



## Press Release

### FELIX GONZALEZ-TORRES

An exhibition of the New Society for Visual Arts (NGBK/RealismusStudio)  
In cooperation with the Hamburger Bahnhof-Museum für Gegenwart-Berlin, Funded by the Capital Cultural Fund in Berlin

**01 October 2006 - 09 January 2007**  
**Hamburger Bahnhof-Museum für Gegenwart-Berlin**

**Press conference: 30 September, 1 p.m.**  
**Opening reception: 30 September, 7 p.m.**

The RealismusStudio of the New Society of Fine Arts (Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst) will be presenting a comprehensive retrospective at the Hamburger Bahnhof. The exhibition concentrates on the artist's semi-temporary and reproducible works as well as on a selection from his photographic oeuvre.

Felix Gonzalez-Torres was one of the most important American artists of the 1990s. His work is characterized by a keen understanding of the social, cultural and political situation and an ability to translate such complex circumstances and events into the simplest of forms. The formal openness of the content of his objects and photographs contrasts with his political statements and private experiences. He leaves it up to viewers to interpret them as they will, aware that these interpretations will be dependent on their cultural and socio-political contexts.

Aesthetically polished and socially provocative, Felix Gonzalez-Torres used minimalist strategies and added personal, social and political meaning. Through his work in the 1990s, he made an important contribution to the critical reception of minimalism and concept art as politically motivated art forms within the "system". His aim was on the one hand to work within the traditional context of art-making practices, on the other hand to infiltrate the system. This may be seen for instance in the *billboard* projects shown at public sites, in which he makes use of subversively aesthetic marketing strategies and thus open up for discussion questions of what is "private" and what is "public".

As a gay artist of Cuban origin, another theme of Felix Gonzalez-Torres' work was societal emancipation, including sexual emancipation; the gender discussion; equal integration of ethnic groups and of feminist theory and practice in the general art discourse. The blotting out of history, the efficiency of the political system, the omnipresence of ideology and the AIDS crisis all culminate in Gonzalez-Torres's artistic work and activity.

This retrospective coincides with the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Felix Gonzalez-Torres. The artist's work has been shown in five RealismusStudio exhibitions since 1988 (two of them solo exhibitions). The curator of the show, Frank Wagner, has followed his artistic development almost from the beginning. In this exhibition the works by Gonzalez-Torres will not be just refabricated, but reinstalled.

Felix Gonzalez-Torres demands active participation of his recipients in shaping his work thereby questioning the inviolability of the work of art. Work such as *stacks* (of paper) and *candy spills* develop their full meaning and function only once they have been put to use. Sheets of paper can be taken home and the candies consumed. This concept is the consequence of an iconography whose subjects always include loss, transitoriness, memory and of course renewal. The fact that in the course of the exhibition the works disappear before the eyes of the visitors is evocative of the

finite nature of human existence. Yet the work can be regenerated thereby bringing into it the potential for change and hope and putting into question the idea of our unknowable yet ever-changing future.

### **Biographical notes**

Felix Gonzalez-Torres was born in Güaimaro, Cuba in 1957, leaving Cuba in 1971 to Madrid. In 1979 he emigrated to New York, later he became an American citizen. In 1981 he graduated from the Pratt Institute of Art, later going on to spend two years attending the Whitney Independent Study Program. In 1987 he was awarded the degree of Master of Fine Arts by the International Center of Photography and New York University; in the same year his first solo exhibition took place at the Rastovsky Gallery, New York. After that followed: 1990 solo exhibition at the Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York; 1991 Whitney Biennial, New York; 1995, solo exhibition at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. He will be representing the United States at the Venice Biennale in 2007.

Felix Gonzalez-Torres died in Miami on 9 January 1996 from AIDS-related complications.

### **Catalogue**

A publication in English and German will be accompanying the exhibition. The catalogue concentrates on the European reception of the artist's work and on the deepened understanding of the formulation of art in the nineties based upon the example of Felix Gonzalez-Torres's artistic career.

The authors are to include Heike Föll, Petra Reichensperger, Gregor Stemmrigh, Frank Wagner, Susanne Weiß and Michael Wetzel.

ISBN- 3-938515-04-X

### **Accompanying programme**

The participatory impetus underlying Felix Gonzalez Torres's art, the active inclusion of the viewer, provides the starting-point for a wide-ranging programme accompanying the exhibition. One of the main focuses is on thematic tours which will take place as a *jour fixe* each Thursday at 4.30 pm in the gallery. They are intended to help illuminate the complex work of the artist from as diverse a range of viewpoints and experiences as possible and to bring these closer to the public. The tours will be conducted by amongst others: Erika Hoffmann, Dr. Petra Reichensperger, Bettina Allamoda, Candice Breitz, Ulf Aminde, Frank Wagner, Dr. Annette Tietenberg, Judith Hopf, Wolfgang Tillmans and Thomas Wulffen.

In addition to the tours and lecture series, an information room will be set up in cooperation with communications design students from the Kunsthochschule Weißensee. This interface will present socio-political background information and decode the reference points deployed by the artist.

### **About NGBK**

The Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst e.V. was founded in Berlin in 1969, in a period that was characterised by a general mood of social upheaval which effected changes affecting all aspects of political, academic and cultural life. The aim of the NGBK's initiators was to create a society for the arts that was different from all the previous, hierarchically structured organisations, and in which each individual member (whether artist, art historian, sociologist, political scientist etc.) would have the possibility of becoming involved in decision-making and of influencing the political and artistic agenda.

This principle of basic democracy has determined the outward appearance, the objectives and the internal workings of the NGBK ever since: it is the members themselves who come together in working groups to develop ideas and projects, publications and symposia, lecture series and exhibitions.

The NGBK has been supported by funding from the Stiftung Deutsche Klassenlotterie Berlin since its inception.

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