

Felix Gonzalez-Torres, 38, A Sculptor of Love and Loss

By **ROBERTA SMITH**

Felix Gonzalez-Torres, whose modest yet evocative sculpture and photographs about love and loss were often inspired by AIDS, died yesterday at his home in Miami. He was 38 and had homes in Manhattan and Miami.

The cause was AIDS, said Andrea Rosen, whose SoHo gallery had represented the artist since 1990.

In an exhibition career that spanned less than a decade, Mr. Gonzalez-Torres won many followers with works about the sadness and fleeting nature of life and through his use of eccentric materials that also raised questions about art's own permanence.

His works combined an almost classic sense of restraint and beauty with celebratory undertones. Their everyday materials included foil-wrapped candles and light bulbs as well as paired chairs and paired wall clocks, which Mr. Gonzalez-Torres saw as metaphors for lovers.

Like the work of many artists of his generation, Mr. Gonzalez-Torres's photographs and sculptures

mixed Minimalist and post-Minimalist influences, but he thoroughly subverted them. In place of Minimalism's standoffish geometry, Mr. Gonzalez-Torres offered boxy stacks of poster-size photographs that were free for the taking.

Viewers were also free to take from big piles or flat expanses of brightly wrapped candy. Their casual, austere arrangements recalled those of the post-Minimalists, but their familiarity and cheerfulness did not. By giving away his art in this manner, Mr. Gonzalez-Torres questioned concepts of ownership and value while also evoking the transience of art and life.

Those impulses were reflected in his frequent use of public billboards for his images and in sculptures made of elegant strings of light bulbs that were allowed to burn out during exhibitions.

Mr. Gonzalez-Torres was born in Guáimaro, Cuba, and grew up there and in Puerto Rico, where he attended the University of Puerto Rico in San Juan.

He moved to New York City in 1979, graduating from Pratt Insti-



Felix Gonzalez-Torres

tute with a degree in photography in 1983. He also took part in the Whitney Museum of American Art's independent study program.

He is survived by his companion, Rafael Vasquez; his grandmother, María Torres; an aunt, Josifina Gutierrez, a sister, Maida Fernandez, and a brother, Mario Gonzalez, all of Miami; and another sister, Gloria González, of Santurce, P.R.