

# Felix Gonzalez-Torres

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## Overview

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This presentation of Felix Gonzalez-Torres's *"Untitled" (Loverboy)* (1989) at Dia Beacon marks the artist's first acquisition and exhibition at Dia. Consisting of sheer light-blue curtains installed in the linear expanse of the east gallery, which is lined by Robert Irwin-designed windows featuring shifting glazes, *"Untitled" (Loverboy)* emphasizes the existing architectural tension between transparency and opacity. In the spirit of Postminimalism, the medium is responsive to its immediate environment as it takes on a corporeality and relationality in concert with shifting atmospheric conditions. *"Untitled" (Loverboy)* introduces a queer politics and sensibility to the space, unfolding at the intersection of private and public, interior and exterior, and domestic and institutional.

From 1988 to 1989, at Dia's SoHo spaces, Gonzalez-Torres participated in artist collective Group Material's open-forum exhibition *Democracy*—then composed of Doug Ashford, Julie Ault, and Gonzalez-Torres—surrounding four critical concerns of U.S. democracy: education, electoral politics, cultural participation, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

*Felix Gonzalez-Torres* is organized by Jordan Carter, curator and co-department head, and Humberto Moro, deputy director of program, with Liv Cuniberti, curatorial assistant.

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*"Untitled" (Loverboy)* (1989) was first realized at Andrea Rosen Gallery in New York in 1991, the last installation in a four-part project organized by the artist himself. The conceptual parameters described in the work's certificate are both specific and open-ended, instructing that a pair (or pairs) of light-blue, common curtains are installed with relative ease, touching the floor and ideally draping all extant windows in the designated exhibition space, while the remaining details of each installation are left to the owner or hosting institution. The work exists even when not physically manifest and can be presented simultaneously in more than one location, demonstrating the artist's radical approach to authorship, ownership, originality, and value. Gonzalez-Torres cultivated this possibility of change and multiplicity across his practice, which saw him work with diffuse and prosaic materials in series informally known as the "Billboards," "Candy Works," "Curtains," "Light Strings," and "Paper Stacks," among others. Across these typologies, Gonzalez-Torres consistently staged relations "[between] public and private, between personal and social, between the fear of loss and the joy of loving, of growing, of changing, of always becoming more, of losing oneself slowly and then being replenished all over again from scratch."

Consisting of sheer fabric along the linear expanse of Dia Beacon's east gallery, lined by Robert Irwin–designed windows featuring shifting glazes, *“Untitled” (Loverboy)* emphasizes the existing architectural tension between transparency and opacity. Infiltrating the institutional space as a seemingly innocuous extension of its interior architecture, *“Untitled” (Loverboy)* embodies the productive liminality Gonzalez-Torres embraced throughout his practice and identity: “Its in-betweenness . . . [is] almost like straight acting. Like I said before, as a gay man, I think that has a lot to do with the way I do work. . . . I want to be the spy, I want to be the one that looks like something else in order to infiltrate, in order to function as a virus.”

Gonzalez-Torres's work references, extends, and challenges Minimal and Conceptual forms by amplifying the political, sentimental, and poetic connotations he identified as intrinsic to them. He was keenly aware of the artistic forebearers of these movements, many of which are presented at Dia Beacon, and sought to open the social dynamics of their reduced forms. For Gonzalez-Torres, the viewer's presence brings forth productive associations to artworks, contending: “Minimalist sculptures were never really primary structures, they were structures that were embedded with a multiplicity of meanings. Every time a viewer comes into the room these objects became something else. . . . Believe it or not I am a big sucker for formal issues, and, yes, someone like me—the ‘other’—can indeed deal with formal issues. This is not a white-men-only terrain, sorry boys.” Embracing the formal qualities but rejecting the idea of the Minimal object's autonomy, he pronounced, “. . . The viewer is something that I love, is something that I need for the work to exist, [for it] to happen.”

Contending with art-historical influence and lived experience, *“Untitled” (Loverboy)* bridges the formal vocabulary of Postminimalism with the charged language of interiors. The work is responsive to its immediate environment and takes on a corporeality and relationality in concert with shifting atmospheric conditions. In its precarity as a translucent material intended to demarcate a fragile boundary subject to flux and flow, the work suggests the melancholy and vulnerability of life replete with desire, longing, and loss, as it undulates and lightly caresses the gallery floor. Conversely, its pleats and voluminous billows recall the trappings of surplus and lush sensuality. Moreover, the use of light blue—a recurring motif in the artist's practice—imbues the work with layers of associative potential. The artist's blue has been interpreted as a symbol for boys, melancholy, memory, the romantic and erotic, and hospital gowns. Gonzalez-Torres, however, somewhat duplicitously rebuffed these charges, claiming, “Mine is just a light blue that you can get anywhere,” while revealing shortly after that “for me, if a beautiful memory could have a color, that color would be light blue.”

Gonzalez-Torres's intentional formal choices and refusal of fixed meaning and categories reflects a critical ambivalence. At once a self-determined artist and a public-minded activist, his artistic practice and personal and political engagements—with the realities of queer life in the 1980s and '90s—never overdetermined one another. He similarly folded his activities in and out of individual and collective action, the latter intersecting with Dia's programmatic

history. From 1988 to 1989, at Dia's SoHo spaces, Gonzalez-Torres participated in artist collective Group Material's (then composed of Doug Ashford, Julie Ault, and Gonzalez-Torres) open-forum exhibition *Democracy*, surrounding four critical concerns of U.S. democracy: education, electoral politics, cultural participation, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Thirty-five years later, Gonzalez-Torres reemerges at Dia with "*Untitled*" (*Loverboy*) marking the artist's first acquisition and exhibition at the institution. This presentation productively complicates Dia's mission, harkening back to Group Material's initial skepticism of the organization's invitation, in their words: "One of the first questions we asked was: 'Why are they asking us?'" To us, the Dia Art Foundation signified 'exclusive,' 'white,' 'esoteric,' and 'male,' whereas we had always attempted to redefine culture around an opposing set of terms: 'inclusive,' 'multicultural,' 'nonsexist,' and 'socially relevant.'"

—Jordan Carter, Liv Cuniberti, and Humberto Moro

