

A GATES NOTEBOOK

My response to the orange splash across the morning New York Times was "not another *Gates* shot." Relief came with the discovery it was flames from a car bomb in Beirut. It was the third day of my *Gates* inspired visit to the Big Grapple. Unfortunately, I had been suffering *Gates* Fatigue since I made my plane reservation. The great media stream was bleeding Saffron (don't call it orange!) the last few days leading up to the official Unfurling and Jeanne-Claude's noisome attitude had further curdled interest when encountered at the official *Gates* website and in countless interviews. "Any idiot can have a great idea," she said, "It's getting it done that matters."

I considered whether going to see the *Gates* qualified as a great idea as I sat on an empty bench overlooking the orange (they're saffron!) panels flapping in the breeze (waving hello or was it good-bye?) on a chilly February Sunday morning in New York's Central Park. I was sitting alone on a bench waiting for the *Gates* to speak to me. They were just about to when someone with a cell phone parked unnecessarily close by. My empty, quiet spot had been discovered and was fast becoming noisy and full — but of course, I was in New York!

Like so many others, I'd come to see *The Gates* because of *Running Fence*. A precious, golden vision of it disappearing into the surf at the end of a glorious day in Jenner (don't call it Sonoma!) has lingered in my brain for decades.

BY NANCY SPILLER

I'd skipped the umbrellas in Gorman, too far to voluntarily drive on L.A.'s hellacious freeways, but *The Gates* seemed like a great excuse for a New York holiday. Of course, a holiday is not something Jeanne-Claude and Christo would ever do. They claim to never take vacations, choosing instead to call trips around the world scouting for places to embrace with colorful fabric work.

So I ignored Jeanne-Claude's bad 'tude, and packed my bag, a copy of Sartre's novel *Nausea* (life is pointless but I am not!) along with an orange sweater (art is pointless and I have just the thing to wear!).

Immediately upon arrival I discovered that one's reaction to *The Gates* defined which social/economic caste they fell into. Cab drivers grumbled that it was a senseless waste of money. The middle class minions from around the world, Christo-heads who could afford to make the trip, grinned and cooed amiably as they strutted with their brethren down Central Park's orange draped paths. New Yorkers kept their cool. Denizens of the Upper

26 East and West Sides could literally look down on the spectacle while

turning up their noses at the mass amusement. One gauge of how gaga New York didn't go for *The Gates* was the Empire State Building's lights not turning orange (saffron!) at night and as far as I know, none of the landmark fashion emporiums seized them as a major merchandising theme. Easter and the pastel promise of spring still ruled on those fronts.

And while the New York cognoscenti had their fun with the phenomenon, far be it from me to pooh-pooh anyone's giddy pleasure at the wonder of some 7,500 panels installed for 16 days in a landmark horticultural preserve. Everyone had earned their smiles just by getting themselves there to share the moment. So why begrudge them their happiness?

The weather was, after all, gorgeous, for three of the four days I was there, and the pan-

THE PASTEL PROMISE OF SPRING STILL RULED

els caught in breezes and light and reflected on frozen ponds and framing the sculptural bare branches of winter trees were never anything less than lovely. In the blowing breeze they looked to be urging the crowds on, or maybe they were fanning flames in a world on fire. From the roof of a Westside co-op, they seemed like an electric current snaking and waving through the park. From a vantage point on top of a hill, people descended beneath a gate as they walked forward on the path, as if a curtain were rising on players on a stage. The sensuous, ubiquitous saffron fabric even helped me forget the sight of mysterious gunk and repugnant fluid smears I was confronted with whenever descending to the subway. Those staircases could use a little Christo magic!

The Gates reduced adults to Lilliputian size, making them appear childlike, or like dust bunnies beneath a bed ruffle. Children were reduced to tears, refusing to get it, or even consider it, wanting instead to get ice cream, or get out of the park.

But mostly it was an excuse to promenade. Out of towners got to see natives in their habitat. Westsiders were casually chic, Eastsiders could be seen in full-length fur coats and heels, children were with their nannies and exquisitely privileged dowagers were tended by their elder keepers. The over-groomed white standard poodle being walked by a statuesque woman actually looked natural in this setting.

Gates crowds were pleasant, non-combatative, unlike those encountered while trying to grab a table at the Whitney's cafe or a cup of

coffee at Moma. They were contemplative rather than competitive, sharing their reactions with strangers.

By the last day of my visit people were already on to other things. The crowd's attention was taken from flapping fabric to wheeling hawks, the pair that were recently re-instated to the decorative façade of a building by an Eastside co-op board.

Before catching a car to the airport, I took a run through the gift shop. I am, after all, an Art Tourist. I take only pictures, leave only footprints, form only opinions and can't resist buying a few souvenirs. I am the dream of hoteliers, restaurateurs and airlines. My ancestors would have paid to look at the hole in the ground called the Grand Canyon and I am no different. I went to see *The Gates*.

L.A. ARTISTS IN NEW YORK

I arrived in New York just in time to see the final hour of the final day of a show of Nancy Rubins' sculpture at the Paul Kasmin gallery in Chelsea. The two monumental compilations of found airplane parts wanted to be outdoors, maybe Central Park, where they would have been as interesting, if not more, than *The Gates*. The explosive arrangement of mufflers, shredded fuselage, et al, mimicked the shape of trees, and the galleries in which they were installed were too confining to do them justice. The accompanying photo collages provided a way for land-poor New Yorker collectors to share the work.

"The guy who made all this stuff is in there," the Whitney guard said pointing to the next gallery filled with yet more delightful **Tim Hawkinson** creations in the first major museum retrospective of the L.A. based artist's work. "You mean the artist," someone asked. "Yeah, over there," said the guard. Hawkinson was indeed present, a thin, malleable, neutral looking fellow responsible for the engaging collection of kinetic, mind expanding pieces. The perpetual signature machine had folks snitching autographs from the gathering pile at its base. Viewers' faces invariably lit up with broad smiles at the unexpected surprise of Hawkinson's playful pieces. No instructions were needed to enjoy. Hawkinson sees the world of possibility in the open spaces, minds and hardware stores of the West Coast.

Bill Viola was also generating slow-mo excitement at the Whitney with his *Five Angels* for the Millennium installation. A captivating sensory experience of sound and light, forcing viewers in the darkened gallery to give themselves up to the experience. Viola's video-based religion, something the silhouetted crowd did willingly. Sadly, Cy Twombly's works on paper, also at the Whitney, looked old-hat and anemic in comparison to the flock of artists visiting from L.A.