

## THE CRITICAL PROCESS

### Thinking about Sculpture

In 1992, the artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude announced plans for a project called *Over the River*, a proposal to drape nearly 6 miles of silvery, luminous fabric panels above the Arkansas River along a 42-mile stretch of the river between Salida and Cañon City in south-central Colorado. The fabric panels, the husband-and-wife duo proposed, would be suspended for two weeks at eight distinct points along the river that were selected by the artists for their aesthetic merits and technical viability. As with all Christo and Jeanne-Claude projects, the proposal met with immediate, and sustained, criticism.

What impact, environmentalists quickly retaliated, would the project have on bighorn sheep populations in the area? What about fish and birds? How, people asked, could Christo and Jeanne-Claude justify the expense—a projected \$50 million that, many argued, could be far better spent? Why “desecrate” the already beautiful Arkansas River canyon? Why, in fact, pick the Arkansas River canyon at all?

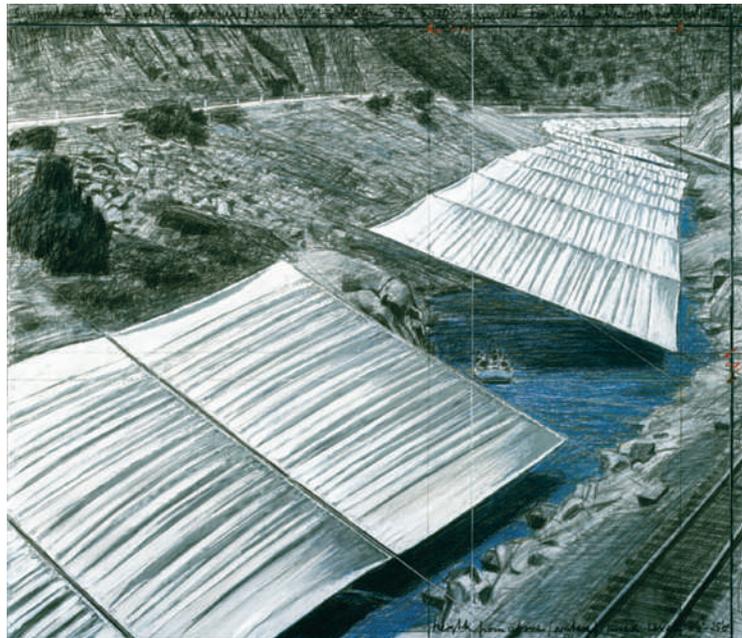
For Christo, the process of preparing the environmental statements necessary for getting the project approved—even the work of those opposed to Christo’s plans—caused people to think, not only about the project itself but also about what constitutes a work of art in the first place. Christo’s was, in fact, the first Environmental Impact Statement ever required of a work of art. In November of 2011, Federal regulators with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) approved the artists’ plan. Since then, a group known as ROAR (Rags Over the Arkansas River) has filed legal proceedings against the BLM and Colorado State Parks challenging their authorizing the project to move forward, and Christo will identify a future August date for the exhibition when the legal process is finally resolved.

As for the cost: Christo and Jeanne-Claude have always funded the costs associated with their projects through the sale of artworks such as the one illustrated here (**Fig. 12-36**). The project requires no public subsidy or taxpayer support, nor have Christo and Jeanne-Claude ever accepted sponsorship or endorsement fees.

Why the Arkansas River? Christo and Jeanne-Claude, who passed away in November 2009, traveled 14,000 miles and visited 89 rivers in seven Rocky Mountain States looking for the right site. The Arkansas between Salida

and Cañon City was chosen for several reasons: The east-west orientation of the river, which will allow the fabric panels to better reflect sunlight from morning to evening; high river banks suitable for the suspension of steel cables; the fact that U.S. Route 50 runs continuously along the river to facilitate viewing; the presence of a nearby railroad that can provide essential access and supply lines; and rafting conditions that allow for viewers to see the work of art from the river.

*Over the River* involves two different viewing experiences: one from the highway, where the fabric will reflect the colors of the sky and clouds from sunrise to sunset; the other at water level, where rafters, kayakers, and canoeists will be able to view the clouds, sky, and mountains through the translucent fabric. How is *Over the River*, then, similar to sculpture in-the-round? In what more specific ways is it similar to Anish Kapoor’s *Cloud Gate* (see Fig. 12-22)? Obviously, one of the ways *Over the River* differs most dramatically from *Cloud Gate* is in its temporary, two-week period of display. Why do you suppose Christo prefers temporary installations rather than permanent ones? Christo also enjoys the controversy that his projects inevitably generate. Why? What important issues does a work like *Over the River* raise other than environmental ones?



**Fig. 12-36** Christo, *Over the River, Project for the Arkansas River, State of Colorado*, 2010. Drawing in two parts (detail), pencil, charcoal, pastel, wax crayon, enamel paint, wash, fabric sample, hand-drawn topographic map, and technical data, detail size 19 × 96 in. and 42 × 96 in. Courtesy of Christo and Jeanne-Claude.