

KERN COUNTY

# CHRISTO

FACT SHEET

February 1991

He has been described as *one of the most influential artists of our day*; his work, as *evocative and an ongoing dialogue between imagination and realism*. He is the internationally renowned artist Christo and his latest project is *"THE UMBRELLAS, JOINT PROJECT FOR JAPAN AND USA."*

Christo was born Christo Javacheff in 1935, in Gabrovo, Bulgaria. He studied at the Fine Arts Academy, Sofia, from 1952-56 and at the Vienna Fine Arts Academy in 1957. In 1958 he moved to Paris and began his *Packages* and *Wrapped Objects* projects. He established his permanent residence in New York City in 1964.

All of his projects are large-scale and conceived as being temporary, which according to Christo, creates a kind of energy. They also share another vital element: the site. *The site carries meaning to my work*, Christo often states, and the relationship between the project and the selected site varies with each proposal.

Today his biography boasts over 30 completed large-scale projects with four more in progress. Among his completed works are *Valley Curtain*, *Grand Hogback*, *Rifle*, *Colo-*



Christo in Tokyo, October, 1989 (copyright Wolfgang Voltz)

*rado*, 1970-72, a project which used 200,000 square feet of nylon polyamide, 110,000 pounds of steel cables and 800 tons of concrete; *Running Fence, Sonoma and Marin Counties, California*, 1972-76, 18 feet high and 24 1/2 miles long and made of two million square feet of woven nylon fabric, 90 miles of steel cable and 2,050 steel poles; and *Surrounded Islands, Biscayne Bay, Greater Miami, Florida*, 1980-83, made of 6 1/2 million square feet of pink woven polypropylene fabric.

His four works in progress are *Wrapped Reichstag, project for Berlin*, started in 1972; *The Mastaba of Abu Dhabi, project for the United Arab Emirates*, started in 1979; *The Gates, project for Central Park, New York City*, begun in 1980; and his latest *The Umbrellas...*, begun in 1985.

Despite the common ingredients of scale, site, temporariness and use of space in his projects, the visual forms vary greatly, as can be witnessed by the diversity of materials used in his projects. Using the world as his medium (or palette), Christo can indeed be described as one of the most influential artists of this era.



**UNDER THE ARTISTIC COVER** — Members of the Brea Association of American Retired Persons gather underneath one of Christo's Umbrellas, during a trip they made last month to the artist's hillside display. The group of 47 toured the exhibit, which was taken down several days later after fierce storms uprooted one of the massive umbrellas, killing a woman.

# Exhibit opens to jeers, cheers

## Christo's umbrellas stop I-5 traffic at dawn unveiling

By John D. Cramer  
McClatchy News Service

LEBEC — It was beautiful, it was ugly, it was here — finally.

At dawn Wednesday, with the night chill and the howl of coyotes in the air, the sunlight slipped over the rim of the low, rolling mountains and into the stretch of Interstate 5 known as the Grapevine.

It shone on a bunch of big yellow umbrellas billowing in the wind — and a whole lot of faces covered with awe, puzzlement or irritation.

"It's gorgeous," said an art lover, nearly swooning.

"It ain't nothing to me," said one man, shrugging.

"What a bunch of ----," growled another person.

"I don't what art is, but I look at this and I think I understand," said a guy in the middle of the road.

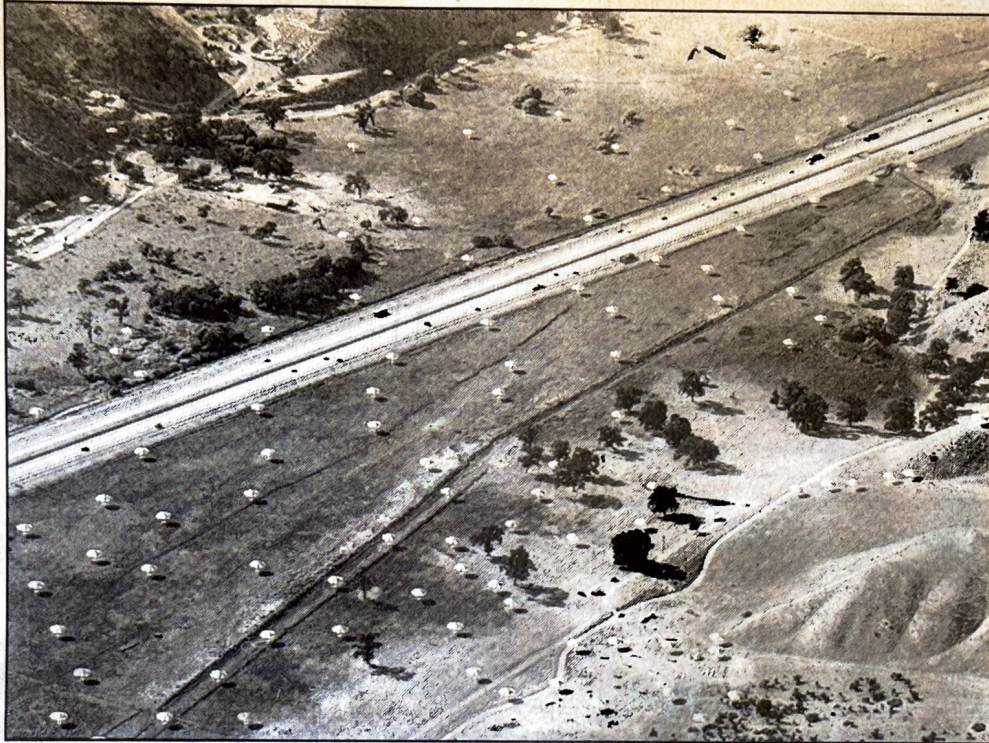
The second half of "The Umbrellas, Joint Project for Japan and U.S.A.," Christo's \$26 million worth of giant octagonal umbrellas, opened Wednesday in the Tehachapi Mountains. Scattered through the Tejon Pass along 18 miles of I-5 are 1,760 yellow umbrellas.

The first half of the massive project — 1,340 blue umbrellas — opened at dawn Wednesday in rice fields north of Tokyo.

The exhibit, delayed a day by rain in Japan, is meant to demonstrate differences and similarities in culture and the use of space. They will stay up until Oct. 30 and the materials will be recycled.

Environmental artist Christo, who devoted six years to his latest project, opened the display in Japan before big crowds.

The Bulgarian-born artist, however, was not to be seen during the unveiling here.



Some of artist Christo's 1,760 yellow umbrellas dot the landscape in the Tejon Pass on Wednesday. H. Lorren Au Jr./The Orange County Register

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Accompanied only by his private film crew, Christo selected a secret umbrella site to relish the moment, said Tom Golden, project manager for California.

"He's worked very hard to develop his vision, and he has the right to savor it in private," Golden said.

Late Wednesday, Christo announced the arty umbrellas he opened in Japan were closed because of a rainout.

The artist told reporters an impending typhoon forced him to close umbrellas in Japan. "That's why the closing of the umbrellas is designed to be a very fast operation."

Before sunrise Wednesday, about 900 workers and hundreds more camera-toting onlookers spread across the countryside.

The crowd was eclectic — many ages, races, nationalities and backgrounds — ranging from hip Los Angeles artists drinking champagne to curious nearby residents.

"History is being made, man," said artist Chris Holguin.

"This shows nothing in life is impossible no matter how bizarre," said artist Nadja Mendoza.

Pine Mountain resident Fred Westlund snapped photos of relatives with umbrella No. 1,760.

"I just want to see what it's like," he said.

Motorists parked at odd angles, crept along the highway, backed up on entrance ramps and gawked all around.

The first umbrella unfurled about 7:15 a.m. on a distant ridge. Cranked open slowly, the rest

opened by late morning.

Helicopters clattered and airplanes circled. Vendors and merchants did brisk business. Police worked to keep roads clear.

Everywhere, people stared, gaped, smiled, pointed, pondered, took photos and walked about distractedly.

"This is the most incredible experience," said Nanci Schriber-Smith of Brea, an art instructor at Fullerton College. "I've had goosebumps since I woke up this morning, and they have just gotten bigger and bigger. It's sheer bliss.

"It's just incredible. I can't imagine any skeptic coming through and not considering this art. I don't know anything else it would be.

"As we were putting them up, the truckers were honking and waving. They've seen them going up and they've been waiting for this for a long time. Oh, it's just wonderful. I

Up close, the umbrellas — big, dusty, scrapes in the yellow paint, nuts, bolts, imposing shadows — seemed almost clunky, more machines than artworks.

But from afar, the impression changed: The parasols — alone or in clusters or long lines, in fields next to grazing horses and on high mountain ridges — seemed delicate, fluttering in the wind, filtering the sun on desert slopes.

Many people said the umbrellas resembled giant flowers, newly blossomed, or mushrooms, or huge butterfiles, freed from their gray cocoon casings and sitting on long yellow poles.

Linda Eckmann, an artist from Laguna Beach, observed, "The hills are a nice toasty-brown right now, and the umbrellas look like big pats of butter. Visually, it couldn't be nicer.

"As we were opening them, we could look under the skirts of the umbrellas and there was a cathedral-like feeling, almost like a Georgia O'Keeffe painting. It is totally, totally worth it."

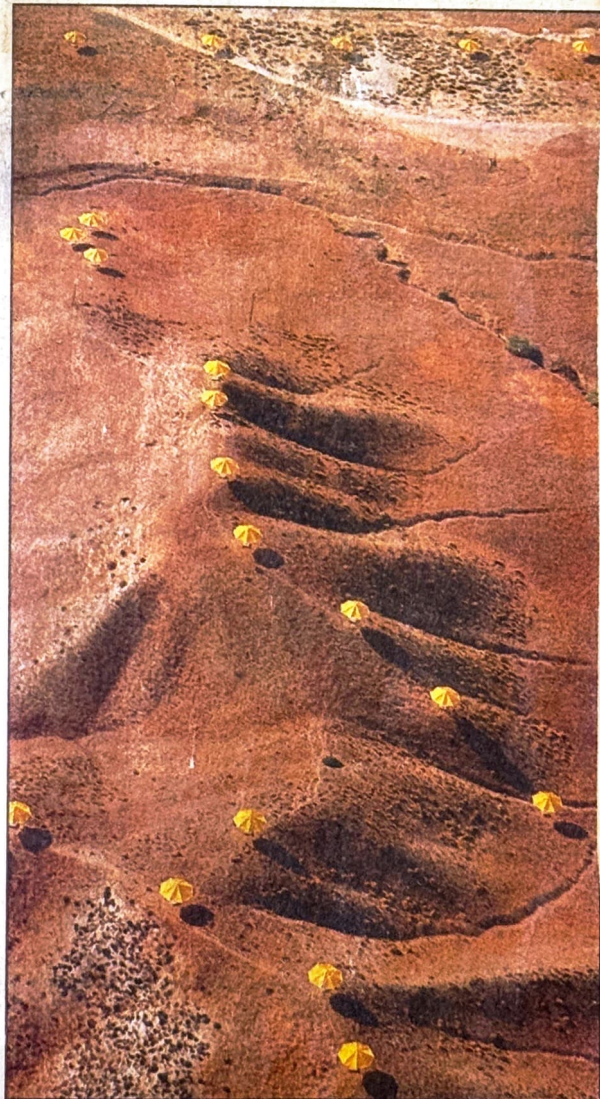
# Christo's 'Umbrellas' open to mixed reviews



Ken Steinhardt/The Orange County Register



Agence France-Presse



H. Lorren Au Jr./The Orange County Register

Busloads of Japanese tourists, students from Southern California and armchair art critics met from Gorman to the Grapevine along Interstate 5 on Wednesday as the second half of Christo's \$26 million art exhibit, "The Umbrellas, Joint Project for Japan and USA," opened in the Tehachapi Mountains. **TOP:** Crew and spectators witness the blossoming of one of the first umbrellas. **RIGHT:** Umbrellas dot the Tejon Pass. **ABOVE:** Umbrellas decorate rice fields 75 miles north of Tokyo. Christo announced late Wednesday that an impending typhoon forced him to temporarily close the umbrellas in Japan. **For more details, see Page A3**

# Last look at Christo's umbrellas



Bill Alkofer/The Orange County Register

Ramiro Soto, who works at the Vi-Cal Metal recycling plant in Orange, dismantles one of the 1,760 umbrellas that made up Christo's massive art project in the Tejon Pass north of Los Angeles earlier this year. The recycling plant, which beat out other bidders for the job, is in the process of

stripping the nylon material from the frames and cutting up the metal, which will be sold and melted for re-use. All of the nylon and even the bolts that held the umbrellas together will find a future use, Vi-Cal President Frank Calta said.

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