ROSS BLECKNER: What kind of students come to your Saturday night session, your art class? FELIX GONZALEZ-TORRES: I have no requirements. My requirements are very lax.

RR: That's very generous, but you must have some requirements.

PCT: Vaporize. That's it. (laughter) Actually, Saturday night is a very quiet night for me.

RR: What do you mean?

PCT: Saturday night is one of those nights when I just don't do anything. I love Sunday mornings now, the flea market on 26th Street.

RR: That's become popular. I went to one in Massachusetts. In two hours, I was SO irritable. It was jarring; it was dusty. The place must be the size of Central Park. Everybody whose store you've ever gone into in New York you see up there, because that's where they get it all. Brinfield, it's called.

PCT: I can't deal with new and novel things. I have no taste for new and novel things. Everything I've ever done, I've always had a history and a family. And these are the people I've known.

RR: You have to do some enterprise and foraging.

PCT: I like flea markets, their sense of mystery. I always wonder, I always make a fantasy about who owned it, who lived with this thing. As you know, I have a sort of things: I collect props and toys.

RR: What did you make of a picture of your toy collection. LOTS and lots of toys.

PCT: Hundreds. Plastic and rubber toys with big eyes. And things that have been left unplayed with by kids.

RR: You like big eyes?

PCT: Big, buggy eyes. Because I have terrible problems with insomnia.

RR: Why don't you take a sleeping pill?

PCT: I was telling you this story, because 1990 and 1991 were very rotten years for me. I went to a flea market during this time and was looking through a bag of toys, and the woman said—I was looking at a Mickey Mouse—"You can have them all for five bucks." I brought them home, and they made me feel very good. So I figured if I had more, I'd feel better. It didn't really work that way.

RR: It usually does work that way, when you find something that makes you feel good. It's like drugs. People take drugs to feel good. If drugs don't work, people wouldn't take them.

PCT: I took drugs, and I liked them. But not anymore.

RR: Me neither. But they still work. Anyway, why were you so upset, so miserable in 1991?

PCT: I was very lost. It was the end. The world was just closing in. And I was taking sleeping pills the way you take candy. Not just at night.

RR: Why?

PCT: I wanted to sleep for five days, six months, a year. I just wanted to sleep.

RR: Before I knew you I saw something... You know what I'm going to say?

PCT: I dedicated a piece to Ross.

RR: Exactly. I thought, this is so sweet, I want to meet him. He dedicated this thing to me and I don't even know him. (laughter) It put me in the best mood. And then someone said to me, "You idiot, why would he dedicate something to you? It's his boyfriend."

RR: (laughter) There's not too many people with that name. Ross. Where does it come from?

RR: Me? It comes from my grandmother whose name was Rose. Where did it come from for your Ross? What was his last name?

PCT: Laycock.

RR: How long were you together?

PCT: Eight years.

RR: What did he do?

PCT: He was a sommelier. He was about to finish his B.S. in Biochemistry with a minor in English Lit. He did everything; he was a Renaissance man. And gorgeous too, really gorgeous. Fucking hot! But intimidating, the first time around.

RR: Obviously you grew more comfortable, hopefully, in six or seven years...

PCT: Like he said once to me, I'm a strange bird—I guess he liked that. He had these boyfriends who were Calvin Klein models and stuff like that.

RR: Calvin Klein models? (laughter)

PCT: Yeah, the boyfriend before me was one of the biggest models...

RR: It's nice that people are bored with those kind of guys and go for strange birds, isn't it? Artistic types, if you know what I mean.

PCT: I saw a picture of this guy and I said, "Oh my God! Do I have to compete with that?" I look like a fucking snout with a jacket next to him. He was gorgeous.

RR: What did you think you looked like? A knot?

PCT: 'SN-O-T-...'

RR: (laughter) Felix, you're funny!

PCT: I always tell my friends, I feel like a snout walking down the street with a jacket on. I'm very insecure when it comes to looks.

RR: Well, a lot of people are... Listen, anything can work to your advantage or to your disadvantage. You have to make those feelings work to your advantage.

PCT: That's how I always work: take your limitations...

RR: And make them your strengths.

PCT: I was telling my students, "Your limitations should be your strengths." When I first started making art in 1987, I had no money. I had a little tiny studio smaller than this kitchen.

RR: The size of the studio is not particularly relevant to the work you do, Felix, is it?

PCT: That was a studio apartment, not my studio.
out? I couldn’t believe it! That picture in *Harper’s*?
That must be your favorite picture of you of all time.
M: My grandma ripped it out of the magazine and
put it on her wall.
R: You looked like a sex god.
F: I wanted to cancel the article, because I’m shy.
and it freaked me out.
R: You’re not so shy; don’t kid yourself.
F: David said something about hands that stayed
with me. He showed me a book of seventeenth
century portrait painting, and it’s all about the hands.
R: You have a melancholy to it. But you also
have a humor in your work that I love.
F: I take my work seriously. I don’t take myself
seriously. Sometimes you have to look back and say,
“Fuck, how was I able to make that shit?” And
laugh about it and then move on. And then destroy
the work. I’ve destroyed a lot of work: I’m not
afraid of mistakes. I’m afraid of keeping them.
R: Why are you afraid of keeping mistakes? What
are you afraid of going to show? Everything’s about
mistakes in life.
F: Every time I have a show, I think it’s the worst
ever.
R: After awhile, you stop being insecure, you get
used to it. I’m used to my insecurities.
F: People ask me, “Are you happy with your show?” And I say, “I don’t know.” I need six to eight
months to digest this work.
R: Are you happy with your Guggenheim show?
F: I don’t know.
R: Do you think you are.
F: No, I really don’t know. I have to...
R: Have you accomplished anything in your life so
far, as an artist?
F: That’s a tough question. In a way, ‘yes’ in a
way. ‘No.’
R: Tell me in what way ‘yes’ and in what way ‘no.’
F: I think with the stacks and with the candy
spills and the light streams, pushing certain limits,
like the limits of editions, the limits of the inclu-
sion of the viewer, the collector, other people in
the work. I feel very good about that.
R: I think your show is going to look beautiful. I
saw the little tea-ner, wetly installation.
R: Only at the Guggenheim, only these people.
When they told me that the show was going to be
you and me, I thought that’s a very good combi-
nation — a painter with someone who does installa-
tion. It can be pretty tough for people to go from
one area to another, but at the same time...
R: Well, that’s not our problem, is it? That’s num-
ber one. Do you think everyone’s going to say, “This
is the Guggenheim going fag?”
F: No, ‘cause no one has ever said “This is the
Guggenheim going straight.”
R: No, but they will say that it’s going gay.
F: I think people are past that.
R: Oh really! They won’t write it but they’ll say it.
You know what I mean? They’re politically correct
until they get home.
F: The way it works is that the press tells you that
you’re going to be an art show at the Guggenheim
and that’s all they say because it’s a straight, white
male show. But if it’s somebody else, some other,
it’s a show with two gay artists at the Guggenheim.
And that is very damaging because when someone
is labeling you it’s for the purpose of justification
which is always defensive. I’m gay. But I don’t make
work about being gay.
F: You don’t make work about being gay?
R: No. You just include it...
R: I don’t either. Although you make work about
being.
F: In love with a man...
R: In love with a man, what it means to be alive
today, what you think, how you feel... Do you think
that gets at all sentimental?
F: Not at all. On the contrary, it’s very political.
Because you are going against the grain of what
you are supposed to be doing. You are not sup-
posed to be in love with another man, to have sex
with another man.
R: Do you think that anybody cares about that at
this point?
F: Walk down the street holding hands with
another man and I’ll tell you a story. We’re talking
general culture.
R: Yeah, but we’re not talking about the general
culture. We’re talking about artists.
F: No, we are talking about our own culture
because artists come from the general culture, and
the public IS the general culture.
R: That’s true. More so than we imagine.
F: That’s what I’ve been doing with the work.
and you have been doing that with your work, too,
being an infiltrator.
F: Do you think your work is sentimental?
R: It is sentimental, but it’s also about infiltrata-
tion. It’s beautiful; people get into it. But then,
the title or something, if you look really closely at the
work, gives out that it’s something else.
R: Oddly enough, I think that my work does have
a certain sentiment to it, but I am not sentimental
at all.
F: All great art has sentiment.
R: And all great art has ruthlesslessness. That
is saying your work or my work is great. Just in
general, great work has sentimentality and ruth-
lessness in the appropriate balance.
F: I see it more as a heroic gesture. And I’m not
talking about size, it could be a small gesture. But
it has to be totally extreme to be heroic. Something
about ideology and about shows that are always
labelled...
R: By giving it a label, by saying “gay artists,” it’s a
way of being dismissive...
F: It’s also a way of keeping us bogus by giving
the center such an importance. Because that center
is always there, it’s art by straight white males.
R: Do you love them?
F: Some of them I do.
R: Which ones.
F: I love Robert Rymon, Carl Andre...
R: You DO! I can understand why you love Carl
Andre, but let me ask you something about him.
F: I don’t know anything about him. I never met
the man.
R: I’m not talking about the man. But I’m very
interested in an idea about the work. I noticed that
he was recreating a piece that he made in 1964 for
a recent show. But he hasn’t done anything since
that piece.
F: He has. There’s always some new work at the
back of Paula Cooper.
Félix González-Torres, Installation view at Castello di Rivara, July 8, 1991; Untitled (Blue Curtains), 1989/90, 5 light blue curtains, dimensions vary.
RE: His work has basically not moved or changed. Nor has Flavin’s, nor has a number of those minimalists’. Nor has Robert Mangold’s.
FCT: Well, I respect that. They were signature works.
RE: I love their work, by the way, but I want to know how come, if your work or my work doesn’t change, everybody is hyperspecial. These guys keep making one little tile piece on the fucking floor for forty years; everyone thinks: genius. You tell me what that’s about.
FCT: That’s from the market point of view, but I don’t think so.
RE: These artists are very dedicated. I really think this is all about survival and life-time dedication to finding some answers in a very narrow niche. They go for that, and they investigate that. Carl Andre has been really two of those pieces. Ross, most artists only have one great idea and then they keep doing it. One can think of with a few great ideas is Jeff Koons.
RE: He has different ways of working. In the end, the idea might all be the same, Felix, we don’t know that, yet.
RE: His work is brilliant, brilliant. That’s what I call different bodies of work—I always think, “Who made it?” It’s like five people, which he probably does have helping him. But it’s true, if you and I don’t change every six months, if we don’t produce the new spring collection or the winter collection, if there’s no difference, people think, “Oh, they sold out; they’re just lazy people.”
RE: Have you been reviewed in The New York Times?
FCT: Never.
RE: How many shows have you had?
FCT: In New York? At least five one-person shows.
RE: And you’ve never been reviewed?
FCT: In The Times, no; I’ve been very lucky.
RE: If you were reviewed at the Times who would you least like to talk about your work?
FCT: That’s a very awkward question to answer, Ross.
RE: I love it! Let’s put it this way, now that you’re having a show at the Guggenheim the chances are highly likely...
FCT: That they will bash me.
RE: Which writer do you think would do the least bad job.
FCT: The least damage, I think would be done by Carol Vogel.
RE: I like Holland Carter because he’s sweet and soft. But Carol Vogel is basically the person I would like, as well, to do reviews.
RE: Also, know every fool that flies into town and has a show gets six, eight inches of the Times.
RE: I think that the art writing, to put it mildly, is slightly out of touch. And I would say that’s generous.
RE: We’re strong enough to be generous. If you’re weak, pussy-footed, you cannot be generous. You have to be very construed and constipated about everything you own. But if you’re generous it shows you’re strong.
RE: Exactly. So are you in love now?
RE: I never stopped loving Ross. Just because he’s dead doesn’t mean I stopped loving him.
RE: Well, love moves on, doesn’t it, Felix?
FCT: Whatever that means.
RE: It means that you get up today and you try to deal with the things that are on your mind.
FCT: That’s not life, that’s routine.
RE: No, it’s not.
FCT: Oh, yes, it is.
RE: A lot is in life is about routine, and hopefully we can make our routines in life as pleasurable as we know how. Because we connect to our work in a way that’s satisfying and we have some nice relationships. After that, how much can you ask?
FCT: That’s why I make work, because I still have some hope. But I’m also very realistic, and I see that...
RE: Your work has a lot to do with hope; it’s work made with eyes open. That to me is very important. Work made with eyes open.
FCT: It’s about seeing, not just looking. Seeing what’s there.
RE: Do you look to fall in love? Do you need that as a situation? Does it inspire your work?
FCT: How can you be feeling if you’re not in love? You need that space, you need that lifting up, you need that travelling in your mind that love brings, transcending the limits of your body and your imagination. Total transgression.
RE: You feel like you had that with Ross?
FCT: A few times over.
RE: How long were you with him?
FCT: Eight years, more or less.
RE: How long into the relationship did he get diagnosed?
FCT: The last three years.
RE: Did he know he had HIV?
FCT: No. The year before he got the diagnosis of AIDS he had his appendix removed and they tested the blood and it was HIV positive. But he was a fucking horse. He was 195 pounds, he could build you a house if you asked him to. It’s amazing, I know you’ve seen it the same way I’ve seen it, this beautiful, incredible body, this entity of perfection just physically, thoroughly disappear right in front of your eyes.
RE: Do you mean disappear or dissipate?
FCT: Just disappear like a dried flower. The wonderful thing about life and love, is that sometimes the way things turn out is so unexpected. I would say that when he was becoming less of a person I was loving him more. Every lesson he got I loved him more. Until the last second. I told him, “I want to be there until your last breath,” and I was there to his last breath. One time he asked me for the pills to commit suicide. I couldn’t give him the pills. I just said, “ Honey, you have fought hard enough, you can go now. You can leave. Die.” We were at home. We had a house in Toronto that we called Pee-Wee Herman’s Playhouse Part 2 because it was so full with ecletic, campy, kitsch taste. His idols were not only George Nelson and Joseph D’Uinson, but also Liberace.
RE: That’s a very nice combination.
FCT: Love gives you the space and the place to do other work. Once that space is filled, once that space was covered by Ross, that feeling of home, then I could see, then I could hear. One of the beauties of theory is when you can actually make it into a practice.
RE: What do you mean by the beauties of theory? What kind of theory are we talking about?
FCT: We talk about Marxist Theory. We talk about Brecht.
RE: Your basic Whitney Program reading list.
FCT: Which is a great reading list.
RE: So Felix, I’m curious to what degree the involve- ment with your work, having a lover who’s died—I know that’s effected your work tremendously in the billboards.
FCT: Yeah, also inclusion, but being inclusive. Because everyone can relate to it. It doesn’t have to be someone who is HIV positive. I do have a problem, Ross, with direct representation, of what’s expected from us.
RE: Why?
FCT: What I’m trying to say is that we cannot give the powers that be what they want, what they are expecting from us. Some homophobic senator is going to have a very hard time trying to explain to his constituency that my work is homorotic or pornohobic, but if I were to do a performance with HIV blood—that’s what he wants, that’s what the rags expect because they can sensationalize that, and that’s what’s disappointing. Some of the work I make is more effective because it’s more dangerous. We both make work that looks like something else but it’s not that. We’re infiltrating that look. And that’s the problem I have with the sentimental, literal pieces. I’m Brechtian about the way I deal with the work. I want some distance. We need our own space to think and digest what we see. And we also have to trust the viewer and trust the power of the object. And the power is in simple things. I like the kind of clarity that that brings to thought. It keeps me from being opaque.
RE: And deluded.
FCT: I was visiting in Miami where I saw this beautiful video about someone dying. There was an image of someone swimming underwater and the sound was this very heavy-duty breathing, like someone couldn’t breathe, actually. And that for me would have been more than enough. But then of course they will not trust the strength of that imagery, the combination of imagery and sound. They had to add text to it and fuck it up.
RE: You know what I want to ask you? How long do you think you’re going to live?
FCT: That’s a very rude question. I want to live until I do all the things that I want to do.
RE: So you don’t know the answer to the question.
FCT: It’s not about time. It’s about how life is lived. I have had a very good life. I have lived this life well. Very well. And I’m an athleic, I’m one-hund- red percent atheist. How many years, I don’t know. I want to experience a few other things... I want to go back to Paris and I want to go back to London.
RE: How long do you think all of this would take?
FCT: I have no idea. Whatever it takes. Maybe a year, two years, six months. One month. That’s what I want to do.
RE: So you would be happy.
FCT: I want to be on the runway for Comme des Garcons.
RE: Oh, really? Is that an ambition of yours?
FCT: I’m just kidding. You did it. That was fun, huh?
RE: I like everything.
FCT: Ross, rephrasing the question—how long did it take you to make those new paintings?
RE: All my life.