

Closing Christo's Gates

New York's Parks Department has denied a permit to Christo, an artist who specializes in transforming landscapes and whose latest proposal is to erect 11,000 steel-supported, golden-orange banners on 25 miles of pathways in Central Park. The department says it is the wrong project in the wrong place at the wrong time. Though it finds the project "visually seductive and of great esthetic charm," it has nonetheless reached the right decision for all the right reasons.

The department has correctly concluded that "The Gates" is more than just a very large work of art; with the crowds it would attract, it is also a very large public event. It risks not only extensive damage to a fragile, man-made landscape, but would also require costly services from understaffed city departments. Taking a minimum of six months to erect and dismantle a two-week display would seriously interfere with Central Park's use and maintenance. And such a project would set a dangerous precedent just when the city is scaling back events to decrease park abuse and encourage res-

toration. This huge "alteration" of the park is impossible to justify in terms of time, effort or money.

It is still harder to justify a temporary transformation that would cost over \$5 million — \$1 million more than the park's annual maintenance budget and more than five years' worth of capital budget restoration funds. There is also an inescapable question about exploiting public land for private gain; the project would be financed out of the highly profitable sale of related drawings.

Christo has vowed to fight on. "The park is still there, and I will do that project," he says. The record shows that he completed a similar undertaking in California without the necessary permit. He regards official obstacles as part of the esthetic process of getting the work done and genuinely believes he can persuade officials with his "humility" until art conquers all. Well, we are not persuaded. The city's sound decision is explained in a long, valuable treatise on enlightened park policies. We can thank Christo for that.