

# Smithsonian Institution NEWS

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**Media only:** Sidney Lawrence (202) 357-1618  
Michèle Colburn (202) 357-1618  
**Public only:** (202) 357-2700

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**PRESS PREVIEW:** Wednesday, June 15, 9:30 a.m. until noon. Presentation at 10:30 a.m. sharp. Refreshments will be served.

## GONZALEZ-TORRES SHOW TO OPEN AT HIRSHHORN MUSEUM

“Felix Gonzalez-Torres: ‘Traveling,’ ” an exhibition of nearly 20 mixed-media works, including large-scale installations, by this Cuban-born, New-York based artist (b. 1957), will open on Thursday, June 16, at the Smithsonian’s Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, and continue through Sept. 11.

The exhibition, a three-part touring show that takes a different form at each venue, opened this past April at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles and will travel to the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago after closing in Washington, D.C. Organized collaboratively by Amada Cruz of the Hirshhorn with curators from the two participating museums, the exhibition honors an artist whose expansive approach to media, imagery and audience has won him wide critical acclaim.

Initially a photographer, Gonzalez-Torres turned to installations and public art in the mid-1980s as a member of Group Material, an artists’ collective dedicated to cultural activism. Stimulated by that experience and the legacy of 1960s Minimalism and Conceptual Art, he began to produce several ongoing series—word portraits, light strings, billboards, and replenishable paper stacks and candy pieces—intended to involve viewers in personal themes. Representative works from these series, along with individually conceived pieces in various media, will be seen at the Hirshhorn.

Works in “Felix Gonzalez-Torres: ‘Traveling’ ”—to fill several second-floor galleries—range from a frieze of stenciled text featuring events and dates from the artist’s life—a self-portrait in words—to “Untitled (North),” 1992-1994, his largest-ever composition of

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suspended strings of lights in darkened space. Elsewhere, a pair of wall-size billboard images in black and white dramatically depict two birds in a stormy sky. Fusing private and public experience, Gonzalez-Torres' spare, evocative installations are imbued with a strong emotional resonance and have deliberately open-ended meanings.

Gonzalez-Torres' replenishable works, both sculptural and participatory in nature, will also be represented. In "Untitled (Placebo)," 1991, some 1,500 pounds of foil-wrapped candies cover a floor space measuring 22 by 24 feet. Moving from the visual to the physical, viewers may respond to the glistening silver expanse by taking and ingesting a candy, which later will be replaced. In "Untitled," 1989-1990, two cubes comprise stacks of poster-size paper sheets printed with the phrases "Somewhere better than this place" and "Nowhere better than this place." Viewers may take a sheet as a memento and literally bring home the message of this work (also regularly replenished).

Love and loss are underlying themes of other works. Everyday store-bought items abutting one another—pairs of wall mirrors and two in-sync clocks—subtly evoke the subjects, as do several recent photographs. The artist pays homage to Alice B. Toklas and Gertrude Stein in one work, a view of the double grave of the famous lesbian couple in Paris.

Gonzalez-Torres, who is openly gay, alludes to the AIDS epidemic in such experience-oriented works as "Untitled (Chemo)," 1991, and "Untitled (Blood)," 1992, each a beaded curtain to touch and pass through, and "Untitled (Thirty-one Days of Bloodwork)," 1992, a visually compelling series of 31 oil paintings based on a month of daily blood-count graphs.

Gonzalez-Torres, 37, once remarked that his works comment on "the passing of time ... the possibility of erasure or disappearance ... [and] life in its most radical definition, its limit: death." Viewing travel as a metaphor for transformation, he subtitled this venue-specific exhibition, his most comprehensive to date, "Traveling."

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. In the past five years, his work has been seen in solo exhibitions in New York and Stockholm and at the Whitney and Venice biennials, among many venues. His work has also taken the form of newspaper ads and urban billboards, as in the Los Angeles version of this exhibition.

### **TALK BY ARTIST AMONG PUBLIC PROGRAMS**

A talk by Gonzalez-Torres (Tuesday, June 28, 7:30 p.m.) will be one of several public programs presented in conjunction with the exhibition. Others include a noontime curator's tour of the show by Amada Cruz (Wednesday, June 22); "Installation Art," a slide overview of this widespread approach in contemporary art, by London-based curator and author Michael Petry (Friday, June 24, 7 p.m., co-sponsored by Smithsonian Institution Press); "The Everyday Art of Felix Gonzalez-Torres," a lecture by New York-based critic David Deitcher exploring sexual politics and identity in the artist's work (Monday, July 11, 6:30 p.m., co-sponsored by the Smithsonian's Lesbian & Gay Issues Committee, with a grant from the Smithsonian Educational Outreach Fund); and a "Young at Art" family program using works in the exhibition as a springboard for self-expression (Saturday, July 16, 10 a.m. to noon). For further information about these programs, call (202) 357-2700.

### **PUBLICATION—A COLLABORATION WITH THE ARTIST**

The exhibition will be accompanied by a 79-page publication, collaboratively produced with the artist by the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. It contains essays by Cruz, co-curator Ann Goldstein of LAMOCA, editor Russell Ferguson, poet and critic *bell hooks*, artist Joseph Kosuth, and art historian Charles Merewether. The publication will be available at the Hirshhorn Museum Shop for \$19.95. Free brochures in English and Spanish will be available at the exhibition.

The third version of the exhibition runs Oct. 2 to Nov. 11 at the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, where it is co-curated by Director Susanne Ghez.

"Felix Gonzalez-Torres: 'Traveling' " is supported, in part, by a generous grant from the Lannan Foundation.

The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Independence Avenue at Seventh Street S.W., is open seven days a week from 10 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. The nearest Metro stop is L'Enfant Plaza, Maryland Avenue exit. Admission to the museum is free.

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The Smithsonian TTY number is (202) 357-1729. A recording in Spanish is reached by calling (202) 633-9126.