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Kulturforum Berlin, Neue Nationalgalerie

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Christo and Jeanne-Claude's *Wrapped VW Beetle* complements collection exhibition

Amid the major anniversary marking 30 years of the *Wrapped Reichstag*, the Neue Nationalgalerie will present another iconic work by Christo and Jeanne-Claude starting 11 June 11 2025, as part of its collection exhibition *Extreme Tension. Art between Politics and Society. Collection of the Nationalgalerie 1945 – 2000: the Wrapped 1961 Volkswagen Beetle Saloon*.

The artists Christo (1935–2020) and Jeanne-Claude (1935–2009) became renowned for their wrapping and packaging of objects and buildings, extending to parks and entire landscapes. For the artist duo, it was never about the act of wrapping, but rather a means to shift perception. Their art of transformation, which consciously took place outside traditional gallery or museum spaces from the early 1960s onward, continues to offer new experiences of everyday environments and natural settings. With *Wrapped 1961 Volkswagen Beetle Saloon*, the Neue Nationalgalerie is now able to present the important artistic approach of Christo and Jeanne-Claude to its audience through a highly symbolic work.

With the kind support of the family and the Christo and Jeanne-Claude Foundation, the work will complement the current collection exhibition *Extreme Tension. Art between Politics and Society. Collection of the Nationalgalerie 1945 – 2000*, which already includes an early work by Christo with *Store Front Project* from 1964. While in his relief-like wall piece *Store Front Project*, Christo recreates a shop window, Christo and Jeanne-Claude, with the wrapped Beetle, so to speak, take it to the streets.

The wrapped Volkswagen is featured in the exhibition chapter *A More Beautiful Life*, which explores how artists of the 1960s and 1970s viewed different lived realities in divided Germany and Europe with irony, attention to detail, and critical reflection—worlds that were heavily shaped at the time by political systems, consumer culture, and the media. With a Volkswagen in the Nationalgalerie, two images of Germany now come together in a productive way: an iconic German car that made world history and a museum deeply connected to Germany's cultural history.

The history of the artwork

In February 1963, on the occasion of a solo exhibition at Galerie Schmela in Düsseldorf, Christo and Jeanne-Claude wrapped a VW Beetle for the first time. The brand-new vehicle had been made available to them by Claus Harden, a colleague of the photographer and filmmaker Charles Wilp. However, the work titled *Wrapped Car* (1963) existed only briefly— at Harden's request, the car had to be returned to its original condition.

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NEUE NATIONALGALERIE

Potsdamer Straße 50
10785 Berlin

MARKUS FARR
HEAD OF PRESS

Phone: +49 266 4234 02
Mobile: +49 151 527 53 886

presse@smb.spk-berlin.de
www.smb.museum/presse



Years later, Harden would describe this decision as one of his greatest mistakes.

Fifty years later, in 2013, Christo returned to Düsseldorf for a lecture at the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen. There, he recalled the lost artwork and decided to recreate it. He acquired a mint green VW Beetle, model year 1961—the same model as the original—and had all fluids removed and the vehicle mounted on rollers. In 2014, it was wrapped once again. Thus, emerged the work *Wrapped 1961 Volkswagen Beetle Saloon* (1963/2014)—a tribute to the earlier action and, at the same time, a new artwork that powerfully embodies the ideas of transformation and remembrance.

Extreme Tension. Art between Politics and Society. Collection of the Nationalgalerie 1945 – 2000 is curated by Joachim Jäger, Deputy Director of the Neue Nationalgalerie, Maike Steinkamp, Curator at the Neue Nationalgalerie, and Marta Smolińska, Professor of Art History at the Magdalena Abakanowicz University of the Arts Poznań.

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