

people forget that it is not at a level of Paris or France but rather of Europe that we need substantial instruments and means of research for transmitting the importance of artistic experiences. In Paris there may be a large museum, but you know that in New York there are three museums for modern and contemporary art.

**Can you give me an outline of the programme for the Paris-New York exhibition?**

The main point of the show is the relationship between France and the United States in the field of art. It is, of course, based on painting, sculpture, drawing and photography, but will also be extended to fashion, literature, architecture, cinema, dance, etc. The arc of time covered will be from 1906 up to more or less recent years. In other words, it starts with Stieglitz and the early exchanges which were still personal, when there were still no galleries or centres to establish these things; and it was Stieglitz who invited the first European artists to his photographer's gallery. And it also starts from Gertrude Stein's arrival on

the scene and her installation in Paris. Next come the Armony Show initiative in New York, Picabia's and later Duchamp's journeys to America, and the influence of cubism there. After the war, in 1918, Americans began to arrive in Paris, and Man Ray was one of the first; then there was the influence of Surrealism in New York, followed by the installation of Mondrian, Léger and the surrealists in New York. In short, all those adventures that are in part - I say in part - the story of art in this century. The choice of paintings closely follows the course of events throughout this epoch and recovers precisely those works known to have played a definite role then. If we choose a Léger - an artist who played an important part in these relations - it isn't going to be just any Léger, but that same Léger which was in that particular exhibition. The exhibition is not enormous; it will include not more than about 250 works. So it will be a fairly small but extremely precise collection. Around the central exhibition other activities and less ambitious exhibitions will be held, dealing with parallel points of interest, as I was

telling you, in music, the theatre, etc. The exhibition will close, I believe, at any rate for the moment, on the theme of Brancusi's influence over a number of American artists, for example Andre and Serra. It will end with this striking fact of an artist belonging almost to the turn of the century inspiring young artists who are forty-five today.

Lastly, we shall add one or two final points to the exhibition. With the Guggenheim museum there will probably be a small video exhibition which will open in New York and Paris on the same day and at the same time. I believe this will be the first time that two museums have opened the same show at the same time. All that is scheduled for mid-May 1977, immediately after the Duchamp exhibition.

Simultaneously, numerous parallel events will be held at Beaubourg: a large construction in the forum, the film library, and so forth. It's going to be a cultural city in which you can choose what interests you most, and rather than the individual events it will be interesting to see what happens among these different things simultaneously.

# Christo the Running Discussion

## The discussion

We invited for a discussion on the Christo **Running Fence**, **Massimo Asnagli**, artist, **Alanna Heiss**, director of the Institute for Art and Urban Resources, NY, **Richard Nonas**, sculptor, **David Ross**, video curator of the Long Beach Museum of Art.

**What was your experience of the « Running Fence »?**

**Ross.** I went up feeling quite cynical about it, an attitude that I shared with a lot of people. I thought it would be a grand work that had got out of control. I took a flight over it and I must admit that I was very impressed by it. It was impossible not to see the real elegance and beauty of the work. There are issues however, around the work, equally significant than the work itself. The work cannot be considered only as a formal statement. It is too involved with the communities living there and with a series of political decisions to exist just as a formal statement.

For example there was a real difference between the way workers were treated and the art people. It should be established which share of the comfort

and enjoyment is to be returned to the workers working at an artist's project. All these issues were raised but not clarified and formed a kind of cloud around the project and its realization.

**What do you feel about the fact that « Running Fence » is only there for a short time, as for other works of Christo, like the « Australia Coast » or « Valley Curtain »?**

**Ross.** It's part of the work. It's meant to be a temporary thing. If it were not it would hurt the feelings of all that don't want a great China wall across the country. The experience of it was wonderful but how many can do it? In a way the work is supposed to be enjoyed by a second generation people as information, through films, photos, drawings and I have a hard time dealing with that. If I had to deal only with information I don't think I could overcome the original cynicism. It is very ambiguous. Either you've never seen it and deal with information or you've seen it and fall in love with it. The conclusion is **double face**. Perhaps this was his intent, to create a situation impossible to be sorted out.

**Heiss.** There's an incredible situation anti-Christo in New York. The critics ignore him or easily put him down. They think it is terribly unchic and unfashionable even to discuss the Christo project. Before going to California I met friend, a sculptor, in the street who asked me what was I going to California for. I said to see « Running Fence ». And he « You're kidding, why would you want to do a thing like that? » No, I won't say who it was. But if I had said that I was going to shop in Bloomingdale's...

**Nonas.** He wouldn't have answered that way. People mention Christo to me and they expect my reaction to be just like what Richard Serra's was. They expect me but I don't want to do that. But in the same time all my defence of Christo becomes an attack on a kind of snottiness that says that the only interesting art is this really cold, intelligent, etc. My defence is that Christo as a man and as an artist is hard working and serious and good at what he does and this is what the critics are not ready to admit.

**Why not?**

**Nonas.** Because their definition of serious art is a very narrow one and does

not include what Christo is doing and a lot of other things. I've never seen « Running Fence ». I've seen the photos, the drawings and spoke to Christo about it. Visually it must be an extraordinary experience, a beautiful, beautiful piece. He uses the space in a way that I totally approve of and that I understand. But the most interesting thing of that piece to me is a talk I had with Christo one day and he told me about talking to the ranchers. And I know that area in California. They're very narrow and not interested in foreigners. But he told me of standing at 6 o'clock in the morning with one of those people milking his cow, trying to convince him to let him put his fence through. Then I heard the same story from someone who was with Christo. I find extraordinary that he's able to communicate his energy and commitment to the project to people that have no interest in it. I know very few artists able to do that. And that's part of making art. For example I make these things and they sit in a gallery. Part of what I have to do is to make others to feel the energy with which I am making them. My defense is that Christo is a serious artist and his is serious work and that Richard Serra, who is also a serious artist, needs to take it seriously, even if he doesn't like it. Criticism of Christo falls into two categories. People that say « I don't like it, it could have been this or that ». That's the tune of it. But the other side is ideological, it is not about it as art, it is not even about it as a social action. It is about someone applying a very narrow definition of what art is to this work, and that I don't approve of at all. Whether « Running Fence » is good or not I don't know, I have not seen it. I'd like to see it. I'm sorry I didn't. I didn't like Valley Curtain. Other pieces I thought were good.

**But you've seen the documentation. What do you think about this relationship between the work and the documentation of the work?**

**Nonas.** It's very confusing. My idea is that everything that depends upon secondary things, secondary analysis, explanation, is weak work.

**Ross.** This is an interesting question. Where and how do you draw the line to say this is part of the work, and this is not? I like this part of the work, I don't like this part of the work?

**There's another question. We're used by now to the fact that Christo's works have to be always more impossible to realize, always larger. Don't you think that this line is somehow restrictive for the artist and for art in general? Maybe Christo should do a higher synthesis to his work, give it a different goal, make a shift.**

**Nonas.** I don't know if Christo says that his work has to be always larger and more impossible. If he says that I totally disagree.

**Heiss.** That's part of making art.

**Nonas.** Every piece I make starts out by being impossible. The reason why his work gets bigger and bigger is that a lot of what's involved in the work is setting up support structures to do the work. And each one makes it possible to do the next one. This work probably was impossible 5 years ago. But because of Rifle-Colorado he was able to get it together. Part of the problem I have with Christo is that the drawings become the work. They are not the work and are not very interesting except as souvenirs of the work. The work itself is often very good.

**Ross.** How would you feel if all of a sudden he declared that the piece was totally generated as a myth? If instead of making pieces that are bigger and bigger he made a piece that was totally non-existing in physical reality and only existed as a second generation information as photos, drawings, and let people believe that it was there, in existence, as some kind of structure?

**Asnaghi.** I find his work interesting because it operates a kind of metamorphosis on the landscape. That's why he works on large dimensions and he's correct and coherent about this. As a myth? It is complicated. I wouldn't find it honest or interesting just as information.

**Nonas.** But it has already happened. Although not with Christo. It is interesting. I don't for a moment believe that « Spiral Jetty » exists. That's all pictures, films, photos. It's a myth. But that's true with most of the work of land artists. The first piece that Heizer really made is « Complex One/City », which is terrible. Don't get me wrong. I think that « Double Negative » is one of the greatest pieces of sculpture ever made. I just don't believe it's real.

**Ross.** It's like the difference between the food and the menu. What Christo exploits is a very American characteristic, perhaps universal, but certainly American, mistaking the menu for the food.

**Nonas.** And there's the idea of the West, of the New Country, which is not a European dimension. And the only ones that can deal with it in such an open, obvious way are Europeans. For Americans it is the scale of reality. Christo by putting those things there has made a 19th century landscape painting of the West.

**Heiss.** The Europeans out in California to see « Running Fence » seemed much more open and interested. OK, forget the critics, but I bet Barbara a pair of Italian boots next year style that we'll see no articles on this, except for some reportages, and that we'll have to depend upon European critics for the interpretation of this work. I was very interested in the administration of the project. The artists that deal with large projects are forced to build a structure that corresponds to American commer-

cial structure. I was totally involved in the way Christo built his structure.

**Nonas.** Christo is not the only one that has made large scale projects outdoors that cost a lot of money. But he's the only one that has raised the money himself. With Heizer or Smithson the money all comes from one very rich man or two very rich men. Heizer has out in the Nevada desert something like \$400,000 worth of equipment. That's fine. The point is that somewhere Heizer comes up with the money to make one of those pieces and nobody criticizes him for it. But everybody criticizes Christo because he goes out begging. And this happens because in the case of Heizer or other people it seems that they can maintain their ideological purity. That's snottiness.

**Heiss.** To find the money to the scale he's doing it should not bring criticism on him but rather inspire respect.

**Let's not forget that to this respect the artists are two: Christo and his wife Jeanne-Claude who's the president of the corporation.**

**Nonas.** That's another reason why he's criticized.

**Heiss.** There are two structures that are visible in the US for large projects outdoors. One is the Heiner Friedrich's, who's working with De Maria, Turrell and all those people. The other is Christo.

**Are you talking in the first instance of the Dia Foundation?**

**Heiss.** Right. You see, the others are in a very tasteful situation where Friedrich takes care of everything. You can't even go and see the works without permit, you cannot go at all.

**Nonas.** To go and visit « Complex City » you must fly, and all the pilots of the area have been paid not to take you there without permit.

**What do you mean?**

**Nonas.** Exactly what I said. That the pilots are paid not to take you there unless they get the authorization first.

**Heiss.** I think that artists should be able to do this.

**Nonas.** OK that's very good but we were talking about it in relation to Christo. Now the interesting thing is that a lot of the problems and arguments against Christo are based on the fact depend upon the fact that his projects are very open, his founding is very open. What's interesting is that by doing things in another way, by keeping it quiet and doing it in terms of very large amounts of money given by single individuals, the criticism disappears.

**Asnaghi.** Besides all aesthetic, commercial, economic considerations, besides all considerations at all, Christo always manages to intrigue everybody. One of the first works of Christo is certainly a monument made to himself - and not a bad one.