



OpinionJournal

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NEW YORK DISPATCH

Good Riddance, 'Gates'

Christo's exhibit is straight out of corporate hell.

BY ALAN BROMLEY

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NEW YORK--I went to experience "The Gates" in Central Park one recent morning. I was hoping for the best: a teasing treatment of wind and light that would inspire me and other strollers to new, and perhaps better, visages of the park, New York City and the human spirit.

What I found was soul-deadening. I entered the park on East 72nd Street and walked south, hugging Fifth Avenue like a lifeline. Blessed with great peripheral vision, I found myself harnessed; my vision cut off, channeled and confronted with pillars supporting synthetic saffron-colored drapes.

Don't get me wrong: I love color and its influence, its sensuality, in people as well as fabric. But all of a sudden I found myself reliving one of my worst corporate experiences. Several years ago I was hired as a vice president of a major public relations firm. I was informed that I could not hang any pictures or other art on my walls, except those works of "art" created by the founder--who, suffice it to say, made the right career choice when he went into PR. I was angry, felt stifled and quit within three months, determined to find my own way.

That's what Christo and his wife have done to New York's gem, Central Park. They have, in an act of supreme hubris, taken the dream of respite and restoration from the demands of corporate New York City--perhaps the most demanding city in the world--and turned the trees, the paths, even the graying of winter into yet another corporate hallway. Don't look right; don't look left; look up and you will be confronted! The only place to look, to get away from this imposition, this intrusion, is down. As a New Yorker, I refuse to look down.

And why saffron, the color of the Hare Krishnas? New York is a city of Catholics, Jews, Protestants, Muslims, of people who are black, white, brown and yellow, and variations of all of the above, and we relish it, benefit from it, and, at our best, learn from it.

After five blocks, I couldn't wait to leave Central Park--for the first time since I was almost mugged during the Dinkins administration. Central Park has always been a special place for me. I attended antiwar rallies and concerts, played softball, took my daughters on the carousel, rode bikes with my wife or simply walked my dog. I always left with a sense of calm, thankful that this oasis existed, whether it be green in summer or gray in winter. One would, or could, view and admire the splendid architecture of Fifth Avenue, Central Park West, Central Park South and Harlem, and be thankful for being in a place of trees with roots that seemed to reach out to you, of nature still being able to take its course amid the demands of city life; a place of momentary peace.

That was the idea, the dream of Frederick Law Olmstead and Calvert Vaux; a place to let your soul be regenerated by the beauty of nature, to stroll, let your eye and mind wander past the demands of the day, to relax, play with your family, or lament and to regain your spirit.

But this day, I realized that Christo and his wife had hoodwinked us all and forced us into their monotone vision, one that is anti-American and certainly anti-New York. What we have here are a man and a woman who, enamored by themselves, have neither a sense of New York City and nor a sense of history. It is but an announcement of arrogance, absent knowledge--an equation that has always caused human doom, albeit this time visually so.

I say, drape the Christos in yellow for being too lazy or cowardly to learn about who we are, or in black for their bleak view of us. Two more thoughts: One, I'm so happy this is a temporary exhibit, and two, I hope that they never get permission to "do" Athens, Des Moines or Jerusalem!

Alan Bromley, lives, writes and revels in New York City.

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