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Three New Shows Celebrate the Work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres

The late artist's work is featured in a three-part exhibition in New York, Milan, and London this month



“Untitled” (Portrait of Julie Ault), 1991

© THE FELIX GONZALEZ-TORRES FOUNDATION, COURTESY OF ANDREA ROSEN GALLERY, NEW YORK

By [THOMAS GEBREMEDHIN](#) | May 5, 2016 12:24 p.m. ET

“**EVEN THOUGH** he’s been gone twenty years, his work is alive because it’s always changing, it’s always evolving,” art dealer Andrea Rosen says about the late American artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres, who is celebrated in a landmark three-part exhibition at her eponymous gallery in New York, Hauser & Wirth in London, and Massimo De Carlo in Milan. Under the curatorial guidance of artists Julie Ault and Roni Horn, it’s the first solo presentation of Gonzalez-Torres’s work in well over a decade, with each gallery highlighting a specific facet of his oeuvre (painted word portraits at Andrea Rosen gallery).

Gonzalez-Torres, who died in 1996, was known for his ephemeral installations and sculptures, many of which call into question the nature of change and interpretation. In a work such as *“Untitled” (USA Today)*, audiences are encouraged to take candies individually wrapped in red, silver, and blue cellophane from a pile, subverting, in the process, the notion of permanence and the anticipated relationship of the viewer to a work of art. And, as such a work can never be exactly replicated, especially when compared to the relatively static nature of a painting or photograph, it forces the issue of interpretation and responsibility in recreating these works from show to show. “One of the interesting things about Felix’s work is that when an owner lends them for exhibitions, they are lending the right to make decisions about those works,” says Rosen, who first began representing Gonzalez-Torres in 1989. “There’s this idea—what does it mean to take on the responsibility of curating? It adds this whole other element in terms of interpretation and reading and how the work transforms itself over time.”

While some of Gonzalez-Torres’s art, including his candy installations, have been interpreted as responses to AIDS, the artist rejected such singular readings of his work. Indeed, during his lifetime, and even to this day, there was an attempt to read Gonzalez-Torres solely through the lens of his identity as a Cuban-born, gay man. But, as Rosen explains, to place such limitations on him would be antithetical to his intentions. “It’s not to say that he wasn’t an activist. But Felix felt that the most powerful thing that one could do was to subvert the center, as opposed to marginalize oneself. It’s certainly not the case that he would have negated that he was gay or anything else, but it was this idea that anyone could feel his works were as equally personal and about them as they were about him—that was the ultimate sign of equality.”

“Felix Gonzalez-Torres” is now on view at Andrea Rosen gallery through June, opening at Massimo De Carlo in Milan on May 21 and Hauser & Wirth in London on May 27.