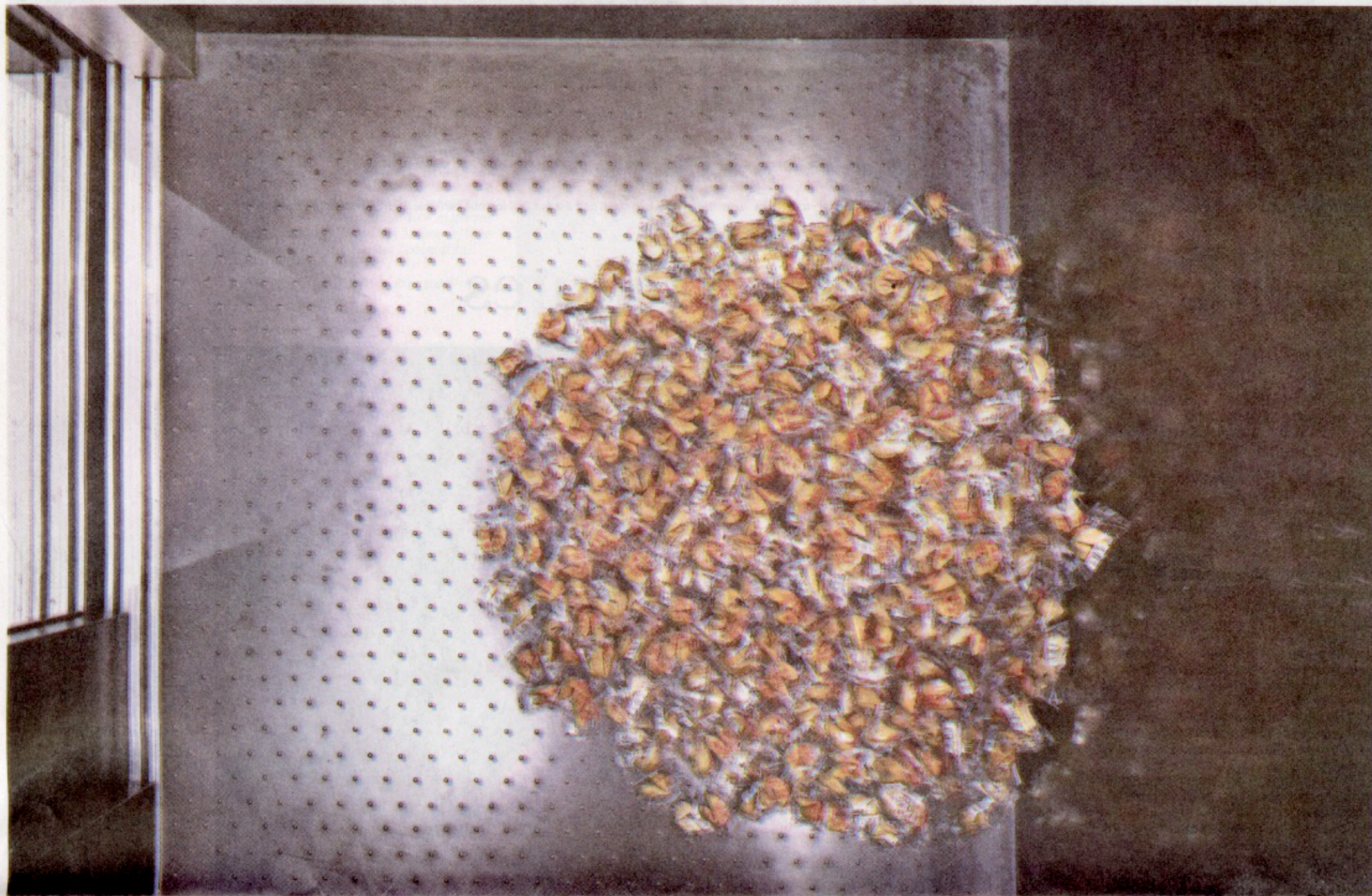


Arts

The New York Times

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A4 ARTS FOUNDATION

A Multiplicity of Futures

Amid a pandemic and unrest, an artist's pile of fortune cookies has spread around the world.

By VICTORIA BURNETT

It is a quiet homecoming: a mound of fortune cookies on a Havana rooftop overlooking a wide, green river. Art lovers come in ones and twos, cracking open a cookie to read their fortunes, sometimes popping the treat in their mouths.

The cookie pile is part of "Untitled" (Fortune Cookie Corner), a 1990 work by Felix Gonzalez-Torres that has been installed, mid-pandemic, as a collective work in hundreds of locations around the world. It is the first work by Gonzalez-Torres, who was born in Cuba but identified as American, to be made on the island, according to the Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation.

"It's like he's here, looking at Cuba, at the landscape, at his orishas," said Jorge Fer-

nández Torres, director of Cuba's National Museum of Fine Arts, referring to the deities of Santería, the syncretic religion practiced by many Cubans. Mr. Fernández, who spoke by phone from Havana, was one of 1,000 people invited by Andrea Rosen Gallery and David Zwirner Gallery to participate in the project.

The work, which Mr. Fernández installed on May 25 above the studio of the Cuban artist Wilfredo Prieto, "emits a kind of vibration," he said, adding, "It gives me goose bumps."

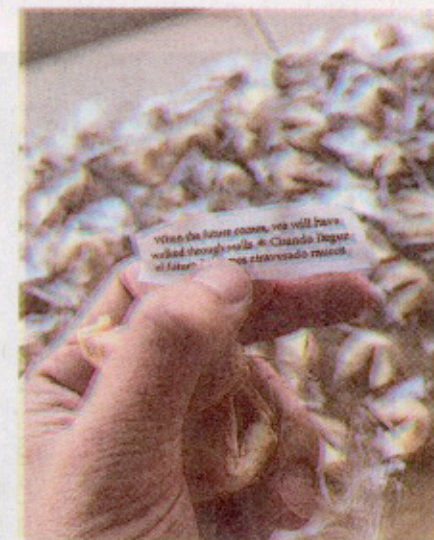
"Untitled" (Fortune Cookie Corner) originally involved 10,000 cookies and was one of the first in a series of edible sculptures mainly made from candies. The two galleries, which represent the artist's estate, invited friends, artists, curators and fans of

Gonzalez-Torres's work to create a collective installation, each piling 240 to 1,000 cookies and exhibiting them from May 25 to July 5. The piles are to be replenished once, on June 14.

Ms. Rosen said she came up with the project in April, when much of the world was locked down, hoping that it would prompt people to reflect on notions of public and private space, loss and regeneration, and the value of our existence when we are shut away at home.

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Above, a display at the A4 Arts Foundation in Cape Town, South Africa, is part of Felix Gonzalez-Torres's work "Untitled" (Fortune Cookie Corner). Right, a site in Los Angeles.



COMMONWEALTH AND COUNCIL



NEW YORK Left, Bill T. Jones, artistic director of New York Live Arts, reading poetry and political writings in the building's lobby, which had a mound of fortune cookies. Right, the building's exterior.

VIA ANDREA ROSEN GALLERY

Seeing a Multiplicity of Futures

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Gonzalez-Torres, who was born in Guáimaro, Cuba, in 1957 but left as a child, spent much of his career in New York. Apparently simple — a stack of paper, a pile of candies, a beaded curtain — Gonzalez-Torres's work is "made to make complications," Ms. Rosen said.

The artist, who was gay, lived on the front line of the AIDS pandemic, losing his partner, Ross Laycock, to the disease in 1991 and himself dying of AIDS-related causes in 1996. Several of his candy sculptures were named for Laycock; the "ideal weight" of the sculptures when initially installed is 175 pounds, about the weight of a healthy man.

Carlos Basualdo, senior curator of contemporary art at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, said that Gonzalez-Torres's work speaks to the isolation and grief of today's pandemic — much as it did during the AIDS crisis — as well as the boiling anger at racial injustice.

"There are works, when you subject them to the pressures of today, they become silent," he said. "But not Felix's. The work is still alive."

The edible sculptures remind us that, despite the pandemic's uneven toll, we are "deeply connected" to others, said Mr. Basualdo, who is not participating in the project.

"It is both joyful and playful but extremely consequential," he said.

So far, some 320 people from Cape Town, South Africa, to Knoxville, Tenn., have installed the work, according to a tally by Andrea Rosen Gallery, which has published photos, video and text from about 70 locations on its website.

Some participants have placed the cookies in a public space — Shanghai's gleaming Hongqiao transportation hub; a dry foun-



SHANGHAI Good fortunes at the Hongqiao transportation hub. So far, about 320 people from around the world have installed the work.

Hundreds are staging a tribute to Felix Gonzalez-Torres's edible sculpture.



BROOKLYN Brianna Caillelo fills her bicycle's basket with fortune cookies each day and leaves it outside her home.



HAVANA A rooftop setting, one artist said, gave the installation a new kind of power.

tain in Rome — while others installed them in their bedroom or in a shuttered gallery. Bill T. Jones, artistic director of New York Live Arts, which placed a fortune cookie pile in its lobby in Chelsea, on Thursday opened the center's doors for a pop-up event in which he read aloud poetry, political writings and history. Elsewhere, participants chose a spot that was semipublic, like a bike-basket or the open trunk of an S.U.V. Amenda Tate, an artist based in West Des Moines, Iowa, filled a newspaper honor box with cookies and placed a camera inside, filming passers-by as they squirt hand sanitizer and reach inside for a cookie.

Brianna Caillelo, chief registrar and operations manager at Andrea Rosen Gallery, fills the basket of her bicycle with fortune cookies each day and leaves it outside her home in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, with hand sanitizer. As she sat on the stoop, several passers-by glanced at the cookies without taking one. But by evening, Ms. Caillelo said, the basket was empty.

"It just felt really good after this time of being so isolated to be able to share with people," she said.

Michel Otayek, an art historian and curator who stacked 997 cookies in the corner of his living room in Berlin, is holding online discussions of Gonzalez-Torres's work; last week, he left hundreds of stickers around Berlin bearing the words, "Would you take one?" and the address of a website explaining the project.

Speaking over Skype, Mr. Otayek said he wanted the installation to create "random encounters" despite being shown in his home. Katrin Wittig, a friend of a friend of Mr. Otayek, saw his photos on Instagram and made her own fortune cookies from printed cotton. She sent some to Mr. Otayek because we all "need a bit of fortune," she said. Those who contact Mr. Otayek will have to chance to ask him to open a cookie for them and read them their fortune, he said.

Gonzalez-Torres's work "lends itself to new stagings," Mr. Otayek said.

Some disagree. Mr. Basualdo said that while he finds the work "super relevant," he turned down Ms. Rosen's invitation to install it because doing so in a space where the public could not gain access to it de-

tracted from its purpose.

Carolina A. Miranda, a writer for The Los Angeles Times, wrote recently that she too declined an invitation to take part. She dismissed the project as an insensitive publicity stunt in the midst of an economic and public-health crisis and of protests against racial injustice.

Inviting people to make the installation on their own dime, she wrote, was "tone-deaf at best and foolhardy at worst."

Ms. Rosen said the gallery did not want to impose on people and that participants could buy the minimum number of fortune cookies for about \$20. She observed that, since she developed the idea, the social context has shifted from strict lockdown to an eruption of outrage at the killing of George Floyd in police custody in Minneapolis.

Either way, she said, the project is no financial benefit to the gallery.

The simplicity of staging the work also meant it was feasible to include Cuba, Ms. Rosen said. Artistic exchanges between the United States and Cuba can be fraught with logistical and legal complications, in part because of the decades-old economic embargo. All that was required in this case was a bunch of cookies.

But on an island beleaguered by shortages, the crescent-shaped cookies were nowhere to be found.

"I've never seen a fortune cookie in my life," Mr. Fernández said. "I thought, where the hell am I going to get these?"

Mr. Fernández turned to Pedro Galindo-Landeira, a Cuban living in New York who promotes artistic exchanges between Cuba and the United States. He, in turn, asked a

chef in Havana and offered to pay for them. The chef, Carlos Alonso Acosta, whose Cuban-Asian restaurant Jama has been shuttered for almost four months, spent two days making 500 cookies with his sous-chef Dorian Moreno Trespalacio and packed them in cling wrap. One ingredient, eggs are hard to come by right now, he said, so he used mashed plantain in the first batch and is experimenting with mashed yucca, which makes the cookies crispier.

"For Felix, you do whatever you can," said Mr. Fernández, who wrote the fortunes, using a mix of quotations from Gonzalez-Torres, Cuban intellectuals and common axioms. In the Cuban heat, the cookies quickly began to deteriorate, he said, so most people just read the fortune.

Humberto Díaz, a multidisciplinary artist based in Havana who visited the rooftop installation, said that the setting gave the installation a new power.

"There is this intimate experience of taking your own fortune, but seeing the whole city spread out before you," he said.

For Mr. Fernández, the modesty of the installation, the strangeness of staging it during a pandemic, even the scramble to make the cookies, seemed fitting.

"Felix's work has that homemade quality," Mr. Fernández said. "It's like an intimate conversation."

He had imagined bringing Gonzalez-Torres to Cuba for a biennial or for a retrospective at the museum he runs. Then, when he least expected it, he was offered a chance to stage one of his works.

"In this moment of silence, of isolation, suddenly this happened," he said.