

PRESS RELEASE

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**TRAVELING; AN EXHIBIT OF THE WORK OF FELIX
GONZALEZ-TORRES OPENS AT THE RENAISSANCE SOCIETY**

For its season debut, The Renaissance Society is pleased to present *Traveling*, an exhibit of the work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres. Presented in conjunction with the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, where this exhibition took on different forms, *Traveling* opens at the Renaissance Society Sunday, October 2, and runs through November 6. There will be an opening reception Sunday, October 2 from 5:00 to 7:00 pm. at which the artist will be present. Felix Gonzalez-Torres will also speak at The School of the Art Institute Auditorium on Monday, October 3, at 6:00 pm. The talk is free and is sponsored in collaboration with The School of The Art Institute of Chicago Visiting Artist Program.

[This work] constitutes a comment on the passing of time and the possibility of erasure and disappearance, which involves a poetic space...[it] also touches upon life in its most radical definition, its limit: death. As with all artistic practices, it is related to the act of leaving one place for another, one which proves perhaps better than the first.

Felix Gonzalez-Torres, 1990

As simple as they may sound, a pile of candy, a stack of paper, a string of lights, these are the raw materials Gonzalez-Torres uses to address such complex themes as private and public, history and memory, and love and loss. In keeping with many artists of his generation, Gonzalez-Torres who was born in Cuba in 1957, appropriates the strategies of the previous generation of minimal, process and conceptually based artists. But unlike his contemporaries, who mine from the past a certain irony, Gonzalez-Torres uses his predecessors' strategies as a means towards a more personal, poignant and political end.

Since 1988 Gonzalez-Torres has produced a series of replenishable sculptures. In these works, which consist of vibrant mounds of individually wrapped candies or stacks of prints which sometimes feature romantic imagery or provocative text, the audience is invited to take a print or enjoy a piece of candy. Audience members who accept Gonzalez-Torres' gifts are no longer viewers but participants in a cycle of accumulating, depleting and replenishing, a cycle which is none other than life itself.

Time and duration are themes which run throughout all of Gonzalez-Torres' work. Whether explicitly, as in *(Untitled) Perfect Lovers*, which simply consists of two identical synchronized clocks, or more subtly as in the replenishable works, Gonzalez-Torres is in some way calling our attention to the ephemeral nature of the present. Seemingly disparate works such as *Untitled (Blue Curtains)* and his untitled billboard word portraits each share an obsession with the way in which moments are defined. The fluidity of billowing curtains, a haunting gesture with an invisible agent, stands in stark contrast to the rigid series of names, dates and places which make up a collective, public or official history. Given that a discussion of time must also involve space, what more appropriate title for this exhibition than *Traveling*? Far less grandiose than the notion of a voyage is the metaphysical sense of the word traveling which is simply movement through space. Even at that, its most mundane definition, traveling is still laden with metaphors about the nature of life, particularly life as a perpetually transitory state of being.

But in Gonzalez-Torres' work, politics are in no way forsaken for poetry. Throughout the 1980's Gonzalez-Torres was a member of Group Material, an artist collaborative devoted to cultural activism. Gonzalez-Torres has stated, "aesthetics is political", and in viewing the body of his work there is a seamless transition from the poignant to the political. Since 1989 the artist has produced several billboards one of which featured the soft inviting image of a bed with two pillows, both fresh with the imprints of their users' heads. Placed in several locations at once, this work unabashedly signified public recognition of private acts. As the artist commented in an interview, "Our intimate desires, fantasies, dreams are ruled and intercepted by the public sphere."

It almost goes without saying that the current issue for which not only the theme of public and private but all of Gonzalez-Torres' themes achieve their greatest significance is AIDS. Gonzalez-Torres is frank in admitting that his work is driven by and derived from personal experience. As a gay man whose work is suffused with time and the nature of being, AIDS is an unavoidable specter. Works such as *Untitled (Blood)*, a red and clear bead curtain and *Untitled (Bloodwork, Steady Decline)*, a series of graph drawings depicting a steady decline are strong allusions to this tragic epidemic.

For his exhibit at the Renaissance Society, Gonzalez-Torres will feature several works one of which, *Untitled (Revenge)*, will feature 2,000 lbs of blue candy. Gonzalez-Torres has also arranged to have 5,000 booklets from *Untitled (Passport II)* to be mailed out as invitations for this show. The booklet features black and white photographs of a turbulent and brooding sky sometimes containing a lone bird, photographed from below, floating effortlessly. As the artist has stated, "they are passports without name, gender, address, or ethnicity." Clearly not meant to verify our identity, these existential passports are more a testament to simply being.

Raised in Puerto Rico, the artist has been a resident of New York since 1979. He earned degrees from Pratt Institute in 1983 and the International Center for Photography in 1987. He has had solo exhibitions throughout the United States and Europe.

Traveling is accompanied by a handsome 79-page catalog with essays by Amada Cruz, Russell Ferguson, Ann Goldstein, bell hooks, Joseph Kosuth, and Charles Merewether. The Renaissance Society is closed Mondays and gallery hours are Tuesday through Friday 10:00 am. to 4:00 pm., Saturday and Sunday Noon to 4:00 pm.
