

Keegan, Matt. "On Anne Truitt." *Artists on Artists Lecture Series*, 19 December 2017, Dia:Chelsea, New York, NY.

ALEXIS LOWRY: Good evening. Welcome. My name is Alexis Lowry. I'm an associate curator here at Dia Art Foundation. And I'm standing in today for my colleague Kelly Kivland, who organizes this series, the Artists on Artists series, but who, unfortunately, couldn't be here tonight.

It's my pleasure to introduce our speaker tonight, Matt Keegan. As many of you know, the Artists on Artists lecture series invites an artist to consider another artist, or artists, plural, in Dia's collection of programs. The events generated through the series not only give us new perspective on historical material, but also into the thinking and the practice of those who come here to speak.

Before introducing Matt, I would like to thank those who make this series possible. The series is part of the Sackler Institute at Dia Art Foundation, and is supported in part with public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. Brooklyn Brewery kindly provides the complimentary beer. And my colleagues at Dia, including Francesca Lo Galbo, Max Tannen, Mary Katherine Youngblood, and of course Kelly, are the engines behind tonight's event. On behalf of Matt, I would also like to thank Ann Greene Kelly, who codesigned with the artist the zine you have in your hand, as well as Jessica Dickinson, who is here and will partake in Matt's talk.

Anne Truitt entered Dia's collection in 2016, and her work is currently the subject of a long-term display at Dia Beacon. The overdue move to acquire Truitt's work came out of our conversations about who the voices were that could best complicate the narrative of minimal and conceptual art all rep-- already represented by the collection. At Dia, we were compelled by Truitt's emphasis on painting in counterpoint to geometric form, her use of color, and her rigorous interrogation of the terms of visual perception.

Matt Keegan has been similarly moved by Truitt's work, her painted objects, for several years. In 2014, he paired his own work with Truitt's *Landfall*, which is now at Dia, for an exhibition at Andrea Rosen that looked comparatively at color. The zine you have in your hand was also produced for that exhibition.

Today, he will consider Truitt and Felix Gonzalez-Torres, another artist who has been part of Dia's

programs, though not the collection, through writings by both artists about their own practice. Speaking with and through them, he offers us a new perspective or a new interpretive framework for thinking about both.

Keegan was born in Manhasset, New York, in 1976, and received his BFA from Carnegie Mellon University, and an MFA from Columbia University. Working in sculpture, photography, video, and text, his practice often navigates the complex interrelations of language, form, and image, by meditating on the confluence of personal experience and concurrent sociopolitical events, to suggest new ways of reflecting on questions of identity.

In early 2017, his solo exhibition, *Generation*, was presented at Participant in New York. An iteration of this exhibition, titled *Replicate*, is currently on view at the Carpenter Center for Visual Arts in Cambridge, Mass. It's up through January 7th, so go. In 2016, he realized the exhibition *A Traveling Show* with Kay Rosen, which was presented at the Contemporary Art Museum in Houston and Grazer Kunstverein in Graz, Austria. And his first monograph, *OR*, was published by Inventory Press in conjunction with his 2015 solo exhibition, *Portable Document Format*, at Rogaland Kunstsenter in Norway. After Matt's talk, we'll take questions, so get ready. And please join me in welcoming him.

MATT KEEGAN:

Thanks, Alexis, for that introduction, and thanks to Kelly, who invited me to give this talk tonight. So you're about to witness my first PowerPoint presentation. So wish me luck.

I also want to thank Jessica Dickinson, who will be a part of tonight's presentation; Ann Greene Kelly, who agreed to let me make additional copies of the zine we made for my show in 2014; and Stefany Lazar, who is here somewhere, for all of her help on putting together tonight's PowerPoint.

Okay. So for my talk this evening, I will focus on the work and autobiographical writing of Anne Truitt. The architecture of Truitt's childhood in Easton, Maryland, is mined for *First*, which is seen here, from 1961. It was described by the artist as "the essence of fence."

Truitt's biography is implicit in subsequent work. In a September 1980 entry from *Daybook*, the

first of three journals kept by the artist and published in 1982, Truitt writes, “I believe that I returned so persistently to the insights of my childhood, because what I think of as my nerve in art had its origin at that time, in my first recognition that I was alien in the universe. And I believe that because this realization of alien-ness ground itself into my mind in that particular setting, its characteristics became highly charged for me. I turned to this setting, away from the void. It was a choice of life over death. So that certain band of experience, the landscape of my childhood in all its inflections, became entirely providentially the nearest to home I am ever likely to know on this earth. Within these inflections lies the range of my sensitivity.”

In a January 14, 1975, entry, Truitt continues, “The east, west, north, south coordinates of latitude and longitude of my sculptures exactly reflect my concern with my position in space, my location. This concern and obsession since early childhood must have been the root of my 1961 decision, taken unconsciously in a wave of conviction so total as to have been unchallenged by logic, to place my sculptures on their feet, as I am on mine. This is the straight, clear line between my life and work.”

Following *First*, Truitt writes, “I immediately left behind the appearance of fence for ever less referential art. I began to isolate a reality of proportion and color, which I see gleaming behind the objective world.”

Turn and *Prospect* followed *Daybook*, published in 1986 and 1996. After reading these three journals, her life as an artist is difficult to detach from her sculpture, painting, and drawing.

Additionally, I will discuss the work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres, who integrated elements of his life and relationships into his art and exhibition making. Although his work is currently absent from Dia’s collection, Gonzalez-Torres was a member of Group Material at the time of their *Democracy* project, which took place at Dia’s former 77 Wooster Street location between 1988 and 1989, and was made into a related publication in 1990. I will cite interviews and text written by Gonzalez-Torres to pair with Truitt’s writing.

Both artists were dedicated teachers, and would not want their voice or biographies to dominate discussions on their art. In fact, Gonzalez-Torres clearly stated, “I am not the work,” while making art that wove the personal and the public together. Writing about biography in the 2006 book *Felix Gonzalez-Torres*, editor and close friend of the artist, Julie Ault, emphasizes, “When as a matter of public record,

biographical information is connected to art, cultural forces take over, and often preclude the subtle relationship between person and production. That correlation tends to get privilege in the interpretive mix, thereby overshadowing other possible meanings and associations. There are other hazards. Biography can be used as a means to categorize, heroize, or distort an artist's intentions and the function of their work."

For tonight's talk, I want to think about biography as a tool to stake a claim, to be specific with life experience and clear in one's position in relation to the time the work is both being made and exhibited. I will pair the work and ideas of Anne Truitt and Felix Gonzalez-Torres to create a dialogue and hope to not conflate their practices and content of their work, as well as their very different lives and deaths.

For Truitt, I'm interested in how her writing has served as a point of connection for younger artists, writers, and curators, to not only access the work, but to form a relationship with the artist. In the case of Gonzalez-Torres, the embedded autobiographical elements have served a similar point of entry and connection.

I came to Gonzalez-Torres while in the mid-'90s as a gay -- at the time, I was actually, technically, bisexual -- Cuban American art student drawn to his infusion of queer content in the traditionally straight legacy of minimalism. The work was a revelation to me, and like many artists of my generation, it continues to set a standard for exhibition making.

I read *Daybook* more recently, at a time when I was focusing my attention on the language of color and form, and had the distinct pleasure to show my work alongside Anne Truitt's *Landfall*, which Alexis mentioned is currently on view at Dia Beacon. This work is from 1970 and was included as part of a 2014 Gallery 2 exhibition at Andrea Rosen, which is the same gallery that exhibited the work of Gonzalez-Torres since 1990 and continues to co-represent his estate.

My thinking about Truitt and Gonzalez-Torres and their distinct approaches to art and biography came about after visiting the spring [2017] presentation of Gonzalez-Torres's work at David Zwirner Gallery. Friends brought the press release to my attention before seeing the exhibit, because of its erasure of significant details of the artist's work and life. What does it mean when a large gallery with a press team decides to not mention that Gonzalez-Torres was born in Cuba, was gay, made work about and for his

boyfriend, Ross, who died an AIDS-related death in 1991, and that Gonzalez-Torres died at 38 due to AIDS in 1996? Is biography queer? Does biography affect sales?

In her essay, *Minimalism and Biography*, published in 2000, Anna Chave writes, “That the artists associated with minimalism were mostly spared extensive biographical inquiries is unsurprising, not only because of the intently impersonal aspects of their practices, but also because the period of their work’s ascendancy overlapped with the broaching of certain critical paradigms entailing the diminishment or outright erasure of considerations of artistic subjectivity. In the radicalized 1960s, neo-Marxists, including partisans of Louis Althusser, elevated the categories of the material and the social over those of the individual or the subjective. For Marxists generally, as indeed for capitalism also, the personal and the expressive values have historically been derogated as secondary, and tacitly or otherwise as feminine, since women have ordinarily been acculturated to assume these arenas as their proper domains. Feminist critics may counter that the categories of the personal and the social are irrevocably intertwined such that the so-called private sphere has all along been radically implicated in patterns of modernization and processes of social change. But Marxist-informed criticism has largely persisted in depreciating the biographical, in so doing finding common cause at once with much poststructuralist art criticism, as well as the deindividualizing impetus underlying key minimalist initiatives.”

So to distill this quite dense quote of Chave’s, what she’s saying, in short, is that critical and often Marxist-informed writing during the years of minimalist production emphasized the material and social over the biographical or the subjective, and tended to marginalize the personal as being synonymous with the feminine. Second-wave feminist scholarship countered that the personal is political, and yet writing on the artists affiliated with minimalism, continues to downplay biography in favor of a material-driven narrative. I should note that Althusser, who Chave highlights, was a significant influence on the ideas and work of Gonzalez-Torres.

In a 1993 interview with Tim Rollins, published by Art Resources Transfer, Gonzalez-Torres anticipates Chave when he says, “I love formal issues. Actually, they have very specific meaning. Forms gather meaning from their historical moment. The minimalist exercise of the object being very pure and

very clean is only one way to deal with form. Carl Andre said, 'My sculptures are masses, and their subject is matter.' But after 20 years of feminist discourse and feminist theory, we have come to realize that just looking is not just looking, but that looking is invested with identity, gender, socioeconomic status, race, sexual orientation. Looking is invested with lots of other texts. 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 become something else. For me, they were a coffee table, a laundry bag, a laundry box, whatever. So I think that saying that these objects are only about masses is like saying that aesthetics is not about politics. Ask a few simple questions to define aesthetics. Whose aesthetics? At what historical time? Under what circumstances? For what purpose? And who is deciding quality? Then you realize suddenly that aesthetic choices are politics. Believe it or not, I'm a big sucker for formal issues. This is not a white men only terrain. Sorry, boys."

I'll add to this quote Gerardo Mosquera's insightful writing published in *Artforum* in May 1996, that Gonzalez-Torres's quote, "paradoxical feat of romanticizing of minimalism and conceptualism may be seen as the concealed, unsuspected introduction of a Latino strain into what had been largely European and American movements."

In *Prospect*, Truitt writes, "The achievement of women tends to be judged in comparison to the achievement of men. Historically, the majority of art critics have been male, and the majority of artists who have been attracted their attention have also been male. These facts flavor the canons of art criticism. The situation is changing, but as matters stand now, the achievement of women in art tends to be undercut."

In the preface to *Daybook*, Truitt establishes why she began the process of writing a journal. I have asked Jessica Dickinson to read the preface. Jessica is a painter and a dear old friend, and her work and writing have both been in dialogue with Truitt's for some time.

JESSICA DICKINSON:

"In December 1973 and in April 1974, I was given retrospective exhibits of my work in sculpture and drawing. The first at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, the second at the Corcoran

Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, where I live. Walter Hopps was the curator of both exhibits; that is, he reviewed all my work in the most minute detail, and, with my cooperation, chose which works were to be shown, and installed the exhibits. The force of this concentrated and unprecedented attention to my work and to me swept over me like a tidal wave. The objects that I had been making for years and years were drawn into visibility and, many of them for the first time, set forth to the public eye.

But it was not this aspect of the situation which confounded me. The works stood clear, each in its own space, intact. It was I, myself, who, the longer and the more intensely we worked, failed to stand clear. I felt crazed, as china is crazed with tiny fissures. It slowly dawned on me that the more visible my work became, the less visible I grew to myself. In a deeply unsettling realization, I began to see that I had used the process of art not only to contain my intensities, but also to exorcise those beyond my endurance. I must have done so with haste akin to panic, for it was a kind of panic I felt when, once again, inexorably confronted by my own work, confronted, actually, by the reactivation of feelings I had thought to get rid of forever, now so objectified that I felt myself brutalized by them, defenseless because I had depended on objectification for defense.

I also felt that my failure to come to terms with these feelings as I was making the work had deprived me of myself in the most profound depths. It was if the artist in me had ravished the rest of me and got away scot free. I had the curious feeling of being brought personally to justice, but obliquely. These feelings made no sense to me until I came slowly and painfully to the conviction that, although I had been scrupulous in trying to integrate the other areas of my life, I had avoided confrontation with the artist.

The anguish overwhelmed me until, early one morning, and quite without emphasis, it occurred to me that I could simply record my life for one year and see what happened. So I bought a brown notebook, like the ones in which I made lecture notes in college, chose a special day, the first of a visit to a friend in Arizona, and began to write, sitting up in bed every morning and writing for as long a time as seemed right. The only limitation I set was to let the artist speak. My hope was that, if I did this honestly, I would discover how to see myself from a perspective that would render myself whole in my own eyes.

As I wrote, my life continued in its ordinary round. I took care of my three children, Alexandra,

Mary, and Sam, who at the time, 1974, were 19, 16, and 14. I cooked, and cleaned, and gardened, and did all the various duties that fall to the lot of a woman living with her children alone. I tried to be patient with the rhythmical unfolding of my writing, never to second think it, and as the year went on, found myself rewarded when a subtle logic began to emerge. I began to see how my life had made itself as I was living it, how naturally and inevitably I had become an artist.

In 1978, my first grandchild was born, and I felt moved once more to write, this time with the idea that I might be able to illuminate for myself the painful confusion I felt during the transition my children made as they moved into adulthood away from me.

So this book had come to exist in the natural way. I hope it may just as naturally keep other people company as they live their lives. Yaddo, September 1981.”

MATT KEEGAN:

Get ready for this next slide. In Anne M. Wagner’s January 2010 essay on Anne Truitt, published in *Artforum*, Wagner provides some context to the year 1974: “That was the year that a sitting president resigned under threat of impeachment, an heiress was kidnapped temporarily radicalized, computers arrived in the nation’s newsrooms, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* made movie history, and the Corcoran Gallery of Art hosted the first and, until now, only museum retrospective of Anne Truitt’s work.”

One of the historical events that Wagner leaves out is the Vietnam War. In a February 26 entry from 1975, just months before the war officially came to a close, Truitt writes, “The newspaper this morning prominently displayed a photograph of a Cambodian man holding the naked sprawled body of his just-killed daughter. I place Sam’s poached egg on toast, hot Ovaltine and honey in front of him. Bear daintily accepts his morning dog treat, a biscuit that comes in bony shapes attractive to dogs. Superficially, a world presenting such disparities can only be comprehended within a logic of madness. Such a logic would have to be constructed, as indeed it has been, so well that remarkably few people revolt to seek new solutions. One of these is maladjustment to the world. I now see that when I left psychology, I was even at that time refusing to aid and abet acquiescence to the premise that all was well with the world, and that the

individual's job is to arrange an appropriate stance toward it. That Cambodian child was killed yesterday. I see her dead today. Empathy invites a quick reaction. The world is a mad invention with no order, no sense, no hope of sanity. Refusing to jump into the abyss of chaos, I return, as always, to order. I line us up, Sam, the dead Cambodian child, and me.”

Returning to their 1993 interview, Tim Rollins asks Gonzalez-Torres, “How do you go about making the portraits?” He replies, “As you know, in our culture, we read photographs in two ways, by what's denoted and by what's connoted. The denoted is pretty obvious. Color or black and white, a photo of a person or a building, a portrait or a landscape. The connoted are all the other characteristics that we bring to the reading of an image according to our particular historical formation and position. So when you look at a portrait photograph of someone you don't know, you pretty much bring your own connotations to a denoted set of characteristics. In other words, from an image, you switch to language, which is the only way we humans can read an image. In these portrait pieces, I try to reverse the process. I start with language, and then I ask the viewer to provide an image. I start a portrait by asking the person to give me a list of important events in his or her life, intensively personal moments, which outsiders have very little knowledge or insight into. Then I add some relevant historical events that, in more ways than one, have probably altered the course of and the possibility for those supposedly private or personal events. These portraits are always changing, and whoever owns them can alter, add, or take out information. They usually get painted directly on the wall, way up close to the ceiling, all around the room like a frieze.”

In a December 3, 1994, correspondence with collector Mr. Robert Vifian, whose portrait is seen here, Gonzalez-Torres relays to Robert Vifian, “In your case, I kept coming to the same point. I could see only through printed, projected, or electronic imagery, particularly when it came to the references about Vietnam. This is how I travel to Vietnam, through visual culture. Photography, TV, films, and the written word created a picture in me, not for me, but in me. We are not what we think we are, but rather a compilation of texts, a compilation of histories, past, present, and future, always, always shifting, adding, subtracting, gaining.”

Writing in 1974 from the artists' residency Yaddo, Truitt reflects, “I expanded into love with the

discipline of sculpture, although my intellectual reason for abandoning writing for sculpture in 1948 was that I found myself interested in the sequence of events in time. I think now that it was this love that tipped the balance. Artists have no choice but to express their lives. They have only, and that not always, a choice of process. This process does not change the essential content of their work and art, which can only be their life. But in my own case, the fact that I have to use my whole body in making my work seems to disperse my intensity in a way that suits me.”

One of the differences in the art making of Truitt and Gonzalez-Torres revolves around the centrality of the studio for Truitt, in contrast to the post-studio production of Gonzalez-Torres. In addition to the studio, the artists’ residency Yaddo, which -- a studio from Yaddo is seen here, Stone South. The artists’ residency Yaddo in Saratoga Springs played a significant role in Truitt’s art making life, where she later served as the artists’ colony’s director.

When Tim Rollins asked Gonzalez-Torres why he does not have a studio, he responds, “The reason I don’t have a studio, I think that I’m very neurotic. Actually, I guess I am neurotic. So having a studio would paralyze me completely. Just the idea that I would have a place where I had to go to work and make something scares the shit out of me. The studio is a scary stage set. The only time I had a studio, I didn’t make a single thing for six months. I guess that’s good. I saved the world from unnecessary artworks. I never had a penny, so by the time I got around to having some money, I realized I didn’t really need a studio. It was a revenge, a sweet one. Now I’m very happy I made that decision, because I don’t produce objects all the time. When you don’t have a studio, you take risks. You change your underwear in public. I’m not afraid of making mistakes. I’m afraid of keeping them. I have destroyed a lot of pieces. I like the excitement of fucking up royally. Some artists can rehearse in their studios before they go into the gallery. I find that too easy. I don’t know. I never had anything to lose, so I’ve always done it my own way.”

A 1970 Guggenheim fellowship afforded Truitt the luxury of building a studio in the backyard of her DC home. The studio is a central axis of her everyday life. In March 6, 1975, she writes, “The concept remaining merely conceptual falls short of the bite of physical presence. Just one step away is the debilitating idea that a concept is as forceful in its conception as in its realization. I see that this might be

considered an intelligent move. The world is cluttered with objects anyway. The ideas in my head are invariably more radiant than what is under my hand, but something puritanical and tough in me won't take the fence. The poem has to be written, the painting painted, the sculpture wrought."

Earlier in '75, Truitt wrote, "Three sculptures are well started and seem to be making themselves under my eyes. The paint is a creamy delight, strained and restrained through a tiny Japanese sieve that has somehow survived from my Tokyo years. It spreads sensuously under my brush, which seems scarcely to touch it, serving only to transfer it to the wooden surface."

In May of 1991, Truitt opened a retrospective exhibition at her long-term gallery in New York City, André Emmerich. After receiving a dismissive Roberta Smith review in the *New York Times*, Truitt responds, "The sculptures are simple fabrications. They declare neither technical prowess nor the implied heroism of the artists who, for their own good reasons, have brought the materials and methods of industry into the service of art. Clement Greenberg noted in 1968 that my sculpture edged on the look of non-art. I use wood for a number of reasons. A tree grows slowly. My temperament is slow growing. I feel akin to wood, which absorbs paint as I have found that I absorb experience, in layers that become intrinsic. And wood lends itself to planes. A severe planar armature throws emphasis on color, sets it free into three dimensions, so that a whole sculpture refracts the light to which human beings owe their lives."

Gonzalez-Torres began exhibiting in New York in the late 1980s. In the winter of '91, addressing this time period in the art market, Truitt writes, "In the long run, usually, genuine originality commands financial reward. But financial reward has recently, in the 1980s, come to some command of art. As William O'Reilly, astute art dealer, remarked, 'There are no more green fields. They have been macadamized by mercantilism.' Based as it is on the economy and economics of money, our society's intellectual history is constrained, Marx and Engels claim by what they call 'bourgeoisie values.' They write that, quote, 'The bourgeoisie have stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honored and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage laborers. Artists are bluntly confronted by the marketplace. Richard Diebenkorn's wife once told me that when her husband began to get famous, she had to get used to the fact that every time he marked a piece of

paper, it became worth a lot of money. Even my much more modest position makes the market value of my work way out of line with the intrinsic value of paper, wood, or canvas. One of the reasons I enjoy teaching is that I am paid a reasonable salary for what I do reasonably well, an even exchange, perfectly forthright.”

In his interview with Tim Rollins, Gonzalez-Torres states, “For me, it makes a lot of sense to be a part of the market. It would be very expected, very logical and normal, and natural for me to be in alternative spaces. But it’s more threatening that people like me are operating as part of the art market, selling the work, especially when you consider that, yes, this is just a stack of paper that I didn’t even touch. Those contradictions have a lot of meaning.”

Winter, 1991. This is a Truitt quote. “Edges also seem to me to promise insight, particularly edges where what we think of as opposites meet. It is interesting that the organs of reproduction are also closely juxtaposed with those of excretion. When the concepts they elicit in my mind meet, and when I bring to bear on them my intuition that all that exists is one, I discover the simultaneity of creation and destruction.”

In a 1991 interview between Bob Nickas and Gonzalez-Torres published in *Flash Art*, Nickas begins, “With the first stacks, you let people have a part of the piece and take it away.” Gonzalez-Torres responds, “I was teaching at the time, and the one thing that terrified me to no end was that most of these kids had no historical references. They were literally living in the MTV limbo. So those stacks, as well as the dateline pieces, were an attempt to create a kind of historical picture, a reminder to reinstate certain events. At this point, to recall history seems impolite.” Nickas: “They were on black backgrounds without pictures, only events floating through time. Gonzalez-Torres, “The blank spaces served as a screen for people to project themselves into those events. I started making those pieces to deal with very specific crucial issues with how information is transformed into meaning. Right now, we have an explosion of information, but an implosion of meaning.”

Returning to the Rollins interview, Gonzalez-Torres elaborates on his commitment to teaching. “I see the practice of teaching as an integral part of my work. Teaching, for me, is a form of cultural activism, a form of creative change at a very basic level, and it is a way of redeeming the profession of art teaching. I want my students to learn the tools of critical thought, and to always doubt, to learn how to doubt

themselves and to be self-critical. Only through acts of self-criticism are we able to discern which work is better or worse, hopefully. It's based on the Brechtian model. It is not about good or bad. You try to give them the ability -- the tools to see for themselves what is important, what is needed, what is moving and what is not. I also make very clear to them that they should not trust me. I am not the voice of authority. I make mistakes. I might be wrong. I do have a very clear agenda, and that is a desire to make this place a better place, and I'm an artist. That is the position where I speak from. But I'm an artist who tries to redefine the role of the artist. I see myself as an instigator, someone who questions not only the function of the art object and the practice, but also the act of teaching art."

In the spring of 1991, Truitt writes, "I became interested in the art of teaching in 1965 while I was living in Tokyo, when I read Sylvia Ashton-Warner's remarkable book *Spinster*. Her protagonist teaches Maori children in New Zealand to read and write English. She evolves her own method. She starts by asking each child to speak one word spontaneously. These words are, of course, charged. Mother, home. She discovers that if she prints this word in bold letters on a card large enough for the child to hold easily, and gives the card to the child to keep, the child begins to connect a specific feeling with the letters, and is able to make a natural transition from personal meaning to printed word. She allows the children to pace themselves, so their own feelings become their own words. Eventually, they develop a more objective vocabulary. Teaching may elicit self-knowledge, but unless it also leads students into an ever-broadening view of art and life, self-knowledge results only in self-expression."

So reading this description of these flashcards, and also thinking about teaching, as well as the '90s, I thought about this video that I made in 2011 that features my mother, who is on the left channel, and a set of flashcards she created over the course of, let's say, fifteen or so years. And she created these image only flashcards, so it's a kind of inversion of what's discussed for *Spinster*, but she made approximately four hundred double-sided flashcards that were used to teach English language learning coursework to both high school students and continuing ed students. And my mother, both of her parents were born in Cuba. Her first language was Spanish. So what you'll see is my mother here, and one of her flashcards there. She's assigning a word or phrase to what's projected, and then what she says is translated into Spanish:

Christmas. Skiing. Aqua beach. Perfect wave. Summer. Father's Day. First communion. Navratilova. Basketball. With the boys. Bon voyage. The girl in the gallery. Siamese. The boys in the laundromat. Peacock. Telephone. Fighting. Moving. Bald. Dogs. Repairman. China. Angry. Sleeping. Riding. Having breakfast. Playing. Garbage. Neat. Dishwasher. Getting ready. Army. American Indians. Good breakfast. Happy woman. Windy. Medicine. Memories. Action. Sticky. Airplane. Roses. Movie. Arthritis. Dead. Lipstick. Building. Scotsmen. Space. Paying the bills. Constructing. Paying the cab. Daddy's shoes. Listening. Angry. Thinking. Happy. Doctor. Dorothy. Off to work. Surprised. Praying. Happy. Relaxing. Grooming.

MATT KEEGAN:

In the exhibition statement for his 1988 installation at the New Museum, Gonzalez-Torres states, "It is a fact, people are discriminated against for being HIV positive. It is a fact, the majority of the Nazi industrialists retained their wealth after the war. It is a fact, the night belongs to Michelob, and Coke is real. It is a fact, the color of your skin matters. It is a fact, Crazy Eddie's prices are insane. It is a fact that four colors, red, black, green, and white, placed next to each other in any form, are strictly forbidden by the Israeli army in the occupied Palestinian territories. This color combination can cause an arrest, a beating, a curfew, a shooting, or a news photograph. Yet it is a fact that these forbidden colors presented as a solitary act of consciousness here in SoHo will not precipitate a similar reaction."

For both Truitt and Gonzalez-Torres, color is a central feature of their work, especially the color and space implied and embodied by blue. On October 12, 1974, Truitt recalls, "I remember how startled I was when, early in 1962, I realized that I was becoming obsessed with color as having meaning not only in counterpoint to the structures of fences and the bulks of weight, which were, I had thought, were my primary concern, but also in itself as holding meaning all its own. As I worked along making the sculptures as they appeared in my mind's eye, I slowly came to realize that what I was actually trying to do was to take paintings off the wall, to set color free in three dimensions for its own sake. This was analogous to my

feeling for the freedom of my own body and my own being, as if in some mysterious way, I felt myself to be color.”

On Christmas Day, 1983, in turn, Truitt remembers, “‘Blue is your color, Annie,’ I used to be told when I was a child. And so it has been in my work. I lived in Japan from 1964 to 1967, and during that period flew this ocean” -- referring to the Pacific -- “six times, the only times in my life when I had enough space and enough blue.”

Back to the 1993 interview with Tim Rollins. Rollins asks, “I wanted to ask you how you choose the blue that you use. What’s the difference between your blue, Felix Gonzalez-Torres blue, and Yves Klein blue?” Gonzalez-Torres responds, “First of all, my blue is not international blue, as Yves Klein’s was. Mine is just a light blue that you can get anywhere, in any hardware store.” Rollins: “It’s more specific. It’s not just light blue.” Gonzalez-Torres: “Actually, I change it all the time. It’s a light blue that I change all the time. It just has to be light blue.” Rollins: “Okay. Why is it light blue? Is this a baby blue for boys, a robin’s egg blue?” Gonzalez-Torres: “It’s more like a Giotto blue in the Caribbean, saturated with bright sunlight.” Rollins: “It’s lighter than Giotto’s blue.” Gonzalez-Torres: “But when you go out in the Caribbean sun, the colors get very washed out. It’s almost like what Giotto’s blue would look like in *Last Year at Marienbad*, a memory of a light blue. For me, if a beautiful memory could have a color, that color would be light blue. There’s a lot of positive dialect, you know, in blues. I love blue skies. I love blue oceans. Ross and I would spend the summers next to a blue body of water or under clear Canadian, blue skies.”

Returning to the 1991 interview between Nickas and Gonzalez-Torres, Nickas begins, “Although your works are untitled, there are parenthetical subtitles. Even the titles have a forbidden part to them. But behind every refusal to name or to speak is a clue, which speaks volumes. *Double Fear*, *Still Life*, *Placebo*, *Death By Gun*, all very loaded, off to the side, unspoken.” Gonzalez-Torres responds, “Things are suggested or alluded to discreetly. The work is untitled because meaning is always shifting in time and place. Also, this isn’t really my language, but the language I learned, so I’m reluctant to give something a name that is imposed on me. There is also a third reason. My own sexuality was never revealed anywhere else. I realized that I was something else that I didn’t see at home, and later, as a I grew up, I found out what it was. It was

hidden from me, but I was able to find it. You have to deal with who your public is. Who are you making these things for? Who are you trying to establish a dialogue with?"

James Meyer, in his book *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, says the following on Anne Truitt's titling. Quote, "Her reluctance to explain their allusions suggests a suspicion of transparent correspondences, the naïve premise that this word means that. Her works are not depictions of images or events, but metonyms pointing to a complex of association. Each sculpture is the residue of a memory or chain of memories triggered during its completion."

In a 1992 entry in *Prospect*, Truitt addresses her sculptures' autonomy. Quote, "By the time that my work began to appear in my mind in the 1960s, I had fixed this phenomenon as a fact and could accept the corollary fact that every work I made was a failure when looked at in the light of what I had conceived that it was going to be. No matter how faithfully I folded concept into a material form, something evanescent and ineffable remained aloof. Concept resisted facture, and matter resisted the imposition of concept. When my work began to go out into the world in the 1960s, I found that the things I had made sometimes evolved a history all their own." July 21, 1974. "Sculptors, relying as they do on subtle kinesthetic cues for the apprehension of weight and form, may be more dependent than other people on placement.

Bob Nickas asks Gonzalez-Torres, "Can you talk about how the candy pieces relate to memory and the body?" Felix Gonzalez-Torres: "The pieces called *Lover Boys* are piles of candy based on body weights. I used my own weight or mine and Ross's together. If I do a portrait of someone, I use their weight." In the publication that accompanies Nancy Spector's Felix Gonzalez-Torres exhibition from 1995 to 1996, the art addresses the candy circulation. Felix Gonzalez-Torres: "It's a metaphor. I'm giving you the sugary thing. You put it in your mouth, and you suck on someone else's body. And in this way, my work becomes a part of so many other people's bodies. It's very hot. For just a few seconds, I have put something sweet in someone's mouth, and that is very sexy." In her writing, Spector equates the paper stacks with monuments, and perhaps this thinking can also be applied to the candy piles, as they commemorate a specific body or entwined bodies and their related weights.

Truitt is best known for her totems, and these works were pejoratively described as tombstones by

Donald Judd when first exhibited at André Emmerich Gallery in New York City in 1963. Reading an April 9, 1983, entry in *Turn*, Judd's flatfooted reading gains complexity. Truitt writes, "I was born into a triangulated family, two monoliths, father and mother, and me. I became bulkier and began to move about. My twin sisters, both 18 months after me, added two more members, so we were father, mother, one oldest daughter, twin daughters, one male, four females. Father and mother slowly, but very surely, I watched, became less and less monolithic.

"When we were all about the same size, three of us split off, I first, and then my sisters. Mother died. Father shrank. I undertook his care. By the time he died, I was a monolith myself. James and I triangulated, had a daughter. This familial replication continued, placidly if reviewed in this way, father, mother, three children. A difference, two males, three females."

For both artists, death hovers over their production, but due to dramatically different causes. *Turn*, Truitt's second journal, published in 1986, is deeply informed and impacted by the 1981 suicide of her former husband, James. This loss caused Truitt to cease to make work for over a year. His death was a trigger for Truitt to reconsider the premature cancer-related death of her mother, and the life and death of her father, who battled depression and alcoholism. *Turn* was published the same year as a Supreme Court ruling on *Bowers, Attorney General of Georgia v. Hardwick, et al.*, to uphold state laws banning consensual sex between adults of the same gender.

In an interview with Robert Storr published in *Art Press* in 1995, Gonzalez-Torres states, "The thing that I want to do sometimes with one of these pieces about homosexual desire is to be more inclusive. Every time they see a clock, or a stack of paper, or a curtain, I want people to think twice. I want them to be like the protagonist in *Repulsion* by Polanski, where everything to her becomes a threat to her virginity. Everything has a sexual mission. The walls, the pavement, everything."

Nineteen eighty-six was the year that the AIDS crisis entered into the general public's consciousness in the United States, in part due to the high-profile death of Rock Hudson, then-president Ronald Reagan's friend and fellow actor. Truitt does not mention HIV or AIDS in *Turn*, nor in her subsequent journal, *Prospect*, published in 1996, the same year that Felix Gonzalez-Torres died. I learned

through my research that Truitt lost people close to her in the first wave of AIDS-related deaths.

A passage from *Daybook* is relevant here, though not specifically a commentary on the AIDS crisis. “The simplistic right-wrong dichotomy never has felt true to me. I have always been aware that no one should be condemned and have never been able to sympathize with righteous indignation, except when beside myself with pain. Abstract political action has always seemed to me almost totally meaningless, partly because of this incapacity for embracing judgements. Only individual acts feel authentic to me. It is specific moral decisions that interest me.”

In a winter 1991 entry in *Prospect*, Truitt writes, “Recent events, the Persian Gulf War that was so brutally, shockingly militaristic; my frightening headaches; my effort to place my work in the world responsibly; the loss of tenure at the university that reduced my financial security; the incipient onset of old age; have changed me in ways I cannot yet assess. Yesterday, on my daily walk around the lakes, it occurred to me that I might simply stop thinking, and rely on the force that Federico García Lorca calls the *duende*. The spirit of the earth roused in the very cells of the blood surges up from the soles of the feet. García Lorca tells us that the *duende* faces, on the one hand, a fight with death, and on the other with geometry, until it reaches a real and poetical abstraction from this world. When this abstraction is reached, its effects can be felt by everyone, by the initiated who have seen how style can conquer poor matter, and by the ignorant in an indefinable but authentic emotion.”

In 1991, Ross Laycock, Gonzalez-Torres’s boyfriend, as well as the person the artist referred to on numerous occasions as his primary audience, died of AIDS. Discussing his work in relation to Ross’s death, Gonzalez-Torres said, “When I got into making stacks, which was the show with Andrea Rosen, I wanted to do a show that would disappear completely. It had a lot to do with disappearance and learning. It was also about trying to be a threat to the art marketing system, and also, to be really honest, it was about being generous, to a certain extent. I wanted people to have my work. The fact that someone could just come and take my work, and carry it with them, was very exciting. Freud said that we rehearse our fears in order to lessen them. In a way, this letting go of the work, this refusal to make a static form, a monolithic sculpture, in favor of a disappearing, changing, unstable, and fragile form, was an attempt on my part to rehearse my

fears of having Ross disappear, day by day, right in front of my eyes. It's really a weird thing when you see the public come into the gallery, and walk away with a piece of paper that is yours."

In early 1992, toward the end of *Prospect*, Truitt states, "When I write about myself, I interview myself. There is a gap between the life I have lived and live, and the life I write. Partly this is the inevitable gap between experience and expression, partly what I make by deliberate choice. I omit, abbreviate, abridge, and retrench. I feel a certain urge to tell what it is like to be an artist in this culture. By writing about one artist, I hope to draw attention to art itself, for it seems to me that a society that can discover, in its currents otherwise hidden, unarticulated."

Thank you.

ALEXIS LOWRY: Thank you, everyone. Does anyone have a question?

F1: Can you repeat the last line?

MATT KEEGAN: Oh, yeah. "For it seems to me that a society that can discover, in its currents otherwise hidden, unarticulated."

ALEXIS LOWRY: I'll get us started, if nobody else has a -- while you guys ponder. Do you see one over there? Okay. You brought up briefly in the talk the Zwirner show and its treatment of Gonzalez-Torres, or lack thereof, you might say, his biography. And I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about that show, or how the objects stand in contrast to the biography for you.

MATT KEEGAN: Yeah. So if you do research on Gonzalez-Torres, or if you're already quite familiar with the work, there was an articulated differentiated between his biography and the work, although there are these moments where the two dovetailed really beautifully. After -- or, let's say, leading up to Ross's death in 1991, the tenor of his interviews and the transparency in which he speaks changes from that point to later interviews. And my interest in highlighting that exhibition is not so much that I think that we should look at this work exclusively through Gonzalez-Torres's biography, but that to remove particular factual details, like that he was born in Cuba, that he died an AIDS-related death, is violence, to me. So there's not a gray area in terms of information that's

factual. How that -- not to prescribe the work to be read through his homosexuality or through his being from Cuba, or that he was educated in Puerto Rico, but that the work has a life that is much more vast. But the omission of such specific details is hard for me to make sense of. Yes?

M1: Well, first of all, I want to thank you, Matt, for such a beautiful talk. You know? And I guess it's a talk where I see you building a dialogue between two artists who, for complicated reasons, didn't have one in their lifetimes, two artists who both, let's say, as you show, had a complicated and oblique relationship to minimalism. But it's not really a dialogue, right, tonight? It's a triologue, let's say. And I'm curious about, in a sense, you exist at the same generational divide that -- you can almost think about three parts from Truitt to Gonzalez-Torres to yourself. And I'm curious if you might more explicitly place yourself within this complicated relationship to a particular formalist legacy that -- it seems to me, both in the way you outline it, wanted to push out a notion of biography, and yet opened up very interesting complex spaces for people within it.

MATT KEEGAN: I'll try answer that just by saying that these are two artists that are so foundational to so much of my thinking. Because Truitt is a more recent part of my thinking, within the last, say, four to five years, rather than Gonzalez-Torres, as I mentioned, goes back to college. But for both of them, there's a bunch of different things that come up. One is that, although both of them have legacies that are connected with minimalism, they both complicated it, or distanced themselves from it. And also, even though Truitt further differentiates herself from a conceptualist trajectory, there's a process of her writing that feels like it simultaneously connects her to it. And for me, I'm interested in this materiality. I love that quote of Gonzalez-Torres about formal issues and the implicit politics of it, because it took me a long time in my own work to understand what material does, or what material can articulate without it being over articulated. And because there's a part of my work that's really interested in research and takes pleasure in doing something like this, it took me time to come to that point. In terms of biography, I think that I've worked with my family on multiple occasions, so the relationship to biography is perhaps more transparent. But what I'm interested in both of their cases is that these are two artists that do not insist on biography, but it's

such a point of entry to the work, and for me, the complexities of the work. I think that it's impossible for me to think about this talk without this cultural moment where specificity of position and specificity of language is nonexistent when we're listening to the current events. So there's something about their precision of language that's something that I find extremely admirable, and also extremely generative. So I relate to them as artists, but also this investment in education, and pedagogy, and how do artists that are invested in teaching have a relationship that creates a discursive structure that isn't necessarily working from the position of being the knowing entity, and the students as being the receptive entity. So my interest in them and my connection to them, I feel like, is super layered, and the more time I spent thinking about them and reading about them, I felt like, oh, yeah, there's really a relationship here. So does that address your question? Yeah? Thank you.

ALEXIS LOWRY: I had another question. One of the things I thought was interesting was how you used their words about biography, but not actually providing -- their own words don't actually provide that much biographical information. So it's more -- it seemed more like a meditation on the idea of biography than recounting specific life events that are informing the work. And I'm wondering if that was strategic, or if you thought about -- I mean, with Felix Gonzalez-Torres you provide a little bit more. But have you thought about, especially with Truitt's case, specific life events that are informing the work at all, or...?

MATT KEEGAN: Yeah. I think my decision to build their dialogue, of sorts, the way that I did was that I didn't want to make a talk that was, like, "The work is like this because of this experience," or, "The work is to be read this way because of this dimension of their identity, or their age, or their being a mother or not being a father." That -- I really wanted or hoped that the rhythm of the talk follows a rhythm and flow that, these are people who were extremely clear in their thoughts, and in Truitt's case, as the quote says at the end, there's a process of editing and subtracting. And for Gonzalez-Torres, most cases, it's excerpts from interviews, which, I'm sure, are also edited. But I didn't want it to be a presentation about, this artist was born here at this time, this artist was born

here at this time. I was more interested in, how do we come to know them through these different modes of presentation of self, and modes of presentation of intentionality, identity, whatever, studio interests, making interests.

ALEXIS LOWRY: Thank you so much, Matt.

MATT KEEGAN: Okay. Thank you.