-funded.

Dellinger had interacted with the couple, on and off, for about three decades. Jeanne-Claude died in 2009. Christo died last year.

"My first exchanges with the couple date back to the late 1980s when I contacted them as an undergraduate art history student conducting a series of interviews," Dellinger says. "They were always remarkably kind and responsive to those expressing interest in their work."

Dellinger, who grew up in Florida, said he was well aware of the artists thanks to their "Surrounded Islands" project. He sees the Rauschenberg Gallery exhibit as a way to shine a spotlight on their work and all they accomplished in their lifetimes.

"(It) should allow us to both celebrate their long legacy," he says, "and to pay tribute to an irreplaceable artistic duo with strong connections to our South Florida community."

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