

LOCAL ACTION

The Boston Globe

Access to artists via 'The Gates'

By Leslie Brokaw, Globe Correspondent | February 3, 2008

For nearly three years, I've kept tucked in my wallet a 2 1/2-square-inch piece of bright orange fabric. It's the same fabric that was used by the artists **Christo** and **Jeanne-Claude** to make the panels of their installation project "The Gates" in New York's Central Park. On the day the 7,503 gates were unfurled - Feb. 12, 2005, after 16 years of planning and political wrangling - project staffers handed out the swatches as party favors to those of us who were stumbling around open-mouthed and giddy.

Fans viewed the opening as a long-awaited high holy day of art. At the same time, many who had denigrated the endeavor during its run-up as so much emperor's-new-clothes came away enchanted. Rarely in the depths of raw, gray winter had Central Park been so festive. The paths were filled with visitors and locals, all happy to simply stroll and take in the 16-foot-tall gates and shimmering fabric.

On their website, the artists described the effect this way: "When seen from the buildings surrounding Central Park, "The Gates" seemed like a golden river appearing and disappearing through the bare branches of the trees and highlighting the shape of the meandering footpaths." For two weeks, everyone came out to play, and then it all went away.

Following Christo and Jeanne-Claude were their longtime documentarians **Albert Maysles** and his brother David, who began filming for "The Gates" back in 1979. (David died in 1987.) Over the past 34 years the Maysles brothers made "Christo's Valley Curtain," "Running Fence," "Islands," and "Christo in Paris," films that captured the dramatic temporary installations in which the husband-and-wife team draped and wrapped fabric on monumental canvases - the space between two Colorado mountains, for instance, or the length of the Pont Neuf bridge in Paris.

The film shows the artists from back in 1979, when they began taking the project to community-board hearings asking for permission. ("Twenty-seven miles of shower curtain" is how one critic dismissed the idea.) It wasn't until 2003 that permission was granted, from new Mayor **Michael Bloomberg**. The cause was helped by the fact that 7 1/2 years earlier Christo and Jeanne-Claude had wrapped the Reichstag parliament building in Berlin, to great fanfare and popular acclaim.

"As pioneers of cinéma vérité, the Maysles were never drawn to the talking-heads type of documentaries," film critic **Charles Taylor** wrote in an essay that accompanies a 2004 box set of five of the Maysles' films on the artists. "The most profoundly moving moments in these films are the sight of people discovering a capacity to respond to beauty that they may have never suspected they had in them."

The film "The Gates" will premiere on HBO Feb. 26, but the Museum of Fine Arts is hosting a special screening on Friday at 7:30 p.m. Attending the show to introduce the film and conduct a Q&A will be Christo and Jeanne-Claude themselves and two of the filmmakers, Maysles and **Antonio Ferrera**.

The event is free. Tickets will be available Friday at 10 a.m. at the museum box office and online at mfa.org/tickets. The MFA is not accepting phone orders.

CONVERSATIONS WITH: Also on Friday, at 7 p.m., director **Cecilia Miniucchi** will introduce and talk about her film "Expired," which stars **Samantha Morton** and **Jason Patric** as parking officers with mismatched personalities who get romantically involved. The movie played the Cannes Film Festival, the Sundance Film Festival, and the AFI Festival, and now the Harvard Film Archive. Information is at 617-495-4700 and hcl.harvard.edu/hfa.

A year ago, Cambridge filmmaker **Jane Gillooly** was in Swaziland, meeting people and shooting footage about the devastation that AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria have had on the country. What the professor of film at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts found was an emergence of a generation of children who are being raised by elderly grandmothers.

The movie Gillooly made, "Today the Hawk Takes One Chick," focuses on three women, as the director's notes put it, "whose experiences highlight a rural community at the threshold of simultaneous collapse and reinvention."

It gets its Boston premiere Saturday at 7 p.m. at the Institute of Contemporary Art, with a Q&A with Gillooly and members of the film crew following the show.

Information about the movie is online at <http://janegillooly.com>. Details about the screening are at 617-478-3103 and icaboston.org.

AFRICAN FILM FEST CONTINUES: The annual African festival at the Museum of Fine Arts, which started Friday, features a repeat of the opening night film "This Is Nollywood" on Saturday at 10:30 a.m., with director **Franco Sacchi** in attendance.

Sacchi, an artist in residence at Boston University, focuses on the Nigerian directors who churn out hundreds of feature-length films with "digital cameras, a week, and a few thousand dollars," as he puts it on his website. "Here was not only a rare positive story about Africa, but one that embodied the egalitarian promise of digital technology - anybody can make a movie."

Nollywood plots, Sacchi writes, "depict situations that people understand and confront daily; romance, comedy, the occult, crooked cops, prostitution, and HIV/AIDS."

A trailer of the film is online at thisisnollywood.com. The full festival lineup is at 617-267-9300 and mfa.org/film. The program continues through the end of the month.

SCREENING OF NOTE: The Brattle Theatre hosts a free show of "Double Indemnity" on Saturday at 11 a.m., with a post-film discussion led by Brattle executive director **Ivy Moylan**. It's part of the theater's "Elements of Cinema" series, designed as a Film-Fan 101 program for people looking to fill in some of their movie-watching gaps. If you've never seen it before, "Double Indemnity" is a primer on film noir, femme fatales, Fred MacMurray, and Barbara Stanwyck - all in one murderous, glorious package (617-876-6837 and brattlefilm.org).

Leslie Brokaw can be reached at lbrokaw@globe.com.

(Correction: Because of a reporting error, the Local Action column in Sunday's Movies section gave a wrong date for an HBO airing of the documentary "The Gates," about the art installation of the same name by Christo and Jeanne-Claude. HBO will broadcast the film Feb. 26.) ■