

# Hill to Bay, Land and Water: Christo and Jeanne-Claude and American Environmentalism

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After four years of planning and preparation, the panels of Christo and Jeanne Claude's *Running Fence*, Sonoma and Marin Counties, California, 1972-1976 were unfurled. The eighteen-foot tall ribbon of white, nylon fabric wound its way over U.S. Route 101 and meandered more than twenty-four miles through the rolling hills north of Petaluma, before extending into the Pacific Ocean at Bodega Bay (Figure 1). Seven years later, the artists' *Surrounded Islands*, Biscayne Bay, Greater Miami, Florida, 1980-1983 was completed. For two weeks in May, seven miles of Miami's Intracoastal Waterway were energized by pink polypropylene coronas encircling eleven small, "spoil islands" sprinkled along the bay on a north-south axis between Miami and Miami Beach (Figure 2).<sup>1</sup> As is common with Christo and Jeanne-Claude's large-scale works, both of these projects engaged the people and places where they were installed, and in both instances the artists embraced the panoply of meetings, discussions, and negotiations intrinsic to an attempt to transform, albeit briefly, the public landscape on a monumental scale. *Running Fence* and *Surrounded Islands* had passionate advocates and ardent opponents, and each project required the authorization of several local, state, and federal agencies for installation. Of interest then, beyond the obvious formal differences, is how these works are *un*-alike.

Though separated by just seven years, *Running Fence* and *Surrounded Islands* each reached their culminating installations at distinctive moments in American history, specifically in American environmental history. In 1972, as preparation for *Running Fence* began, legislation and policy changes ratified in the late 1960s had just begun to take effect, reflecting Americans' growing awareness of their roles as custodians of the natural environment. A decade later, efforts to secure permissions for *Surrounded Islands* unfolded in the

early 1980s, by which time a more experienced and unified environmental movement had adopted more sophisticated strategies of operation for greater efficacy in the promotion of their agenda.

It is in the context of these developments that this paper considers *Running Fence* and *Surrounded Islands* through the lens of the growth and maturity of the modern environmental movement in the United States. These two projects bracket a moment of significant change in the American environmental movement and in associated attitudes about environmental responsibility and advocacy which occurred between the early 1970s and the early 1980s. The base of the environmental community's activities shifted in this era from grass-roots, local, undirected but impassioned activism, to a more professionalized, focused, well-funded, and modernized model of operation concomitant with corporate business models.<sup>2</sup> Christo and Jeanne-Claude's artistic practice at times paralleled and at times challenged environmentalists' means and goals, revealing a complex and ambivalent relationship between their projects and American environmentalism during these years. The dexterity with which the artists navigated the shifting tides of environmental awareness in the decade between *Running Fence* and *Surrounded Islands* is a testament to their own professional evolution and growing erudition in the realm of political effectiveness.

Plans for *Running Fence* began in 1972. Crossing fifty-nine parcels of private property along its route, Christo and Jeanne-Claude's extensive, fabric fence was intended to wind for just over twenty-four miles through the rolling hills of Sonoma and Marin Counties to the coast. The rigorous public debate that unfolded for the four years prior to the project's final installation in 1976 was influenced by the

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<sup>1</sup> These man-made islands were formed from dredged material when the Intracoastal Waterway was constructed in the 1920s. See David Bourdon, Jonathan Fineberg, and Janet Mullholland, *Christo: Surrounded Islands, Biscayne Bay, Greater Miami, Florida, 1980-83* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1986), 14.

<sup>2</sup> For a comprehensive overview of the rise of the modern environmental movement in the United States see Benjamin Kline, *First Along the River: A Brief History of the U.S. Environmental Movement*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007); Kirkpatrick Sale and Eric Foner, *The Green Revolution: The American Environmental Movement, 1962-1992* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993); and Philip Shabecoff, *A Fierce Green Fire: The American Environmental Movement*, rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2003).

growing environmental awareness and activism of the 1960s. In California the artists encountered a community of ranchers leery of strangers, a public skeptical of the artists' intentions, and Boards of Commissioners in Sonoma and Marin Counties whose operational directives were based in the state's strong, new traditions of environmental consciousness.

These wary attitudes reflected the impact of growing concerns about the environment that had been spurred by the 1962 publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, largely accepted as the text that launched the modern environmental movement in the United States.<sup>3</sup> A community philosophically joined over fears of environmental pollutants and policies that threatened human and animal welfare, the young, grass-roots environmental movement gained supporters throughout the decade. The debate over the preservation of America's existing natural spaces had captured the public's attention in the mid-1960s when activists turned to the media, letter-writing campaigns, and public protests to block the construction of government-sponsored dams threatening the integrity of the Grand Canyon (Figure 3).<sup>4</sup> In addition, vivid memories of recent environmental calamities such as the Santa Barbara Oil Spill and the Cuyahoga River fire near Cincinnati, Ohio, framed the eco-anxiety that characterized public sentiment at the turn of the decade. These concerns, coupled with a national desire to heal the planet—the core philosophy of the first Earth Day in 1970—were fresh in the memories of Californians when the artists began advocating for *Running Fence*. Environmental legislation passed during the Nixon administration was just taking effect, and local governing bodies had been influenced by this new national focus on environmental policy.<sup>5</sup>

Christo and Jeanne-Claude's artistic practice also was in its nascent stages in the early 1970s. Although the engineering, planning, and installation of *Running Fence* was executed with a laudable amount of success, the lobbying campaign

upon which they embarked to win support for their project was less proficiently executed. In addition to negotiating land-use contracts with fifty-nine property-owners, Christo and Jeanne-Claude petitioned several governmental agencies for approval to install *Running Fence*, including the Sonoma and Marin County Boards of Commissioners, two Regional California Coastal Committees, the California Highway Department, and the California State Police. The artists attended eighteen public hearings, appeared for three sessions in California Superior Court, and spent almost a full year trying to convince the ranchers that contrary to popular rumors, *Running Fence* was neither "an Evel Knievel-type stunt," nor "a front" for a chain of McDonald's hamburger stands.<sup>6</sup>

The demands were prodigious, and although Christo and Jeanne-Claude had hired a project manager and retained counsel, much of the legwork and the campaign of persuasion was carried out by the artists themselves. In the lack of manpower alone, the endeavor was inefficient and seemed to lack a strategic plan. Christo and Jeanne-Claude made radio appearances, shook hands, and patiently explained their project to members of the community for months. Analogous to the practices of environmentalists at the time, the artists were dedicated to a cause and working diligently on a grass-roots level to achieve their aim, but lacked a well-formed professional apparatus or organizational system to hasten or ensure success. The informal, personal tone of the land-use contract effort is revealed in the documentary film, *Running Fence*, in the words of Lester Bruhn, one of the ranchers who supported Christo and Jeanne-Claude's efforts (Figure 4). With authority Mr. Bruhn proclaimed:

I'll bet you a dollar right now that I can go out and put your curtain up and I won't have a complaint... because everybody in this country knows me. But when a stranger comes in they're [the community]

<sup>3</sup> Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962). In her book, Carson revealed the catastrophic impact of pesticides on the environment, particularly on bird populations. She accused the chemical industry of minimizing the threat posed by the use of harmful toxins and public officials of complicity for their lack of oversight. Spending several weeks on the *New York Times* best-seller list, the book is credited with spurring a new concern for pesticide use and the pollution of the natural environment. As a result of *Silent Spring*'s revelations DDT was banned in the United States in 1972, and environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club experienced unprecedented growth in membership.

<sup>4</sup> For example, see the Sierra Club's, "Now Only You Can Save the Grand Canyon From Being Flooded...For Profit" advertisement: *New York Times*, June 9, 1966, p. 35. Also Figure 3 here.

<sup>5</sup> The Pacific Southwest Water Plan proposed by the United States Bureau of Reclamations was a culminating issue in America's attempt to identify the value and appropriate use of western natural spaces and rivers. For a broader treatment of the controversies surrounding attempts to dam rivers in the west, see Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 161-181 and 200-238. For more on the Santa Barbara Oil Spill of January 1969, see Keith C. Clark and Jeffrey J. Hemphill, "The Santa

Barbara Oil Spill: A Retrospective" (paper presented at the 64<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Association of Pacific Coast Geographers, University of California Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, CA, September 14, 2001). For information about the Cuyahoga River fire of June 1969, see "Oil Slick Fire Damages 2 River Spans," *The Plain Dealer*, June 23, 1969, C-11; and "The Cities: The Price of Optimism," *Time Magazine*, August 1, 1969. Note that June, 1969 was not the first conflagration triggered by the contamination of the Cuyahoga. Earth Day was conceived by Senator Gaylord Nelson of Washington state. For a discussion of the impact of Earth Day, see Bil Gilbert, "Earth Day Plus 20, and Counting," special issue on the environment, *Smithsonian Magazine* (April 1990): 47. On Nixon and environmental policy, see John C. Whitaker, *Striking a Balance: Environment and Natural Resources Policy in the Nixon-Ford Years* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1976).

<sup>6</sup> Calvin Tomkins and David Bourdon, *Christo: Running Fence, Sonoma and Marin Counties, CA 1972-76* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1978), 25. This book is the official documentary publication of the *Running Fence* project. Traveling door-to-door, Christo and Jeanne-Claude negotiated land-use contracts with each property owner over 11 months. They offered a portion of the materials from which the fence was constructed along with a new home appliance to each rancher, as gifts-in-kind.

just a little skeptical, see, and they don't understand.<sup>7</sup>

In the political realm, the artists' fight for legal approval of *Running Fence* was a challenge from the beginning. For almost two years, until the end of 1975, Christo and Jeanne-Claude debated, discussed, and attempted to meet the myriad requirements outlined for the project by governmental and political authorities, with environmental issues constituting a considerable portion of the concerns. Significant to the supporting, pro-Fence evidence was the Environmental Impact Report ordered at the expense of the artists by the Sonoma County Commission. As the first comprehensive, scientific study of this type completed for a work of art, the 280-page document included extensive data about the Fence, as well as about the plants, animals, reptiles, and amphibians whose habitats it would traverse.<sup>8</sup>

The documentary about *Running Fence* by Albert and David Maysles offers a unique window onto the proceedings of several of the eighteen public hearings. The informal, emotional tone of the meetings is captured in the film, in rooms crowded with mostly casually dressed participants, some of whom are seated on the floor. Comments are largely personal and emotional in nature, including a proclamation from a man who states emphatically that *Running Fence* "just isn't art, it just isn't," punctuating his remark by holding up a white handkerchief as a diminutive parody lampooning the fence (Figure 5). Most statements, whether pro or con, are met with a variety of claps, whistles, and yelps of agreement.

Despite the unceremonious atmosphere of the proceedings and the profusion of anecdotal comments, environmental concerns were also raised during the hearings. One gentleman questioned the legality of the individual land-use contracts in light of the ranchers' agreements with the county to maintain their properties as greenbelt zones. A woman voiced apprehension about setting a land-use precedent. She remarked:

If we allow the Running Fence Corporation to use agriculturally-zoned land for what amounts to advertising for their books, movies, and...theatrical gestures...it will be logically very difficult to refuse permits to any other temporary commercial activities, carnivals, rock concerts, motorcycle races, whatever....<sup>9</sup>

However, after three years of court battles, meetings, and

zoning and environmental hearings, on December 16, 1975, the final permit for *Running Fence* was secured. All were not convinced, but Christo and Jeanne-Claude had garnered enough support for a 4-to-1 vote in favor of the project from the Sonoma County Board of Commissioners.

In retrospect, the public hearings for *Running Fence* may be characterized as a microcosm of the state of the American environmental movement in the early 1970s. Groups of energized citizens expressed multivalent, personal views about the Fence as the public discourse unfolded. They voiced their concerns to political bodies whose members were aware of their charge to protect the environment, but also empathetic to their constituents' wide-ranging opinions. Permission in the end, though, was granted for *Running Fence* not based on sentiment, but on rational grounds. Before casting the deciding, affirmative vote, Commissioner Gary Giacomini stated, "I am convinced that this project will create no environmental harm. We have permission by the ranchers. We have benefits bestowed on the ranchers... and, much needed jobs for the County."<sup>10</sup> Environmentalists engaged in similar debates locally and nationally in the late 1960s and early 70s for a host of causes, great and small. The methods expressed by the citizens of California in the hearings for *Running Fence* echoed the unstructured methods implemented by environmentalists more broadly at that time. Their candid, emotional approach revealed commitment and zeal, but lacked the tactical aim and power to secure the success they would achieve in future years.

In 1981, five years after the completion of *Running Fence*, the campaign for *Surrounded Islands* began. As described in the artists' press release, "*Surrounded Islands* underlines the various elements and ways in which the people of Miami live, between land and water."<sup>11</sup> These two natural elements had challenged the artists in California, and in Florida approval to encircle eleven "spoil" islands in Biscayne Bay with broad coronas of pink fabric required a sophisticated strategy of mediation for Christo and Jeanne-Claude to achieve success. Because their works intrinsically "...involve all the prosaic, time-consuming engineering and approval problems of, say, a controversial new bridge,"<sup>12</sup> the public relations campaign, coupled with the legal and political choreography for the Florida project, was intense.

The awareness of and concern for the environment inherent to the citizens of Florida, specifically Dade County, had a great impact upon the discourse about the protection

<sup>7</sup> *Running Fence*, DVD, directed by Albert Maysles, David Maysles, and Charlotte Zwerin (New York: Maysles Films, Inc., 1978).

<sup>8</sup> Christo, *Final Environmental Impact Report: Running Fence* (Foster City, CA: Environmental Science Associates, Inc. 1975). The report cost the artists \$39,000. Ultimately three appellate court judges reversed an earlier decision and ruled that the E.I.R. was not required, but Christo and Jeanne-Claude submitted it to the Commission nonetheless.

<sup>9</sup> Maysles, Maysles, and Zwerin, *Running Fence*.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Christo and Jeanne-Claude, "Surrounded Islands, Miami, Florida, 1980-1983," Christo and Jeanne-Claude, <http://christojeanneclaude.net/si.shtml>. Also see David Bourdon, Jonathan Fineberg, and Janet Mulholland, with photographs by Wolfgang Volz, *Christo: Surrounded Islands, Biscayne Bay, Greater Miami, Florida, 1980-83* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1986), the official published volume documenting the project.

<sup>12</sup> Dominique G. Laporte, *Christo*, trans. Abby Pollak (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 59.

of Biscayne Bay from the artists' extraordinary aims. More broadly, Christo and Jeanne-Claude endeavored to create *Surrounded Islands* in a political atmosphere that had shifted, primarily due to two national political events: the strong attention given to environmental issues by President Jimmy Carter; followed closely by President Ronald Reagan's appointment of James G. Watt as Secretary of the Interior in 1981.

The first successful presidential candidate to run on an environmental platform, Carter entered office in 1977 with an ambitious agenda. No president since World War II had fought so rigorously to establish new, and reform existing, environmental strategies and legislation. To assist in this mission, Carter appointed some of the brightest environmental leaders to posts in his administration, which deprived the movement of some of its most valuable guiding voices.<sup>13</sup> Conversely, though, it created space in the movement for new, innovative thinkers to make bold choices and to strategize for the environmental community's future.

When Ronald Reagan took office in 1981, several of his first environmental decisions were discouraging to many, including his appointment of cronies and pro-development individuals to important environmental posts.<sup>14</sup> However none of these was so derided as the appointment of James G. Watt as Secretary of the Interior (Figure 6). Watt was a Reagan loyalist: ultra-conservative, pro-industry, anti-regulation, with a confrontational style that made him easily dislikable. His first policy directives included a host of eco-unfriendly ideas, including a moratorium on new land acquisitions for national parks, a freeze on additions to the endangered species list, and initiatives to open more federal acreage and offshore tracts to mining, logging, and oil and gas interests. Watt's unapologetic, anti-environment performance over the subsequent two years united and galvanized disparate factions of the environmental movement as never before, their resolve forged by a common enemy. Simply put, in the early 1980s James Watt became the single greatest incentive for the consolidation and professionalization of the modern American environmental movement.

Disdain for Watt spurred an unprecedented increase in donations to and memberships in environmental organizations, as well as the general expansion of the environmental community. Writes Historian Jeffrey K. Stine, "The resulting increased revenues enabled environmental organizations to build up their professional staffs to unprecedented levels,"

which in turn allowed them to become more politically and legally active.<sup>15</sup> One government official stated, "Environmentalists aren't trying to grab headlines by throwing their bodies in front of bulldozers anymore."<sup>16</sup> A Sierra Club strategist remarked, "Emotionalism is giving way to professional analysis and political savvy... now, we're finally starting to talk the real language of politicians."<sup>17</sup> The professionalization of a well-funded and organized modern environmental movement resulted in its ability to press its agenda more effectively on a national level, a model that was adopted in state and local political arenas as well. Individual and grassroots activism lingered, but was no longer considered the primary method of advocacy.

Much as the environmental movement had streamlined its management and professionalized its lobbying efforts, by the early 1980s Christo and Jeanne-Claude also had refined their public relations skills, adopting a smarter, more efficient, more organized strategy of persuasion. The public debate over *Surrounded Islands* lasted for more than two years, during which time the artists attended informal and formal meetings, and made innumerable phone calls to secure permits from governmental agencies. However, efforts in Florida entailed only seven public hearings compared to the eighteen held in California. Certainly part of this diminished outcry from the public should be attributed to a growing familiarity with the artists after the success of *Running Fence*, but in light of the complex environmental issues associated with the diverse ecosystems of Biscayne Bay; the numerous permits required (eleven), as well as a more organized and professionalized environmental community, an equally if not more valuable explanation may found in the professional team that Christo and Jeanne-Claude assembled to assist them in their cause. In addition to their project director, they retained seventeen attorneys, a marine biologist, an ornithologist, a mammal expert, and four engineers, as well as various other staff to engage in preliminary preparation. This professional team was in place to field questions and address concerns about *Surrounded Islands*, allowing for a division of labor that was not apparent with *Running Fence*.

The artists continued in their roles as primary spokespersons for their project, but with more sophisticated public relations skills than the efforts observed in California. As seen in the documentary film *Islands*, about the project in Florida, Christo's ease and comfort with the public, his ability to advocate effectively about the project—and his

<sup>13</sup> Jeffrey K. Stine, "Environmental Policy during the Carter Presidency," in *The Carter Presidency: Policy Choices in the Post-New Deal Era*, eds. Gary M. Fink and Hugh Davis Graham (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 183. Stine gives an incisive overview and explanation of the Carter administration's philosophies and goals concerning the environment in this chapter, 179-201.

<sup>14</sup> Jeffrey K. Stine, "Natural Resources and Environmental Policy," in *The Reagan Presidency: Pragmatic Conservatism and Its Legacies*, eds. W. Elliot Brownlee and Hugh Davis Graham (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2003), 235. Stine's chapter offers an enlightening overview of environmental policy and attitudes of the Reagan administration, 233-

256. See also Andy Pasztor, "Reagan Policies Spur Big Revival of the Environmental Movement," *The Wall Street Journal*, August 9, 1982, p. 15; and Philip Shabecoff, "Environmentalism Back in Spotlight as Activists and Administration Battle," *New York Times*, September 19, 1982, p. 35.

<sup>15</sup> Stine, "Reagan," 238 and 251.

<sup>16</sup> Pasztor, "Reagan Policies," 15.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

English—had improved significantly since the mid-1970s. Jeanne-Claude speaks persuasively about the project in the documentary as well.<sup>18</sup>

The film also reveals a notable shift. Gone are the overcrowded public hearings and informal remarks offered by individuals. Absent are the skeptical citizens and land-owners. Instead, the documentary features a well-dressed and composed audience in the Dade County public hearing (Figure 7). *Islands* also presents the artists engaged in discussions not with ranchers and an opinionated public, but instead with politicians: conducting high-level conversations and negotiating to win legislative bodies and governmental agencies over to their point of view.<sup>19</sup>

The attitudes and operational systems encountered in the local commissions in Florida seem to have become more professionally structured and businesslike as well, and by 1982 concern for the environment was a more pervasive issue. Upon casting his opposing vote to deny the permit, Dade County Commissioner Harvey Ruvin explained,

I find I can't support it for something even more fundamental than specific problems it may cause the environment. I think there is something offensive about the chauvinistic use of the natural environment in this manner."<sup>20</sup>

Professionalization had enhanced the environmental movement's ability to influence national discourse in favor of preserving the environment. The artists, however, while endeavoring to be eco-friendly, used their refined skills of persuasion with the aim of achieving their own personal goals. After the unsuccessful morning vote, Mr. Ruvin spoke with Christo and Jeanne-Claude during lunch, and in a second afternoon poll, the permit from Dade County was granted. Mr. Ruvin had asked the artists for, "some significant flow back to the resource," in exchange for a positive outcome for the permit.<sup>21</sup> They refused to pay cash for Mr. Ruvin's vote, but they did agree to donate 1000 signed and numbered photographs of *Surrounded Islands* to be sold for the benefit of the preservation of Biscayne Bay.

Christo and Jeanne-Claude's efforts in Miami were more sophisticated, and the political climate more vigilant and environmentally savvy, but one of the more trying obstacles the

artists faced was a local activist named Jack Kassewitz, Jr. Of robust persistence, Kassewitz proved a dedicated opponent of *Surrounded Islands* on environmental grounds. Ecological testing and expert consultations had revealed that the project posed no threat to seagrasses, the ospreys that had begun a nest on Island 9, nor to Biscayne Bay's manatee population.<sup>22</sup> Having vocally objected to *Surrounded Islands* for some time, just months before the scheduled installation, Kassewitz filed federal suit against city and county entities, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and President Reagan to stop the project. A distraction and financial aggravation to Christo and Jeanne-Claude, the case ultimately was dismissed, as was Kassewitz. He and his methods were disparaged by the environmental establishment in the press, as well as behind closed doors.<sup>23</sup> Kassewitz's individual, unbridled activism may be viewed as a relic of earlier operational modes of the environmental community. By 1983, the mature environmental movement no longer endorsed or found success in unstructured protest.

In April 1990 the United States celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the first Earth Day. In the previous two decades, the modern environmental movement had gained its footing and assumed protest methods inherent to the social activism of the 1960s before modernizing, professionalizing, and adopting smart, efficient strategies of legal and political operation. By the mid-1980s, these changes resulted in the environmental community's ability to keep their agenda in the national spotlight, and impact legislation on national, state, and local levels.

Similarly, Christo's and Jeanne-Claude's efforts in the mid-1970s to secure permission to install *Running Fence* were successful—but unsophisticated and grass-roots in their tone, from conversations with the local ranchers to the unceremonious climate of the public hearings. By the early 1980s, the artists' attempts to win approval for *Surrounded Islands* benefited from their own professionalization and a refinement of the lobbying and legal strategies they employed. Christo and Jeanne-Claude's efforts to navigate the political and social milieus associated with *Running Fence* and *Surrounded Islands* reveal a complex process and nimble modes of operation expressed by these two artists. As they endeavored to provide scientific evidence of their

<sup>18</sup> *Islands*, DVD, directed by Albert Maysles, David Maysles, and Charlotte Zwerin (New York: Maysles Films, Inc., 1986).

<sup>19</sup> The film further reveals that the artists had become amply adept in their methods by 1982 to pursue projects in Paris (*Wrapped Pont Neuf*) and Berlin (*Wrapped Reichstag*), concurrent with their work in Miami.

<sup>20</sup> Maysles, Maysles, and Zwerin, *Islands*.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Small-scale trial installations revealed that manatees enjoyed loitering underneath the pink polypropylene, which in fact seemed to inspire out-of-season amorous activity.

<sup>23</sup> Several professionals associated with wildlife conservation openly criticized Kassewitz in a March 1983 article in the *Miami Herald* that mocked Kassewitz as "the Bambi man." A roster of "serious environmentalists" who earlier had shown support for Kassewitz publicly distanced themselves from him several months before the installation of *Surrounded Islands* began, and in a letter to the *Miami Herald* editor, the vice president of the Florida Audubon society wrote: "It is unfortunate that the furor created by so many new-found defenders of Biscayne Bay in response to [*Surrounded Islands*] could not have been channeled against some of the real and long-lasting threats to the Biscayne ecosystem...." Werner Spies and Wolfgang Volz, *Christo: Surrounded Islands, Biscayne Bay, Greater Miami, Florida, 1980-83* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1985), 14-15, 22.

eco-friendliness using a somewhat corporate model of persuasion, they were simultaneously challenged as villains by environmentalists. Christo and Jeanne-Claude's ambivalent relationship to the environmental movement during their concurrent developmental years reveals a complex push and pull along the line of acceptable eco-responsibility and

activism. Considering *Running Fence* and *Surrounded Islands* in this socio-political context provides just one source from which constructive new discourse about these compelling artists may develop.

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Figure 1. Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *Running Fence*, *Project for Sonoma and Marin Counties, California*, 1972-1976, 1976, installation photograph. Courtesy of and © Wolfgang Volz.



Figure 2. Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *Surrounded Islands*, Biscayne Bay, Greater Miami, Florida, 1980-1983, 1983, installation photograph. Courtesy of and © Wolfgang Volz.

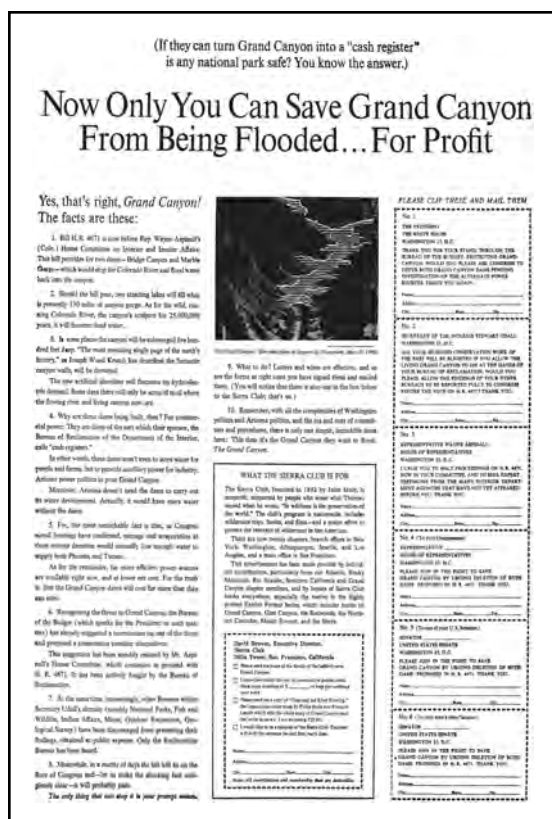


Figure 3. Sierra Club full-page advertisement, "Now Only You Can Save the Grand Canyon From Being Flooded...For Profit," *New York Times*, June 9, 1966. Used by permission of Colby Memorial Library, Sierra Club.



Figure 4. Lester Bruhn and Christo, film still from *Running Fence*, 1978, DVD, ©Maysles Films, Inc.



Figure 5. Sonoma County Commission meeting, film still from *Running Fence*, 1978, DVD, ©Maysles Films, Inc.





Figure 6. Mark Hess, *James Gaius Watt*, 1982, acrylic on canvas, 51x 35.2 cm (20 1/16" x 13 7/8"), National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; gift of *Time Magazine*.



Figure 7. Dade County Commission meeting, film still from *Islands*, 1986, DVD, ©Maysles Films, Inc.